

Responses to the B.C. Climate Action Team's forestry recommendations from British Columbia environmental non-governmental organizations

October 6, 2008

The following is a joint statement from the a coalition of non-governmental organizations active on climate policy in British Columbia, in response to the government of BC's request for comment on the recommendations of the Climate Action Team. This document contains responses to CAT recommendation #27 in particular, focusing on issues dealing with forests and wilderness lands.

A separate document (with an overlapping group of endorsing organizations) contains responses to all 31 of the CAT's recommendations.

Background

British Columbia's forests, grasslands, peatlands and other ecosystems play a critical role as carbon reserves and carbon sinks and are thus a "shield" against global warming. Our forests have some of the highest carbon stores in Canada averaging 311 tonnes per hectare with some coastal forests holding 600 to 1,300 t/ha. However, when natural ecosystems are converted to other uses or are heavily degraded by human land use, much of this stored carbon is released back into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide, where it contributes to global warming. For example, natural, intact forests store up to 50% more carbon than 'managed' forests that are planted after logging.¹

The CAT identified a number of forest, forestry and land use options to reduce emissions and to increase the uptake of rates of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere; including: storage of carbon in wood products, planting, the use of forest biomass for energy, and protecting existing carbon reserves (e.g., redirect logging from old growth to second growth). However, among these options, the world's scientific authority on climate change (the IPCC) has promoted conservation of existing carbon reserves as the most effective mitigation strategy for the land use and forestry sector:²

*"Reduced deforestation and degradation is the forest mitigation option with the largest and most immediate carbon stock impact in the short term per ha and per year globally...."*³

¹ Kurz, W.A., S.J. Beukema, M.J. Apps 1998. Carbon Budget Implications of the Transition from Natural to Managed Disturbance Regimes in Forest Landscapes. *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change* 2, pp. 405-421.

² p. 549 of Nabuurs, G.J., Masera, O., Andrasko, K., Benitez-Ponce, P., Boer, R., Dutschke, M., et al. (2007). Forestry. In B. Metz, O.R. Davidson, P.R. Bosch, R. Dave, & L.A. Meyer (Eds.) *Climate Change 2007: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 541-584). New York: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved May 2, 2008, from <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg3/ar4-wg3-chapter9.pdf>

³ Ibid; p. 550.

Conservation of existing carbon reserves in BC's wilderness and natural areas is not only the most effective mitigation strategy for the land use and forestry sector, it provides a suite of other co-benefits that are critical for the ongoing health and well-being of British Columbians (e.g., clean water, flood control, tourism and recreation opportunities, among many). Conservation of natural areas also provides for a range of adaptation options, for wildlife, ecosystems, and human communities, to better withstand the effects of climate change.

Recommendations

We urge the BC Government to move ahead with the Climate Action Team's Recommendation no. 27 for the Forest Sector:

“Include forests, land use, the forest-product sector, bioenergy and other renewable wood-derived bio-products in the government's climate action strategy. This should be done with the involvement of stakeholders in a full assessment of mitigation options in terms of greenhouse gas benefits, biodiversity values and other co-benefits.” July 28, 2008

However, we do not believe that the existing Working Roundtable on Forestry nor the BC Climate Change Working Group is the appropriate forum to address this important recommendation. The mandate of these tables does not address the most efficient mitigation strategy for reducing emissions from land use, land use change and forestry (avoided degradation/deforestation of carbon reserves), these tables ignore non-forest carbon stores (e.g., grasslands, peatlands) and their membership is not inclusive (limited or no involvement by NGOs). For this reason, we encourage the Government to ensure the full involvement of the ENGO sector as part of a multi-stakeholder process to address the role of forests, non-forest carbon reserves (e.g., grasslands, peatlands, and wetlands) and forestry for both climate change mitigation and adaptation purposes.

We believe that policy discussions at this new table should be guided by the following principles:

1. Actions/policies need to have a net benefit for (native) biodiversity.
2. Actions/policies must protect or enhance the ability of specified areas to provide ecosystem services.
3. Actions/policies should not promote the suppression of natural disturbances that play an important ecological role and are likely beyond our long-term control.
4. Actions/policies that store carbon in the forest must quantify and verify that the net terrestrial forest carbon balance is positive (carbon stored in the forest, minus the emissions associated with management) from the current baseline activities, 2007.
5. Actions/policies that provide long-term conservation of an area planned for conversion may be counted as a reduction in GHG emissions.

Actions/policies that seek to produce energy from cellulosic biomass must first conduct an assessment to ensure that the additional production of energy, through the use of biomass, results in an overall reduction in GHG emissions consistent with agreed to reduction targets

and associated timelines. British Columbia's NGOs have developed a suite of prescriptive policy/action recommendations that are available upon request.⁴

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⁴ These include (among other measures): avoiding the conversion of old growth forests, grasslands, peatlands and other ecosystems, adoption of harvesting systems that maintain/increase stand – and landscape - level carbon density (e.g., lengthening rotations, maintaining partial forest cover, reducing soil erosion, and avoiding high-emission activities such as slash burning) and encouraging the production of longer-lived wood products and improved wood product recycling to encourage improved management of the carbon pool in harvested wood products (see footnote 2).

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