



Policy Statement:
Western Forestry Leadership Coalition

Climate Change and Western Forests

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Climate change is impacting ecological, social, and economic values associated with forests in the Western US. Shifts in temperature and precipitation, and patterns of extreme events affect the ability of these forests to supply the broad set of ecosystem goods and services expected by the public. Active management is needed. State, local, and federal governments are taking action to reduce and mitigate greenhouse gas contributions and are developing mechanisms to assist humans with anticipated climate changes. Climate change science is evolving and impacts are occurring more rapidly than previously expected, therefore, there is a need for more education, research, and technology transfer. While site-specific impacts may be uncertain, there is a need to consider the implications of probable changes and proactively develop land management strategies that balance climate mitigation goals, while helping forests adapt. Inaction could result in catastrophic impacts; conversely pro-active management may help protect forests from harmful disturbance as well as help to influence more gradual change and adaptation. It is also important to recognize the long-term opportunities and leadership position that forest management can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change.

BACKGROUND

Western forests, the goods and services they supply, the diverse landscapes they occur on, and the biodiversity that depend on them are all at-risk under changing climate. These vulnerabilities, mostly related to shifts in temperature, precipitation and runoff patterns, will manifest themselves differently across the Western landscape. These shifts contribute to extreme events—such as epidemic insect and disease outbreaks, sustained drought, wildfires, etc. Decades of forest research and land management experience have resulted in a robust information base regarding forests and their management. This can help forestry practitioners and land managers understand mitigation and adaptation options for rural and urban forests. Only through active management will these options net all the expected societal benefits – ecological, social and economic.

Mitigation calls for using forestry and forest products to sequester carbon; provide renewable energy through forest biomass; avoid carbon losses due to fire, mortality, conversion to non-forest uses, etc.; and, to reduce management's environmental footprint including greenhouse gas emissions. Managed forests act as a functioning carbon sink and as such are a viable means for offsetting carbon emissions.

Adaptation relates to how forest ecosystems will react naturally or through management to climate change over various time periods and spatial scales. Adaptation management assists forests in becoming more resistant, resilient, and successful in new locations under climate-induced range migrations. Actively managing forests to increase their resistance and resilience while minimizing the amount of forest conversion and fragmentation will reduce both the probability and severity of catastrophic events that have the potential to cause negative ecological, social, and economic impacts.

POSITION

Goal: To increase awareness about the implications of climate change on Western forests and to provide tools and information to Western forestry practitioners, land managers and opinion leaders on how to actively manage forests to maintain, restore and enhance forest health, sequester carbon, and deliver other ecosystem services under a changing climate.

Objectives: WFLC supports an open, comprehensive, collaborative approach to developing national, regional, and state-wide forest management policies that are responsive to and help increase the resilience of Western forests. WFLC shall use this enhanced public awareness of climate change and its impacts on forests to reconnect people to forests and the goods and services that they provide them (e.g., carbon sequestration, clean water, wood, recreation sites, etc). WFLC shall become a credible and widely sought after resource by providing science, experience-based information, and policy advice on climate change and Western forests. WFLC shall capitalize on its collaborative structure, communication and networking skills, and committee activities to engage the public and policy makers. WFLC members shall strive to balance adaptation and mitigation goals in developing new management strategies and policies to optimize ecosystem goods and services and preserve options for future forest practitioners and land managers.

Strategies and Approaches: WFLC shall pursue three complementary types of approaches to support its goals and objectives.

General approaches

- WFLC shall address climate change directly, promoting active approaches to management. WFLC members recognize the benefits of taking a proactive approach to improve forest health and reduce the probability and severity of negative impacts of resulting disturbance.
- WFLC members shall jointly consider adaptation and mitigation strategies to optimize management benefits, and to prevent conflicting management objectives.
- WFLC supports additional research and monitoring to understand the site specific impacts of climate change.
- WFLC recognizes the importance of urban forests in mitigating impacts of climate change and shall actively promote increasing urban forest cover.
- WFLC members shall identify ways to reduce their organization's environmental footprint.
- WFLC shall pursue promotion and recognition of woody biomass and timber offset options in the climate change debate.
- WFLC shall actively work to increase awareness of the potential impacts of climate change on the full suite of goods and services provided by forest ecosystems, such as, carbon sequestration, water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, woody biomass, timber, etc.

Regulatory approaches

- WFLC encourages federal investment in management actions to reduce carbon releases by wildfire, insects and disease, and other disturbances.
- WFLC recognizes the important federal role in setting standards for forest carbon measurements to support carbon market development.
- WFLC recognizes that current and future regulatory actions regarding forests need to consider climate and effects on potential gains from incentive frameworks (e.g., carbon markets).
- WFLC supports consideration of forestry as a separate category from agriculture in development of greenhouse gas emissions reporting programs.

Market-based approaches

- WFLC supports an incentive-based framework (e.g., carbon markets) to help private landowners manage for changing climate, for carbon and for other ecosystem goods and services.
- WFLC supports the consideration of a full range of alternatives to address permanence and certainty for participation in carbon markets, aside from permanent conservation easements, that are consistent with current international standards.
- WFLC supports the development of the woody biomass industry to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, and as a means to help actively manage forests.

- WFLC member organizations shall work to garner public support for the substitution value of wood over other fossil fuel intensive products and supports the retention of and investment in additional forest products infrastructure development.

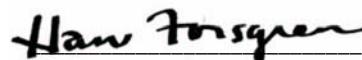
SPECIFIC ACTIONS

WFLC shall accomplish the above goals, objectives, strategies and approaches by:

- Facilitating discussion and the dissemination of science and experience-based knowledge and information about western forests and climate change among members and other stakeholders.
- Engaging with regional and state initiatives (e.g., Western Climate Initiative) and building a network of partnerships to advocate for forestry's role in mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- Developing outreach materials for use by members (e.g., standard presentation, pamphlets, web archive, conferences, etc.).
- Synthesizing research results (or work with research organizations already doing this) and support the development of science-based tools and predictive models for incorporating climate change into forest management and planning practices and policies.
- Considering the Biomass Collaborative Roadmap to help articulate biomass benefits.
- Using work groups and member organizations to synthesize research and policies.
- Outlining policy options, opportunities, and/or possible concerns for membership.
- Coordinating the development and implementation of a set of western forest management principles and/or protocols applicable to improving land managers' ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- Providing feedback to the Forest Service and other research organization on research needs.



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Date Signed: December 14, 2007

Expiration Date: Two years from signing