

## **Green New Deal for Pacific Northwest Forests**

Our planet is in a climate emergency. For decades, scientists have been highlighting the need for immediate action on climate change as both national and global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase. Now, climate scientists warn that we have less than nine years to drastically reduce emissions before we face serious consequences (IPCC 2018). Simultaneously, as the climate crisis becomes more dire, long-festered social, racial, health, economic and environmental justice issues have come to the surface, revealing deep structural inequalities within our nation and resulting in acute civil unrest. It has become increasingly clear that these issues are fundamentally interconnected as disenfranchised and historically oppressed communities are impacted first and most severely by the effects of climate change. If we are to mitigate the climate crisis, we must do so in a way which addresses these systemic injustices plaguing our society.

The good news is that we have a powerful natural tool to help us stop the climate crisis and support a **just transition** to transform our society and address the systemic injustices at its core: the diverse forests of the Pacific Northwest (PNW). These forests play a vital role in our global climate system, and their protection is essential in the effort to curb the climate crisis. Forests of the PNW help stabilize the climate by sequestering and storing vast amounts of carbon on the landscape while also helping us adapt to the effects of climate change such as higher temperatures, floods, drought and longer wildfire seasons. They also can provide opportunities for employment and cultural use and access, remediating the impacts of a century of extraction. If we are to grapple with the unprecedented threat that climate change poses to our society, we must recognize that forest defense is community defense, and that by protecting our forested ecosystems, we also safeguard the diverse communities which rely on them.

This climate crisis is too big for just one solution. Every sector of our economy from housing and transportation to energy production and manufacturing will need to be transformed to reach urgent climate goals, reverse racial and economic inequalities, and provide for people and communities. As the Pacific Northwest is a landscape defined by forests; this document offers a vision for the region's forests and forest-reliant communities that will meet the pressing need to mitigate climate change, defend our communities against its worst impacts, and advance a just transition consistent with the framework of the national Green New Deal.

### **What is the Green New Deal?**

The Green New Deal (GND) is a platform that has emerged in recent years to address not only the climate crisis, but the many systemic injustices that plague our nation. The GND strives to utilize the best available science and technical know-how to transform all parts of our nation's economy to address the climate crisis, while protecting the natural environment upon which our

society depends. The GND is a plan to eliminate carbon emissions nationally, while addressing the social inequalities at the roots of our society.

House Resolution (HR) 109 details the overarching economic vision of a GND to combat the climate crisis:

“Whereas the House of Representatives recognizes that a new national, social, industrial, and economic mobilization on a scale not seen since World War II and the New Deal era is a historic opportunity— (1) to create millions of good, high-wage jobs in the United States; (2) to provide unprecedented levels of prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States; and (3) to counteract systemic injustices.”

## **The Role of Pacific Northwest Forests in the Green New Deal**

Achieving the bold objectives of the Green New Deal requires immediate action to better preserve and protect the forests of the Pacific Northwest. The language in HR 109 includes an objective to:

“secure for all people of the United States for generations to come—(i) clean air and water; (ii) climate and community resiliency; (iii) healthy food; (iv) access to nature; and (v) a sustainable environment...”

and provides solutions including:

“... (J) removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and reducing pollution by restoring natural ecosystems through proven low-tech solutions that increase soil carbon storage, such as land preservation and afforestation; (K) restoring and protecting threatened, endangered, and fragile ecosystems through locally appropriate and science-based projects that enhance biodiversity and support climate resiliency...;(L) ensuring that public lands...are protected and that eminent domain is not abused.”

Incredibly, the forests of the Pacific Northwest have the potential to take up and store as much if not more carbon per acre than any other forest in the world - including the Amazon rainforest (Law 2018, Keith 2009, Krankina 2014). Throughout the region, forests also provide clean air and water, food, habitat, cultural significance, and recreation opportunities, all while naturally removing carbon from the atmosphere. With more protections and broad reforms to forestry practices, these forests will not only be a powerful tool for combating climate change, but can also help this region to adapt to the worst effects of global temperature rise through protecting local freshwater resources and biodiversity, and increasing community resilience to wildfire.

To maximize the natural climate benefits of our forests we must keep them from being logged for the short-term profits of industry. Sadly, the forced removal and murder of the Indigenous peoples of this region who had lived sustainably with these lands since time immemorial, initiated a history of exploitation that has undermined the ability of our forest ecosystems to fully contribute to a climate solution. Since the colonization of the West, and increasingly since after WWII, both privately owned and public forests in the Pacific Northwest have been subject to massive **clearcut logging**, leaving less than 20% of forests unlogged — primarily on public lands (Stritholt et al. 2006). Corporate-owned lands, which make up a large percent of forested lands in the region, continue to be cut at an industrial scale, degrading ecosystem integrity, reducing the amount of carbon that they can store and generating significant carbon emissions through the use of heavy machinery, transport of logs, soil-carbon losses, and rapid decomposition or burning of residual woody debris. Since the 1990's, industrial logging on federal public lands in the PNW has mostly shifted away from clearcutting, to logging operations which leave some trees on the landscape. Even still, in Oregon, the timber industry remains the single largest source of gross carbon emissions, making up 35% of the state's annual carbon emissions while only generating 2% of the State's gross domestic product (GDP) (Law 2018, Oregon Global Warming Commission 2018, Oregon Office of Economic Analysis 2019). This is in stark contrast to the emergent eco-tourism industry in Oregon, which makes up over 6% of the State's GDP and employs approximately 5% of the work-force (Travel Oregon 2020).

