



Western Forestry Leadership Coalition Issue Brief:

Climate Change – A Western Update

September 9, 2009

As Congress moves into their fall session for 2009, it is timely for a review of the current climate change legislation and the activities of the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC), the Council of Western State Foresters (CWSF). This issue brief and others can be found at http://www.wflcweb.org/infomaterials/issue_briefs.php

Federal Legislation

Current legislation such as the *American Clean Energy and Security Act* (H.R. 2454) introduced in the U.S. House by Representatives Waxman (D-CA) and Markey (D-MA) and the *American Clean Energy Leadership Act of 2009* (S. 1462) introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senator Bingaman (D-NM) propose federal policy that recognizes how climate change and energy policy need to be addressed comprehensively. In the policy debate the important role forests play in both sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it for many years has been recognized. A changing climate could shift forests and from a carbon sink to a source, so considerable debate is occurring on how to create a set of incentives that recognize the value of growing forests, while also encouraging actions that will provide more resilient forests that can better adapt to changing climate. Mixed into this discussion is also the potential to expand production of renewable energy from biomass sources, including forestry.

The Climate Change legislation is proposing a cap-and-trade system where major greenhouse gas emitting sectors would have a cap on their emission in the form of allowances that are reduced over time. They can either reduce their own emissions, purchase emission allowance from others under the cap that have excess allowances, or they can purchase emission offsets from approved projects that reduce emissions in sectors outside of the cap, such as forestry. Congress continues to debate if and how forestry offsets will be included. The debate is currently on the back burner but is expected to resume later this fall.

Forest Offsets and Additional Incentives for Adaptation

Most current versions of climate change legislation include a provision for a 'Natural Resources Adaptation Fund', designed to deliver funding for "human adaptation" to anticipated impacts to natural resources. The allocation of those funds currently identifies funding for federal agencies, with a portion of the funds reserved specifically for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Current versions of the legislation also include forestry as a source of carbon offsets defined as measurable avoidance, reduction or sequestration of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gas emissions. The June 19, 2009 Congressional Research Service report provides a comprehensive discussion of the climate change provisions and role of agriculture and forestry. The report is available at http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL33898_20090619.pdf

Regional and State Action

Western Climate Initiative (WCI): The WCI Offsets Committee is working toward recommending the design and operation of an offset system for participating entities. In July 2009 a white paper was released for public comment. This was the first stage in developing a definition of a WCI emissions offset and related eligibility criteria for offset projects, and includes an overview of approaches that other systems have taken in defining offsets, an evaluation of the policy and operational considerations, and a discussion of implementation options of the criteria. The White Paper is available at <http://www.westernclimateinitiative.org/component/repository/Offsets-Committee-Documents/>

A new report, *Western Forests: Recommendations for Addressing Climate Change*, will be available soon from the CWSF. This report will identify the most salient issues facing policy makers as they work to maximize the potential for the forestry sector.

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