

Ecotrust

Ecotrust response: House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis Request for Information

Ecotrust is a Portland, Ore.-based nonprofit that for nearly 30 years has worked at the intersection of economy, equity, and the environment in the region from California to Alaska that we call “Salmon Nation.” Our mission is to inspire fresh thinking that creates economic opportunity, environmental well-being, and social equity. Responding to the climate crisis is a driving imperative in our work.

We are grateful for the opportunity to share the policy recommendations below at the invitation of the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on the Climate Crisis and specifically Congresswoman Bonamici, the member from the Pacific Northwest region where we live and work.

Ecotrust envisions a future in which the worst consequences of climate change are averted, due in large part to better management of natural capital, and that the inevitable impacts of climate change are met with solutions that are equitable and regenerative.

The temperate rainforests, fertile agricultural lands, and massive coastal estuaries of the greater Pacific Northwest are extremely valuable natural assets in this effort. This natural capital is coupled with our regional commitment and powerful human capital to allow us to drive towards long-term sustainability. Therefore, we advocate for national scale policies that are focused on the management of our natural capital in this region and regions throughout the country, as a means to combat climate change as well as ensure our farmers, ranchers, forest land managers, and fishers are best prepared for the impacts of climate change.

Forestry, agriculture, coastal communities, green building, and ecosystem services are all sectors with strong potential for mitigation and real needs for investment to bolster their resilience in the present and future climate crisis. Below, we provide recommendations related to these sectors, specifically responses to **Agriculture** (6 and 7); **Oceans, Forestry and Public Lands** (8); and **Resilience and Adaptation** (11b).

Agriculture

6. What policies should Congress adopt to reduce carbon pollution and other greenhouse gas emissions and maximize carbon storage in agriculture?

Forests lie within the USDA’s definition of agriculture, and privately-held forests represent significant opportunity for drawdown. We have prepared a *DRAFT INCENTIVE STRATEGY FOR FOREST CARBON POLICY* that outlines a program targeted at private forest lands and modeled after the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Grassland and Wetland Reserve Programs. This program would lead to quantifiable increases in carbon sequestration and storage on private lands. Potential decreases in regional supply of wood products could be easily quantified and, if concerns arise from existing wood processors, addressed. This draft policy is included as a separate document with our submission.

We also fully endorse the NRCS’s Healthy Forest Reserve Program and strongly recommend that its geographic scope and funding be significantly expanded so that the thousands of

interested landowners who are currently unable to participate in the program could enroll their forests.

Regenerative and soil building agricultural practices have the potential for promising gains in drawing carbon down from the atmosphere. And the retention of carbon in our soils will be a deciding factor in the rate of future climate change. There is good evidence supporting regenerative practices as a tool for mitigation, but more studies are needed to better understand where and how carbon sequestration happens in soil and in particular, how management practices impact carbon drawdown and retention in specific soil types. We recommend policies to fund such studies.

Furthermore, future policies must consider the impact to small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers who play an important role in their local communities and regional economies. For example, current carbon pricing policies that generate offset opportunities for agricultural producers can only be exploited at economies of scale because of the relatively large amounts of land required to capture carbon at scales to outweigh the costs to verify, validate, and monitor carbon for offset markets. This has an indirect effect of disadvantaging producers who function at smaller scales (e.g., the majority of producers in Oregon and Washington). Rather, policies that are focused on incentivizing specific practices that are known to build and retain soil organic matter can be equally accessed for all agricultural producers regardless of scale. We therefore support incentive-based policies for agricultural producers.

7. What policies should Congress adopt to help farmers, ranchers, and natural resource managers adapt to the impacts of climate change?

A key advantage of regenerative and soil-building agricultural practices is that these practices both mitigate climate change and help farmers and ranchers be better prepared for the inevitable impacts of climate change. Once again, policies that provide non-market incentive mechanisms that shifts farms towards regenerative practices are our key recommendation. Policies that are focused solely on maximizing sequestration or reducing emissions do not necessarily lead to more resilient landscapes. We recommend therefore focusing on incentivizing changes in land management, not carbon offsetting. For example, debt relief structures that support land managers in transitioning away from conventional agriculture will help support farmers' ability to deploy regenerative practices. We also recommend policies that support collaborative and community ownership of farmland, creating more opportunities for regenerative practices to be implemented and lowering barriers to farming for individuals that may have important land-based knowledge regarding adaptation, but not the access to land or capital currently necessary to put these practices into action.

Oceans, Forestry and Public Lands

8. How should Congress update the laws governing management of federal lands, forests, and oceans to accelerate climate adaptation, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and maximize carbon storage?

The laws that govern federal lands should be updated to specifically prohibit the harvest of old growth forests, including in Alaska. These laws that guide forest management on federal lands should also increase buffers around streams, wetlands, steep and unstable slopes, critical biodiversity habitat, drinking water source areas, and other High Conservation Value areas as compared to common practice.

We also strongly endorse the co-management of federal lands and waters by American Indian tribes. Both informal discussions and formal tribal consultation are important to natural resource management. As the traditional users and stewards of terrestrial and marine resources, American Indian tribes are particularly important to successful management programs. Agencies should seek out and financially support co-management agreements and prioritize building trust with tribes. Additionally, as many Native American communities are facing serious impacts of climate change, co-managing resources provides opportunity for innovation and adaptation.

Resilience and Adaptation

11. What policies should Congress adopt to help communities become more resilient in response to climate change? The Select Committee welcomes all ideas on resilience and adaptation but requests comments on three specific questions:
b. How can Congress better identify and reduce climate risks for front-line communities, including ensuring that low and moderate-income populations and communities that suffer from racial discrimination can effectively grapple with climate change?

The best recommendations in response to this question will be provided by community-based organizations led by and representing Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities and low-income communities that are facing the direct impacts of pollution and climate change. Ecotrust supports shifts in policy that direct resources and restructure decision-making so that these leaders can drive policy.

In addition, because of our nearly 30 year history of working with American Indian tribes from northern California to Alaska, Ecotrust strongly supports the comprehensive recommendations provided by the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI; letter dated November 20, 2019). These recommendations were generated during the Tribes and First Nations Climate Change Summit that took place in Spokane, Washington from July 30-31, 2019. As a frontline population, tribes in the Pacific Northwest have been national leaders among all tribes in addressing climate change impacts on their communities and homelands. The recommendations set forth by ATNI are based on lived experience and emphasize a reasonable, multi-level approach of policy and action.

In a 2017 study by Ecotrust and PolicyLink, we examined the economic, ecological, and social impacts of existing community-based urban forestry investments designed to benefit low income communities and communities of color. The study identified policy recommendations that can be more broadly considered in the development of green infrastructure and the initiation of urban restoration projects—both areas of increasing need due to climate change. These policy recommendations emphasize making equity a component of all programs and implementing an all-inclusive approach to address disparities. Identifying and alleviating barriers faced by firms owned by people who are BIPOC or from other historically disadvantaged groups, should be part of this strategy. Priority actions may include expediting onerous prequalification (“prequal”) processes for small businesses; making separate contracting targets for BIPOC-owned, woman-owned, and “all other” emerging small business; and developing a dedicated funding stream (e.g., from a construction cost levy) to make these goals achievable.

The full study can be viewed: https://ecotrust.org/wp-content/uploads/Jobs-and-Equity-in-the-Urban-Forest_final-report_3_8_17.pdf