



## Request for Information: House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis

The House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis has a significant opportunity to leverage the United States' extensive arable land-base to achieve significant carbon reductions and climate adaptation benefits. Natural climate solutions, particularly through forests, have the ability to provide at least [37% of cost-effective CO<sub>2</sub> mitigation](#) needed through 2030 for a greater than 66% chance of keeping warming below 2°C. Similar to the transformation of the energy, transportation, and industrial sectors, the land use sector can be managed differently to benefit the climate, enhancing economic and ecological outcomes and complementing the more limited offsets approach. The Committee should build upon the strong bipartisan support for land stewardship and conservation to bring Americans together to help solve the climate crisis through nature-based solutions.

### Agriculture

*What policies should Congress adopt to reduce carbon pollution and other greenhouse gas emissions and maximize carbon storage in agriculture?*

#### **“Carbon-friendly” federal food procurement:**

The federal government could establish procurement requirements for all federally-purchased or supported food and fiber acquisitions to achieve, over time, increasing “carbon-friendly” purchasing from farms and ranches (e.g. starting at 10% of all procurement and increasing to 50% or more of all procurement over a specified timespan). For example, in 2008, the USDA’s Child Nutrition Programs were amended to encourage the purchasing of unprocessed, locally grown agricultural products – this could be further amended to encourage carbon-friendly products. Further, priority ranking criteria could be added for contract awards, prioritizing contractors that use carbon-friendly food and fiber. Carbon-friendly farming mitigates emissions by increasing carbon stores through practices such as organic agriculture, Holistic Range Management or their equivalents, and/or those which are conserved with permanent working lands conservation easements. Studies have shown that [organic systems store 1.4 metric tons more per acre of carbon](#) than non-organic agricultural systems. Other examples of carbon-friendly practices include restoring grasslands with native grasses (which also provide excellent forage), agroforestry and reforestation on farm and rangeland, especially in riparian areas where additional benefits include reduced erosion and sediment/pollutant capture.

#### **Federal procurement of biobased and wood products:**

Policies and regulations governing federal procurement could be updated to promote enhanced carbon storage via forest and land management. For example, the USDA’s BioPreferred

Program includes 139 designated categories for mandatory purchasing, each with a minimum requirement of biobased content (biological products, including forestry materials). Increasing minimums or including forest carbon-enhanced requirements into federal purchasing would promote the role of natural systems in carbon sequestration. This could be expanded to requiring that all federal contracts have a specified percentage of materials be from carbon-enhanced forest management. Further, a new procurement standard should be developed for the use of sustainably harvested wood from conserved working forests. Forest loss is a major problem in the U.S., where we lose hundreds of thousands of acres annually to conversion, losing these valuable carbon sinks forever. Working lands conservation easements are a proven tool that landowners embrace which enable them to conserve their lands and steward them well. These actions would provide a major “market pull” and security for land managers to invest in, and be rewarded for, climate-focused management.

#### Oceans, Forestry and Public Lands

*How should Congress update the laws governing management of federal lands, forests, and oceans to accelerate climate adaptation, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and maximize carbon storage?*

#### **Promote and safeguard working forests:**

Similar to the Renewable Fuel Standard, there should be a federal mandate for a minimum level of wood used in building materials that come from conserved, well-managed forests. Working forests cover [45 million acres](#) in the U.S., and working forest conservation easements (WFCEs) safeguard these lands for continued, sustainable harvest while also ensuring proper management for wildlife habitat, water, and other ecosystem services. While federal programs such as the Agricultural Lands Enhancement (ALE) or Forest Legacy (FL) promote the use of easements, there is a long waiting list of landowners for these programs. A federal standard requiring minimum levels of wood to be sourced from well-conserved forests would better incentivize landowners to place their land under WFCEs.

#### **Mitigation requirements and fees:**

The U.S. [loses over 1,480,000 acres of forest land per year](#). Further, the U.S. [lost 31 million acres of agricultural land](#) to development between 1992 and 2012. While development can be desirable and inevitable, it must be better planned so that we are not wastefully losing our productive land base. Similar to transportation funding to states for compliance with the Clean Air Act, the federal government could require a minimum level of mitigation for federal funding for state-level land development projects across all land types. Further, there should be a mitigation fee requirement for development/conversion that occurs on federal land for loss of carbon stock. Similar programs already exist for other natural resources, such as the in-lieu fee program within section 404 of the Clean Water Act. These fees could be used to fund resilience and restoration activities on other federal lands (it would be important to establish oversight and enforcement for this). Funds from this program would provide states with new capital for climate-focused management at the state level and give them the opportunity to both reduce current forest loss and augment the current base.

**Land-based tax credits:**

Last year, the Bipartisan Budget Act amended the 45Q carbon capture and sequestration tax credit, which effectively put a \$50 price tag on a metric ton of carbon. A similar land-based tax credit could be developed to promote climate-friendly land management practices that preserve carbon stocks. This would be a performance-based tax credit for a specific amount of carbon sequestered due to sustainable land management or permanent conservation. Another model performance-based tax credit is the Production Tax Credit (PTC) for renewable electricity, which provides credits on a per-kilowatt-hour basis – a land-based version could provide credits on a per-ton-of-carbon basis. Tax credits could be coupled with direct conservation. There would be a very significant response to such tax credits – this approach has been highly successful in incentivizing conservation, proving that land owners and managers will respond.

**Establish the Strategic Carbon Reserve:**

This would focus federal lands management on enhancing climate resilience and increasing resilient carbon stocks over the long-term. In order to accelerate our ability to meet emissions reduction goals, carbon stocks should be increased, providing a buffer and insurance to meet other targets. Actions to increase carbon stocks include restoring more natural levels of carbon to our grasslands, wetlands, and forests, and increasing average forest age with more natural species composition, structure, and age classes within our public forests. Americans understand the role and value of strategic reserves – we deploy them in crises. The climate challenge is nothing if not such a crisis, and enhancing the odds for a climate-safe future is something that the majority of Americans already want and there is increasing bi-partisan support for investing in climate action.