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California Adopts New Forestry Offset Rules, but Angers Some Enviros

By ClimateBiz Staff

SACRAMENTO, CA — California adopted special rules Thursday that will allow landowners, public lands and out-of-state projects to generate carbon offsets by preserving their forests.

The new Forest Project Protocol approved by the state Air Resources Board would be the first state-approved forest carbon accounting standard that would be applicable to projects across the entire country. It is, however, also raising red flags for some environmental groups because it allows the clear-cutting of up to 40 acres.

Proponents say the protocol, developed by the Climate Action Reserve, will improve forest health by ensuring that participating projects promote natural forest management and boost the amount of carbon stored within forests. Projects must be able to prove that they are providing a net increase in the onsite carbon stock.

"Landowners, forestry experts, academics, environmentalists and government agencies all came together to produce a protocol that will capture and store millions of CO₂ emissions every year through cost-effective, sustainable forestry practices," Acting ARB Chairman Barbara Riordan said in a statement Thursday. "Once again, California is leading the way in introducing innovative yet common sense solutions to the global

climate change crisis. This protocol guarantees that any verified forest projects will meet rigorous and conservative accounting standards."

NGOs like the Sierra Club disagree, angry that timber companies will be able to open up an additional revenue stream by selling carbon credits while also being able to clear-cut their land. They called the decision a foregone conclusion, according to the Los Angeles Times, since a press release announcing the rule's adoption was sent out hours before the actual vote took place.

"This is ridiculous," Jim Stewart, co-chair of Sierra Club of California's energy and climate committee, told the Associated Press. "We've got to save every single pound of carbon we can in the next 20 years. We can't allow any clear cutting."

The revised protocol has the support of other environmental groups, including the Nature Conservancy, Environmental Defense and the Pacific Forest Trust.

"In the bigger picture, these are by far the most rigorous rules for forest carbon we've seen," Paul Mason of the Pacific Forest Trust, which backs the new protocols, told the Los Angeles Times. "Investors trading in carbon can have trust in these."