

From the August 2008 issue of *The Forestry Source*

State of California Includes Forests in Carbon Dioxide Reduction Plan

As California goes, some people say, so goes the nation. Two years ago, Arnold Schwarzenegger, the state's well-known "governator," said California would stay true to form by playing a leading role in reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.

"When I campaigned for governor three years ago, I said I wanted to make California No. 1 in the fight against global warming," said Governor Schwarzenegger at two 2006 signing ceremonies for Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32), the California Global Warming Solutions Act. "Using market-based incentives, we will reduce carbon emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2020. That's a 25-percent reduction. And by 2050, we will reduce emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels. We simply must do everything in our power to slow down global warming before it's too late."

With the publication in late June of "Climate Change Draft Scoping Plan," the California Air Resources Board (CARB) announced a framework for achieving the goals set out in AB 32. The plan offers "a coordinated set of solutions to reduce emissions throughout the economy," from agriculture to energy to transportation, as well as an emissions cap-and-trade program that will involve six partner states and three Canadian provinces via the Western Climate Initiative.

Section 7 of the plan, "Sustainable Forests," explains that state and private forestlands can account for about 3 percent of the reduction of 169 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions (MMTCO₂E) required by AB 32: "The 2020 target for California's forestlands is to achieve a 5 MMTCO₂E reduction through sustainable management practices, including reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and the avoidance or mitigation of land-use changes that reduce carbon storage."

Key to meeting that goal was the adoption last year by CARB of a set of protocols developed by the California Climate Action Registry (CCAR) as its standard for quantifying CO₂ emissions reductions from forests. The protocols include rules for calculating reductions from forestry activities that are in addition to what the forest would normally provide and require that reductions are made permanent through conservation easements and are verified via third-party auditing.

"With credible measurement systems and sustainable management techniques, forests are positioned to play an increasingly vital role in the challenge of curbing climate change," said CARB Chair Mary Nichols.

The Pacific Forest Trust (PFT—see "Seeing the Forest for the Carbon, October 2006) was one of a diverse group of state and federal agencies, forest products companies, conservation organizations, and others who help draft the forest protocols. PFT President Laurie Wayburn lauded the inclusion of forests



Pacific Forest Trust

The 2,200-acre Van Eck Forest in Humboldt County, California, is managed by the Pacific Forest Trust to sequester more than 500,000 metric tons of CO₂ over a 100-year period. Van Eck is the first emissions reduction project registered and independently verified under the California Forest Protocols, the accounting standards adopted last year by the California Air Resources Board. Offsets are available for purchase at \$19.95 per metric ton at www.begreennow.com.

and forestry in the CARB scoping plan.

"CARB has acknowledged the powerful role that good forest conservation and stewardship can play [in emissions reduction]," she said. "And it recognized that forests have an integrated impact on climate, because they not only absorb CO₂, but forest products can play a role in alternative energy, alternative fuels. From an accounting perspective, that means they need to be integrated into the overall system and not be seen as just some one-off opportunity."

The plan would have the state Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, with input from CARB, the California Resources Agency, and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, develop a carbon emissions monitoring program and set goals for improving forest-carbon inventories to meet the 5 MMTCO₂E target.

Wayburn said that landowners are keenly aware of the potential benefits of a carbon-offset market.

"Every single landowner I know is interested in seeing how they can participate, and I think [the CARB plan] will continue to open up those opportunities," she said.

John Nickerson is a forester who is a member of the CCAR's forest protocol workgroup, which is now considering revising the protocol to encourage participation by more landowners in emissions-reduction projects. One means of doing so may be expanding the qualifications for reforestation projects.

“Our workgroup has agreed to changing the definition of reforestation, which currently is limited to lands that have been out of forest cover for 10 years or more. Now it’s been changed to cover lands that have undergone a significant disturbance, such as a fire. That will open the door to a lot of projects,” said Nickerson.

Nickerson said the workgroup also has reached a tentative agreement on a baseline protocol more suitable for public lands; the current protocols focus primarily on private lands.

These and other changes to the forest protocols will be considered for approval by CCAR’s board of directors in November.

Bill Stewart, a forestry specialist with the University of California Cooperative Extension who has closely followed the development of the scoping plan, said that the Board of Forestry should focus not solely of the number of forested acres, but on increasing annual growth rates in undermanaged forests.

“You can have the same number of acres of forest, but if one is growing twice as fast, it’s going to have twice as much carbon on it. To many people, both forests look green, and they assume they’re the same,” Stewart said. “For many of the family forest owners in California who have a just-let-it-grow strategy, especially if it’s been harvested once before to take out the big trees, it may only grow at half the rate of a well-managed forest.

There’s a huge potential out there—even if it looks green, it could be storing a lot more carbon if it was actually managed to do so.”

Although the CARB plan acknowledges the importance of forest biomass as a source of renewable energy, Stewart said the Board of Forestry must carefully estimate the energy-substitution benefits of forest biomass and not allow these benefits to “get buried” by being included in the plan’s larger energy-sector goals. It is important, he said, to demonstrate to forest landowners the value of wood chips as a major source of renewable energy.

“Focusing on the climate benefits of forests is going to bring an increase in the value of wood chips, and that’s going to allow a lot more landowners to do stand improvements, to invest in managing their forests. Instead of just breaking even on stand improvement, it’ll actually be a revenue source in many cases,” said Stewart.

Such revenue might encourage landowners to keep forests as forests, he added.

“If you see real revenue improvements for managing forestland, that will help keep forestry as the higher and better use,” he said.

The scoping plan is available at www.arb.ca.gov/cc/forestry.