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Staten Island Advance

Foster's Online  
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## Experts: Forests Can Make Money By Slowing Global Warming

Katharine Webster, Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. -- Maintaining and improving the world's working forests is key to slowing global warming, but climate change will accelerate if the current rate of forest loss continues, according to scientists and policy experts who will speak at a conference in Concord this week.

"If you look at the sources of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, there are two: One is fossil fuels and the other is forests," said Laurie Wayburn, president of the Pacific Forest Trust, a San Francisco nonprofit that has led California's efforts to put a dollar value on the ability of forests to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it.

"To date, we have focused our efforts only on fossil fuels," said Wayburn. "For us to be successful in addressing climate change, we also absolutely need to focus on forests."

Thursday's conference will focus on how climate change affects timberland and the forest products industry in the Northern Forest, which stretches from northern New York to Maine. Former New York Gov. George Pataki is among the panelists and will talk about the a regional initiative to control greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide.

The Northeast, perhaps more than any other region of the country, has tried to protect working forests through conservation easements and public acquisition of land, Wayburn said in a telephone interview last week. But like the rest of the country, it also faces accelerating deforestation because of residential and commercial development.

That's worrisome because harvesting trees faster than they grow back not only reduces the amount of carbon dioxide forests can pull from the air: It adds to global warming because as the wood is processed, burned or breaks down, it releases most of its carbon into the atmosphere, she said.

"Development is really outpacing forestry as the highest and best use of forest lands, and finding ways to deal with that will have significant climate benefits," she said.

European nations, which signed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on climate change, have already made a start with a cap-and-trade system to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Companies that can't meet their emission reduction targets can buy credits from those that reduce carbon dioxide -- including the forest industry.

The United States rejected Kyoto. But California's Climate Action Registry is paving the way for a similar system by quantifying and pricing carbon dioxide, whether it's stored in older, better-managed forests or saved through greater energy efficiency in appliances, Wayburn said.

A similar system could work in the Northeast, she said. The keys are preserving existing forests through conservation easements; storing more carbon by increasing the average age of the trees and selecting for more hardwoods than softwoods -- which also increases the wood's market value; and making sure such measures produce an economic return for landowners.

"Climate is a forest product," she said. "We can leverage that to increase the net stocks of carbon that these forests are taking up and holding ... in a way that puts a higher-value forest industry back on the landscape."

It's also important to develop new markets for the region's low-grade wood, as the paper and pulp industry moves overseas, she said. Particularly promising are alternative energy technologies using wood as fuel, because it is a "carbon-neutral" renewable resource: As forests grow to provide more fuel, they re-absorb the carbon dioxide released by combustion.

The stakes are high, because climate change will hurt the region and the forest industry economically, said Eric Kingsley, vice president of Innovative Natural Resource Solutions, a consulting firm in New Hampshire and Maine.

If present warming trends continue, New England's sugar maples -- prized by makers of fine furniture -- will give way over the next century to a mix of mid-Atlantic hardwoods, predominantly hickory, he said. The maple syrup industry would collapse, and sawmills geared toward northern hardwoods would have to retool.

Hickory might make good baseball bats and railroad ties, but "it's not a beautiful wood," Kingsley said. "You don't usually go to someone's house and admire their hickory dinner table."

Climate change also will increase the length of mud season in fall and spring, he said. Loggers cannot take heavy machinery into the woods without seriously damaging the soil unless the ground is dry or frozen.

John Aber, a climate scientist and vice president of research at the University of New Hampshire, said if global warming is not halted or reversed, in a century New England's climate will resemble North Carolina's now.

"Winters will be warmer and shorter, heating bills will be less," Aber said. "If you like loblolly pine, you'll be able to grow it."

But the region will lose many iconic values, from its maple syrup to fall foliage, which is uniquely brilliant largely because of the vibrant yellow, orange and red leaves displayed by sugar maples, he and Kingsley said.

"The Canadians were really clever to put that on their flag; they're going to own the sugar maples," Aber said.