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Assemblymember Connolly Introduces Legislation to Implement California's First-in-the-Nation Nature-Based Climate Targets

AB 491, sponsored by Pacific Forest Trust, will make California a national model for harnessing nature to achieve carbon neutrality.

SACRAMENTO, CA – Today, Assemblymember Damon Connolly (D-San Rafael) introduced AB 491, which will make California the first state in the nation to codify climate action targets that harness the power of California's natural and working lands to achieve its carbon neutrality goals, solidifying the state's position as a national leader in implementing climate action.

"Climate change cannot wait," said Assemblymember Connolly. "The people of California deserve a safer, more resilient future, and we must harness the power of our forests, wetlands, and farmlands to combat this crisis."

"This legislation will enable California to implement clear, science-based targets for enhanced natural carbon sequestration," said Laurie Wayburn, Chair of the AB 1757 Natural and Working Lands Expert Advisory Committee and President of Pacific Forest Trust. "It will complement the bold actions California has taken in the energy and transportation sectors to achieve the climate goals set to protect our communities, our economy, and our environment."

AB 491, sponsored by Pacific Forest Trust, amends the Health and Safety Code to make the climate targets announced last Earth Day by Governor Gavin Newsom the "law of the land." The targets were recommended to the state in 2023 by the mentioned Expert Advisory Committee after extensive public comment and agency input.

Harnessing natural and working lands for climate action notably integrates short term actions, like fuels management to reduce fire risks or restoration to promote natural systems, and long-term conservation to ensure these actions really deliver benefits. They include greening cities and communities, promoting organic agriculture, conserving farmlands, and notably, shifting to more natural forest management. These efforts not only mitigate emissions but also strengthen landscapes against intensifying climate risks such as wildfires, floods, and biodiversity loss.

Research confirms that restoring the natural ability of forests and other lands to absorb and store carbon is one of the most effective strategies for addressing climate change. As found by the Expert Advisory Committee's report, shifting management practices on a fraction of the state's private forestlands alone could absorb an additional 300 million metric tons of CO2 within the next decade. These practices make forests more fire and flood-resistant, while also providing economic benefits. The legislation also recognizes that nature-based solutions are also critical

strategies for disaster risk reduction, water security, and biodiversity protection. These actions lead to significant and sustained jobs in both rural and urban communities.

By providing clear targets for investments in climate action, the bill also aligns with the voter-approved $10 billion Climate Bond passed in November 2024, which provides substantial funding to advance natural and working lands restoration, conservation, and management. With AB 491, California will continue to lead the nation in climate action, demonstrating that a healthy, safe environment and a healthy, robust economy for rural and urban communities go hand in hand.

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