

# The New York Times

**AP** Associated Press

September 24, 2009

---

## Calif. Clean-Air Program Designed to Boost Forests

---

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) -- California air regulators Thursday expanded the state's carbon-offset program to include forests across the country, creating the most far-reaching effort of its kind in the nation.

The program is voluntary and was endorsed unanimously by the California Air Resources Board.

Under it, land owners would receive so-called carbon credits for planting more trees, better managing their forests or agreeing not to convert their property to another use that would require cutting down trees.

The idea is that polluting industries could buy those credits in the private market as a way to offset the amount of greenhouse gases they produce. The air board will begin mapping out rules for a government-run carbon market next year and hopes to include the forestry program, giving industries another way to meet the state's emissions goals.

"It really demonstrates the key role forests can play in combatting climate change," said Gary Gero, president of the Climate Action Reserve, a nonprofit offset program that wrote the forestry rules.

Global deforestation accounts for 20 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and proposals to give landowners and developing countries financial incentives to preserve their forests are key elements of national climate legislation and international treaty negotiations.

California in 2007 became the first state to adopt rules intended to oversee and provide a clear accounting of carbon storage projects, but it was limited to private forest lands in California.

The program is viewed as the gold standard for carbon offsets and landowners who qualify for the program often collect more money than other schemes, said Paul Mason, California policy director at the Pacific Forest Trust, a nonprofit that manages forestry offset projects.

For example, a credit for a ton of carbon under the California program currently sells for between \$8-9 per ton compared to \$1 a ton for forest projects sold by the Chicago Climate Exchange, a voluntary carbon trading program whose members pledge to cut emissions.

The new rules will allow both private and public forests across the country to take part and will make it easier for timber companies and other private landowners to sell credits. One contentious provision involving forest clear cutting, however, drew the opposition of several environmental groups that have long opposed that kind of logging.

Participating landowners could cut down up to 40 acres of trees, the maximum allowable under existing forestry law in California.

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

Board staff said landowners must prove they ultimately would store more carbon on the land over 100 years. In addition, landowners in states that have fewer or no restrictions on clear cutting must abide by the California limit.

Board member Barbara Riordan added the board would consider more restrictive forestry practices when it designs its cap and trade program next year.