Federal public lands, which make up roughly half of the region's forests, have the potential to draw down and store huge amounts of carbon — so long as they are protected from logging (Krankina et al. 2012, 2014). In fact, even the modest regulations put in place in the 1990s to curb logging on public lands, in an attempt to provide some protections to endangered species and water quality, have resulted in a transition from National Forests acting as a source of carbon pollution, due to unrestrained logging activities and their associated emissions, to instead allowing more acres of these public forestlands to more effectively mitigate the climate crisis by sequestering atmospheric carbon on to the landscape (Turner 2011, Krankina et al 2012). Yet even these limited protections are now in danger of being rolled back to increase logging, a result that would once again allow the timber industry to drastically reduce these forests' ability to sink and store atmospheric carbon long-term, further accelerating climate change.

It's not just public forestlands that must play a part in addressing the climate crisis. Reforming **industrial forestry** practices on state and private lands to store and sequester more carbon will benefit efforts to mitigate the climate crisis, and can benefit workers, communities and local economies by providing good union job opportunities in repairing past harms from logging, conservation, outdoor recreation, and education, while continuing to provide some timber resources. Green New Deal-funded forms of just ownership of private forestlands can also offer

economic opportunities for rural communities and small scale private landowners while meeting conservation and carbon storage goals.

A Green New Deal for our forests challenges the long-standing myth that pits jobs against forest ecosystems, a false dichotomy that has mired meaningful reform of industrial timber harvest practices and the protection of public lands for decades. Despite industry rhetoric, environmental protections to safeguard water quality and leave some trees standing on public lands are not to blame for reduced timber jobs and failing rural economies. Rather, corporate timber companies have maximized profit, reduced operating costs and minimized tax and regulatory burdens all at the expense of the rural communities of the PNW, the environment and our climate. New forestry techniques and machines have mechanized timber harvests and log processing while reducing the industry's workforce by over 80% (Oregon Office of Economic Analysis 2019). The remaining non-union contracted logging, hauling and replanting workforce has seen a drop in wages and a worsening of working conditions, while corporate timber companies celebrate record returns to investors. Of particular concern are the migrant workers who labor under exploitative and oppressive working conditions.

Yet, there is no reason why rural communities should have to choose between prioritizing forest ecosystems and having a robust economy. We can have both. In fact, the massive investment in a just transition that the GND envisions addresses both the urgent need to end rampant destructive forest practices and the need for guaranteed work with a liveable wage.

Shifting the way that forests are valued in order to most effectively contribute to the global effort to reduce greenhouse gases will require dramatic changes. Thankfully, there are opportunities on federal, state and private forestlands to transition the forest sector from one of exploitation and commodity production to one that supports long-term ecosystem stability, carbon storage and rural economic prosperity.

### **Vision for a Just Transition**

If done right, a Green New Deal will simultaneously mitigate the climate crisis, transform our national (and global) economy, address issues of social, racial, economic and environmental injustice, protect natural ecosystems, and create millions of good paying union jobs. To do this, we must demand a bold vision from leaders at both a community and national level; a willingness to truly reimagine all aspects of our economy to create a society based on principles of solidarity and ecology instead of competition and extraction. We believe that the vast forested lands that define the very character of the Pacific Northwest must play an integral role at the heart of this process.

We envision a future in which forests are valued both as ecological communities and for the countless benefits which they provide to society. We envision a future in which corporate timber lands are transformed to prioritize people, biodiversity, clean water and carbon storage instead of short term profit. We envision public lands set aside for their myriad social and ecological benefits, including sequestering carbon, providing wildlife habitat, filtering drinking water, protecting communities both present and future and where long-term ecosystem function is prioritized above cutting and selling timber. We envision a future where the past harms and injustices done to disenfranchised communities are remediated, and the voices of frontline communities are uplifted. We share a vision of rural communities freed from the boom-and-bust economy of Big Timber, and instead empowered to chart their own, more prosperous future beyond timber production.

With a concerted shift away from industrial forestry on state and private land, as well as the remediation of harms from past logging on federal lands, Pacific Northwest forests can become a leader in drawing carbon out of the atmosphere and mitigating the worst impacts of climate change.

## **The Pillars of Green New Deal for Pacific Northwest Forest**

The pillars listed below provide the foundation on which a Green New Deal regarding Pacific Northwest forests must be built.

