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Private Forests are Key to Offsetting Carbon Emissions New Industry-Conservation Coalition Calls on Congress to Act

Washington, D.C.—A new coalition representing virtually all sectors of the forest community—the forest products industry, conservation and wildlife groups, foresters, private forest owners, academics, and carbon finance groups—today called upon Congress to include private working forests as a central part of federal climate change policy. The American Forest Foundation, along with The Trust for Public Land launched the diverse group a year ago.

Drue DeBerry, Senior Vice President for Conservation for the American Forest Foundation said “In the end, it was too important *not* to agree on core principles. There was unanimous agreement on the urgency of stepping up forests’ capacity to remove carbon emissions from the atmosphere. It’s cost effective, it’s ready now, and it works—while at the same time conserving water, wildlife and flood control properties of forests.”

U.S. forests and forest products already capture and store 10 percent of all U.S. carbon emissions produced each year, but the new coalition called the Forest-Climate Working Group (FCWG) says they can trap even more if landowner incentives and forest-carbon offsets are put in place. “This is something we can ramp up right now and that is exactly what policy makers want to see,” said Jad Daley, Director, Northern New England Programs for The Trust for Public Land. “We don’t need to wait for new technologies, and we have enough experience with carbon markets to make it work.”

He added that conserving forests “buys us time we desperately need to make the long-term shift to a low-carbon economy,” but cautioned that forests should not be taken for granted.

The forest products industry and forest landowners in the U.S. are well-positioned to make a significant contribution toward addressing climate change. The group’s recommendations could help forest owners by rewarding them for management practices that capture and store carbon and thereby offset industrial carbon emissions. “Private working forests are one of our nation’s most effective tools for addressing climate change,” said Dave Tenny, president and CEO of the National Alliance of Forest Owners. “The essential role of working forests should be at the forefront of consideration in crafting climate change solutions.”

Among the 30 members of FCWG are many of the nation’s largest and best-known conservation groups including the Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, and The Wilderness Society, along with co-sponsors The Trust for Public Land and the American Forest Foundation. State-based conservation entities, such as Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and Wildlife Mississippi are also on board.

Robert Bonnie, Vice President/Land Conservation and Wildlife for the Environmental Defense Fund, cites a host of conservation benefits of this approach. “Private lands provide a majority of the habitat for most species on the U.S. endangered species list. Forests provide not just wildlife habitat, but important sources of fresh drinking water, flood control, clean air, and recreation for communities.” He added that forest corridors for passage of wildlife will be increasingly critical as species adjust and migrate in response to climate change.

Industry supporters of FCWG range from some of the largest operators like Weyerhaeuser, MWV, and Plum Creek to trade groups like the American Forest & Paper Association, Hardwood Federation, and the National Hardwood Lumber Association. Industry and carbon finance groups like C2I, LLC, say that forests and forest products provide an important solution in helping to address climate change, and that they want to see this solution recognized in climate legislation.

Also supporting the FCWG recommendations are representatives of foresters and forestry groups, including the Society of American Foresters, Forest Guild, Council of Western State Foresters, Maine Forest Service, California Forestry Association, and the National Association of State Foresters. Michael Goergen of Society of American Foresters said “Focusing forest landowners’ strong stewardship ethic toward maximizing carbon storage is not difficult, but they will need economic and technical assistance. If the financial incentives are not there, we can envision a future without many of the small operators that exist today.”

Scientific research and academic entities supporting the FCWG include the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, National Association of University Forest Resource Programs (NAUFRP), and the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences. “Research shows this is a very real opportunity that may not last long if we keep losing our forests,” said Dr. Hal Salwasser, Dean of the College of Forestry, Director of the Oregon Forest Research Laboratory of Oregon State University, and President of NAUFRP.

“It’s not been easy, but remarkably we all ended up on the same page. Representatives of the entire forest community have united behind one consensus platform that recognizes we can’t afford to lose any of our forests’ capacity to store carbon and instead must increase it,” said Eric Palola, Senior Director, Forests for Wildlife, National Wildlife Federation.

When asked about the FCWG prospects in Congress, co-chair Drue DeBerry said “Well, we’ll see if the bipartisan cooperation of our coalition can carry forward in Congress. But we’ve already had a lot of interest in the Senate and we do expect this to be a central piece of forthcoming legislation. We’ve done the heavy lifting and now they have a chance to make this work.” He added, “I really don’t think we would have won agreement from such a diverse group if we had not all come to the table with a profound sense of urgency.”

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The Forest-Climate Working Group is a broad and diverse coalition of forest stakeholder formed to develop consensus recommendations for U.S. forest components of federal climate legislation. The participants in the Forest-Climate Working Group—landowner, industry, conservation, wildlife, carbon finance, and forestry organizations—have engaged in a year of facilitated dialogues to develop this policy platform.