



Forest Carbon Coalition

Advancing nature's climate solutions

April 26th, 2021

Gina McCarthy, Chair
National Climate Task Force

John Kerry
U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate

Deb Haaland
U.S. Secretary of the Interior

Tom Vilsack
U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

RE: A Climate-Forestry Agenda for the United States

Dear Chair McCarthy, Presidential Envoy Kerry and Secretaries Haaland and Vilsack;

We applaud the Biden Administration's commitment to a robust, government-wide approach for combatting the climate crisis making full use of federal, state and local government capacities as set forth in Executive Order 140008. As you know, this requires a radical shift in management of the nation's forestlands to ensure that they are no longer deforested and degraded by logging, grazing, mining, oil and gas development, roads, suburban sprawl and other uses that are driving climate change and making the land more susceptible to its effects.

The good news is that by catalyzing a shift to forest management that prioritizes the myriad biodiversity and climate services of our nation's forests, the Biden Administration can make major gains towards meeting the US nationally determined contribution (NDC) under the Paris Climate Agreement while achieving all of the important goals set forth in EO 140008, including reducing climate pollution, increasing landscape resilience to climate change, protecting public health, conserving our lands, waters and biodiversity, delivering environmental justice and creating jobs and economic growth in our most economically distressed rural communities.

But doing this will require seeing through the misinformation and false solutions offered by Big Timber. Contrary to what Wall Street, foreign and other large corporations are telling Congress and members of your administration, logging is not a solution to climate change. Logging does not reduce wildfires, it does not contribute toward meeting our renewable energy goals, and it will not pull millions of Americans out of rural poverty. Instead, the

clearcuts, timber plantations and logging roads that scar the vast majority of US forestlands are big sources of greenhouse gas emissions; they make the land more susceptible to wildfires and water shortages; and they keep rural communities locked into chronic poverty and economic instability.

As the National Climate Task Force begins its work with input from the Departments of Interior and Agriculture, we are writing to request that you develop and implement a climate-forestry strategy for the United States with five overriding strategic goals based on science, sustainable economics, and environmental justice. Details of these goals and dozens of policy interventions we recommend to achieve them are included in the attached policy brief *America's Tattered Forests - A roadmap for USDA-USDI compliance with climate-forestry goals in Executive Order 140008*. The five strategic goals are:

Strategic Goal 1: Halt and Reverse Deforestation and Forest Degradation

America's vast original forest is almost all gone and what remains exists in tattered remnants mostly on federal lands. All of these carbon rich groves and all other natural, mature, and old growth stands and large, carbon storing trees need immediate federal protection. Most notably, this includes restoring roadless and old growth protections to the Tongass National Forest and adopting nationwide forest plan amendments to protect remaining unlogged forests, older forests and large trees. On non-federal lands, a national No-Net-Loss policy is needed to slow the loss of forest cover to developers. An interconnected network of forest reserves, buffers, and landscape corridors should be established all ownerships to facilitate species migration in response to climate change. Finally, major new investments in forest restoration should be made to allow degraded areas time to reach their full carbon potential and to fight invasive species, close legacy logging roads, stabilize soils, reintroduce native species, and work with fire for ecosystem benefits under safe conditions.

Strategic Goal 2: Diversify and Revitalize Forest Dependent Communities and Remedy Environmental Injustices

Rural communities on the front lines of deforestation and forest degradation are suffering from chronic, multi-dimensional poverty, racial exclusion and environmental injustices. The USDA and USDI should focus rural development program activities on helping America's rural timber towns diversify and grow. To do so, they must emphasize forest protection and restoration, not logging. Redirecting at least \$2 billion per year away from the federal logging program and toward restoration will create over 50,000 new jobs in these distressed areas. By restoration, we mean, decommissioning roads, improving trails, removing invasive species, restoring beaver populations for flood control and water storage, and replenishing populations of other imperiled native fish, wildlife, and plants. Expanding the notification program described by EO Section 222(b)ii to include hazards created by logging and aerial pesticide spraying will reduce public health risks to frontline communities.

Strategic Goal 3: Reduce Forest Ownership by Short-Sighted Investors

Too many acres of US forestland are now controlled by Wall Street, foreign, and other large logging corporations with no expertise or capacity for the kinds of long-term commitments to forest ecosystem health needed to solve the climate crisis. Federal, state and local governments should facilitate the return of these lands to families, tribes, and community-based organizations. They should do so by closing tax loopholes and phasing out subsidies for investor-driven logging corporations, enacting corporate land reform legislation modeled on the Midwest's corporate farming laws, and by equipping a diverse new generation of farmers and foresters with access to grants, low interest and forgivable loans, interactive technologies, and other tools to facilitate purchase and management of forestlands in accordance with climate smart principles.

Strategic Goal 4: Reduce Wasteful Consumption of Wood Products

The US is the world's largest producer and consumer of wood products, but over half of what is logged each year is for pulp, paper, packaging, woody biomass and other short-term end uses that release nearly all stored carbon into the atmosphere in a few short years. As with fossil fuels, federal, state and local government agencies should be working to reduce demand for carbon intensive wood products by ending production and consumption subsidies, placing a moratorium on permitting of new industrial wood products facilities, bolstering markets for substitutes with a lower carbon and ecological footprint and using climate-smart building codes to limit the proliferation of oversized McMansions and other structures that use prodigious amounts of carbon intensive wood.

Strategic Goal 5: Reduce the Climate Impacts of Industrial Forest Practices

The GHG emissions from logging are often overlooked because they are excluded from existing national and state level inventories. Including logging and wood products sector emissions in these inventories is essential for a full accounting of the US climate impact. As with other sectors, these emissions can then be reduced through a variety of regulatory and market-based mechanisms based on the polluter pays principle. In addition, it is critical for the federal government to work with states to modernize antiquated state forest practices laws to help repopulate the land with big, old, carbon dense trees and structurally diverse forests that are far more resilient to climate change than industrial tree plantations.

We appreciate the immensity of the challenge the National Climate Task Force has taken on but assure you that with respect to forests, the policy solutions called for by scientists, economists, and community organizations for decades will not be too difficult to justify, garner support for, and implement as long as the political will to do so remains strong.

Yours truly,

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