



Forest Owners Eye California's Climate Progress

John Driscoll/Times Standard

Trees grow as well in Northern California as anywhere in the world, which is why forest landowners are keeping a close watch on the state's effort to develop standards for how much carbon dioxide is trapped in those trees.

The California Air Resources Board last week adopted the country's first protocol meant to certify the potential reductions in carbon emissions from forests. The decision is seen as a major step in developing the state's climate program, and a move toward helping landowners jump into greenhouse gas trading markets.

Accounting for how much carbon trees in any given forest might store is incredibly complex. The forest protocols just adopted essentially make sure that the way it's done in California is consistent with international standards, said the Pacific Forest Trust in a news release.

That places landowners in a position to tap into what has become a \$40 billion carbon trading market.

If it sounds like a bonanza, it could be.

Trees take up carbon dioxide, a principal greenhouse gas, and store it until the wood begins to decompose. Landowners may be able to profit from letting parts of their working forests grow -- and so collect carbon -- or by managing more strictly than they might under state forest rules. They would get credit for the additional carbon stored through that management.

But it is complicated. The type of tree, the climate it grows in, the soil, the age of the trees and numerous other factors all must be accounted for.

Humboldt State University economist Steve Hackett said that a complete climate registry program may give landowners an option for how to operate their lands, something other than conservation easements or sustainable certification. But he cautioned that it could take land out of timber production by potentially making it more profitable than growing trees.

"It's so new," Hackett said, "that we'll have to see how it shakes out."

Despite the difficulties, the push by the state to participate in the global effort to ease climate change is being seen as part of the forest industry of the near future.

"We see this as a very important emerging part of our business going forward," said Green Diamond Resource Co. timberlands operations analyst Jeff Lane.

Lane said it's critical to develop a forest program for the state that accounts for both conservation and working lands. So far, good audit and market mechanisms are not yet smoothed out, he said.

But air board Chairwoman Mary Nichols said in a statement that she is confident that investment in the carbon market will be an incentive for forest management that not only draws up carbon, but also help improve fish and wildlife habitat in the state.

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