National Alliance of Forest Owners
Investing in the Future of America's Forests

Climate Change Issue Briefing

America's well-managed private forests are vital to any discussion of climate change because of their unique ability to help reduce and manage greenhouse gases in our atmosphere.

Rising global concern about the environment and climate change has led to policy activity at all levels of government – with an emphasis on reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. The current U.S. Climate Policy focuses on three areas: 1) slowing the growth of emissions, 2) strengthening science and technology, and 3) enhancing international cooperation.

Forestry is uniquely positioned to offer solutions because it is a means to naturally increase carbon absorption through a process called sequestration. Trees remove, or sequester, carbon from the atmosphere, and store it in wood. That carbon remains stored even if the tree is used to make much needed wood products, such as homes, furniture and other products used by millions of Americans every day. Wood from sustainably managed forests also provides a renewable and carbon neutral energy source as an alternative to fossil fuels.

As forestlands face increasing pressure from population and land-use changes, public policies that encourage the forests' maintenance and sustainable management can be a significant part of global greenhouse gas mitigation efforts. This is in addition to the many other environmental values contributed by well-managed forests: wildlife habitat, biodiversity, water quality, air quality, and maintenance of rural landscapes.

Private forest owners and sustainable forest management are crucial to the reduction and management of greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore to public climate change policy.

As the United States considers greenhouse gas emission reduction legislation and develops the protocols to use forest carbon to offset industrial carbon dioxide emissions, NAFO believes the government must establish how forest landowners can demonstrate legal equivalency for the carbon sequestered in forests, the carbon stored in wood products, and the carbon dioxide emissions avoided by using wood as a renewable energy source in place of fossil fuels. Government policies should also recognize the value of using wood as a building material that is grown with solar energy as opposed to other materials, such as concrete and steel, that take large amounts of energy to produce.

Voluntary policies and economic incentives should encourage keeping forests in long-term forest use and provide forest landowners with market-based mechanisms to mitigate emissions from other sectors.