



Climate Considerations in Plan Revision Webinar

Questions & Answers

May 15, 2024

1) Concerned about ambiguity around the words “climate” and “carbon”. Would like us to speak about the rules and regulations. Talked about regulations and how they jump from Obama to Biden, and these EOs skip the Trump era. Concerned that issues around carbon will stop all timber harvest and cause economic collapse. He thinks all this climate change and carbon issue is political.

The Executive Orders around carbon and climate change, which were cited in the presentation, are from the current administration and do not reflect the Executive Orders from the Trump administration. It seems as if this is being hurried along before the next election.

Executive Orders do change with changing Presidential administrations. Some of these cited Executive Orders did revoke old Executive orders. Executive Orders do change and are associated with our current administration. However, the 2012 Planning Rule is not new and has never been revoked or revised since its inception. The 2012 Planning Rule established the direction to include climate change effects in Plan Revisions, as well as the direction to include baseline carbon assessment in Plan Revisions and to analyze/estimate carbon effects from the Alternatives.

The Plan Revision process is expected to be completed in 2027 or 2028. We are in the data gathering stage of a multi-year effort. The assessment stage will not even be completed before the next presidential election.

2) What type of carbon are you referring to in your presentation? Carbon Dioxide is needed by plants, so why is it considered a problem?

The focus here is the effect of greenhouse gases. While there are numerous greenhouse gases, we use the word carbon as a common shorthand, since these greenhouse gases are carbon based. We are required to analyze what we call biogenic carbon. That is the carbon that exchanges between our vegetation, ecosystems, and atmosphere. We do not have the same requirements to account for direction point source emissions like power plants or coal production.

What we are required to analyze relates to the effect of Forest Service management on the carbon that is stored in the ecosystem, and the carbon that is absorbed or emitted from the ecosystem and from disturbances.

3) Is it true that young trees store more carbon than older trees, so cutting trees actually stores more carbon.

Young forests generally sequester more carbon than older forests, annually. The bigger trees more carbon per tree. When those trees are cut, if they are left to decompose or burn, they release carbon back into the atmosphere. Long-lived wood products such as lumber can store carbon for a long time. Eventually, all wood products will decompose and return carbon to the atmosphere, but the timeline is variable. These are complex considerations of what we call a life cycle of wood production, wood utilization, and wood usage. We will consider all of these things when we are analyzing the effects of our management.

Importantly, carbon is not the only thing we're managing for. We are forest management agency, not a carbon management agency. We have wildlife, economic, recreation and many other resources to consider. Carbon is just one of many, many resources that we need to consider and analyze the effects on, when we consider how the Tongass National Forest will be managed.

The Forest Service is still working on a document on its stance for our role in carbon stewardship. While is not finalized, it generally emphasizes managing first for ecosystem integrity, and manage for healthy forests first. Opportunities to improve carbon storage or carbon flows that remove carbon from the atmosphere are not the primary consideration.

4) Timber stands in Alaska are sitting idle because of carbon credit trading schemes. Are we going down the road to trading carbon credits, instead of producing lumber, therefore negatively affecting the local economy?

The USDA Forest Service does not have the legal authority to participate in the generation, sale, or transfer of carbon credits or offsets from National Forest System lands. Our existing authorities are fully consistent with our mission to manage public lands for multiple uses, ecosystem integrity, and the sustainability of ecosystem services for the benefit of current and future generations. We do not have authority to sever the value of the carbon from the land and the benefits they provide to society and sell it to the marketplace.

5) How does the plan balance the impacts and at times competing interests of industry and development pressures with climate change goals (e.g, carbon, ecological sustainability, etc)?

Ultimately, the 2012 planning rule is the guidance for forest planning. The Planning Rule requires that ecological sustainability is the overarching goal. However, the rule also requires that we consider sustainability of economic and social values. We will hear from the public and agencies about what is important to them, and they will be sure to tell us when they believe we are not balancing resources. How balance all resources is a value judgement. Part of this assessment process is to come to a common understanding of the values, or identify where there is disagreement. The Tongass Forest Supervisor will consider public input and values in the decision on how to balance these resources.

When we develop the Forest Plan, we will develop alternatives. Those alternatives lay out different options and may have a different focus. Some may have more forest restoration, or more timber management, or more of a hands-off approach. These alternatives will be analyzed, for effects on many resources. The Forest Supervisor will use that analysis, informed by public input, to decide what the final Forest Plan will look like.

For more information or to sign up for our email distribution list, please refer to the Tongass Revision Website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd1105492>.