

Position Statement on Climate Smart Forestry

Introduction

Climate smart forestry describes a range of practices intended to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Climate smart forestry practices are considered *nature-based solutions* to address climate change. Forest products generated with these practices are *climate smart commodities*. There is no single authoritative definition of climate smart forestry and tensions exist at international, national, and local levels over what practices should be considered climate smart. At stake in these debates are economic outcomes, ecosystem services, intrinsic values attributed to forests, and the relationships people have with forests.

Climate smart forestry practices, like all forestry, are likely to result in trade-offs producing winners and losers with the potential for more or less equitable outcomes. The Forest Stewards Guild has prepared this Position Statement which is timely and relevant amid rapidly developing government actions to encourage climate smart forestry. Specifically, President Biden's executive order, "[Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#)" and the passage of the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) and the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) which have created the directive and financial support to expand and incentivize climate smart forestry. As a result, more than a billion dollars is being invested by USDA and others to support projects aimed at production and marketing of climate smart commodities and the monitoring and development of climate smart agriculture and forestry practices (e.g. [USDA-NRCS-COMM-22-NOFO0001139](#)). Successful implementation of these incentives requires input about what projects and practices should qualify and how success is gauged. As a leading voice for ecologically, economically, and socially responsible forestry, the Guild and its members are increasingly called to weigh in on emerging climate smart forestry practices, projects, and policy. A longer, more detailed version of this position statement is available at [ForestStewardsGuild.org](#).

What is climate smart forestry?

Climate smart forestry evolved from *climate smart agriculture*. It describes *sustainable forest management* intended to adapt to and reduce the impacts of climate change. Multiple definitions of climate smart forestry co-exist in policy documents and the scientific literature. While many definitions exist, each with important nuance, there are three dimensions of climate smart forestry consistently included in policy documents and literature: 1) climate smart forestry helps forests *adapt* to future climate conditions, 2) climate smart forestry *mitigates* climate change by reducing emissions and sequestering and/or storing carbon, 3) climate smart forestry produces desirable *social outcomes*.

Forest Stewards Guild Position on Climate Smart Forestry

The Guild holds that forests have an effect on and are influenced by climate change and forest management has potential to both contribute to and combat global warming (see [Policy Statement: Climate Change and Forests](#)). Climate smart forestry as a concept has the power to engage, educate, inspire, stimulate, and motivate foresters and society more broadly. It encourages the pursuit of forestry practices that can lead to more resilient forests and communities, and prevent more extreme climate change. However, climate smart forestry, like



all forestry practices, can result in trade-offs between forest goods, services, and values. While climate change is a defining issue of our generation, the Guild holds that forestry should holistically engage forests as complex ecological and social systems and as such avoid narrowly focusing on a single objective, be it timber production or climate. Responsible stewardship calls on us to take thoughtful actions that address other crises of our time, specifically unprecedented loss of biodiversity and the challenge of achieving more just and equitable futures. To this end the goals of climate smart forestry ought to be matched with the holistic acknowledgement of the diverse challenges facing forest management and the multiple responsibilities we have to forests and to future and current generations of people who benefit from them.

As members of the Forest Stewards Guild, we believe it is helpful to assess impacts of climate smart forestry adaptation, mitigation, and social dimensions using the metric of the [Guild's six principles](#). We believe that criteria and indicators of climate smart practices developed to certify climate-smart forest commodities or determine allocation of subsidies for climate smart forest practices are more likely to support socially just, economically equitable, and ecologically sound outcomes if they align with these principles.

In addition, we make the following specific recommendations for engaging in climate smart forestry projects and to guide the development and/or implementation of climate smart forestry criteria and indicators:

1. When parties with potentially different interests engage with each other over climate smart forestry all people involved clearly articulate their understanding of what climate smart forestry is and their priorities for the project.
2. Assessing the overall mitigation potential of a specific climate smart forestry project should consider as many factors as possible. System boundaries should be clearly defined and transparent. Whenever possible sensitive analysis should be conducted to understand the impact of different assumptions and stochastic factors should be considered.
3. We encourage practitioners of climate smart forestry to be mindful of the trade-offs associated with their practices and transparent about limitations of what climate smart forestry can achieve.
4. Climate smart forestry practices should be place specific. They should be sensitive to the local social context and be ecologically appropriate for the forest type where they are implemented.
5. In recognition of uncertain future conditions, we recommend that climate smart forestry practices include the goal of increasing forests' adaptive capacity, focus on guiding trajectories instead of dictating precise outcomes, and build in flexibility to learn and adapt to the unexpected.

As Guild members, our first duty is to forests and their future. Climate smart forestry aligns with this duty by emphasizing the need to help forests adapt to future conditions, mitigate climate change, and support social outcomes. However, some proposed climate smart forest practices may not always align with Guild principles, and when confronted with circumstances that threaten the integrity of the forest, members must respond through education, advocacy, or where necessary, disassociation. The Guild looks forward to providing opportunities for members and our colleagues to discuss and explore climate smart forestry both in the woods and online.