### **PILLAR 1: Realize the Potential of Pacific Northwest's Forests as a Climate Solution**

To meet the scale of the current climate challenge, we must take bold action to protect our forests and transform the extractive economy that threatens our collective future. The Green New Deal for Pacific Northwest Forests is a set of concrete actions that align with a national policy that will move us quickly towards urgent, science-based climate goals. We must:

1. Transition private and state land forest-use away from corporate industrial forestry practices and toward practices that sequester and store more carbon. This includes implementing new directives and incentives for landowners to practice proforestation (letting forests grow longer), conserve older and unlogged forests for **climate mitigation** and long-term adaptation, as well as meaningful protections for forests that serve key roles for community drinking water, habitat, connectivity corridors, and wildfire defense.
2. Protect federal forests for long-term ecosystem benefits. This requires an immediate shift away from logging and removing carbon from our forests and toward their conservation as essential to maintain clean air and drinking water, flood protection, biodiversity, habitat, and recreation as well as long-term carbon storage and sequestration.

3. Decouple the logging of public lands from funding public services. To ensure that counties are not incentivized to degrade or destroy ecosystem benefits, including the climate benefits conveyed by intact forests, rural county funding should not be tied to how much revenue is generated by timber sales on public lands.

### **PILLAR 2: Transform Industrial Forestry Practices On Private Lands**

The Green New Deal for Pacific Northwest Forests is part of a national mobilization toward a socially just and ecologically-sound society by creating new models of just management of private forestlands, climate-centered regulations, and fair taxation on timber corporations at a large scale. We must:

1. End federal, state and local subsidies and tax breaks for private land industrial forestry practices, woody biomass activities and facilities and corporate timber firms, and instead invest in rural education, infrastructure and non-timber industry jobs programs.
2. Through a robust GND investment in PNW forests, corporate timber properties can be purchased and transitioned into carbon reserves, community drinking water and flood protection districts, and **cooperative forest ownership** enterprises for public benefit and recreation. Key to this is creating a tax, regulatory, and incentive structure that allows forest landowners to retire their land from timber production or to pursue forestry practices that are less damaging to the environment and climate while supporting and strengthening their families and communities.

### **PILLAR 3: Empower Frontline and Historically Marginalized Communities**

A Green New Deal for Pacific Northwest Forests must advance social, economic and environmental justice for **frontline and vulnerable communities**. The burden of our transition from industrial timber economies must not fall on the shoulders of historically disenfranchised communities or working families, who are already exploited by extractive industry and have the most to lose in the face of unmitigated climate chaos. We must:

1. Reform state forest practices, laws and regulations to establish clear, transparent and accessible systems for public participation in private lands logging with an eye toward ensuring that those who are most impacted by logging proposals are directly notified of plans and given increased influence in the decision making processes.
2. Ensuring frontline communities such as Tribes, migrants, and rural communities have stronger legal protections, economic opportunities, safe working conditions and community services independent of logging activity or revenue.

3. Ensure that Indigenous sacred and cultural sites on federal public lands are fully protected and accessible to Indigenous people for cultural practices
4. Support the sovereign government to government relationships between the federal government and Tribal nations by upholding existing treaties which require Free, Prior and Informed Consent on traditional lands, the implementation of **traditional ecological knowledge**, and the commitment to formal Tribal consultation.
5. Create strong legal protections for the rights of timber and other forest workers and unions that guard against exploitative and dangerous working conditions perpetuated by timber corporations.

#### **PILLAR 4: Raise the Standard of Living for Forest-Dependent and Rural Communities**

The Green New Deal for Pacific Northwest Forests must transform and revitalize communities and economies currently based on the extractive timber industry. Integral to the heart of a Green New Deal for Pacific Northwest Forests is the commitment to raising the standard of living for forest workers and lifting communities who currently rely on the timber industry towards more resilient and diversified economies, greater economic prosperity and ecological security. We must:

1. Guarantee a decent union job for all those who seek one, as communities transition beyond the timber economy. This federal jobs guarantee will prioritize the employment of local community members for local jobs, and exclusively offer positions to decarbonize our economy, remediate harm to our natural ecosystems from past logging, increase community resilience to climate change and bolster recreation opportunities. Areas of employment could include:
  - a. Outdoor education and interpretive services
  - b. Research and data collection
  - c. Reestablishing natural forest diversity and function in areas harmed by recent logging
  - d. Non-toxic eradication of invasive species
  - e. Low-impact recreation infrastructure improvement
  - f. Road decommissioning and culvert repair
  - g. Rehabilitation of riparian, stream and floodplain habitat, structure, and function
  - h. Utilizing ecological fire management to restore natural fire regimes in appropriate areas

2. Create mass job retraining programs to transition timber industry employees into new careers while also supporting opportunities for additional education in order to ensure that displaced workers are not left behind as we transition to a 21st century decarbonized economy.

### **PILLAR 5: Invest in Our Communities**

Central to the Green New Deal is investing in communities and workers to provide for a just transition to a more just and sustainable society. From providing secure living wage jobs to protecting freshwater resources and creating fire safe communities, investments in the Green New Deal will benefit Pacific Northwest communities by making them more resilient and better equipped to adapt to the increased risks posed by climate change. We must:

1. Redirect state and federal money currently used to subsidize the cutting and removal of trees into protecting forest ecosystems and creating jobs that will assist in the remediation of harms from past logging. This will ensure that forests are given the best chance to be able to adapt to our changing climate and are able to provide clean water, clean air, habitat for native plant and animal biodiversity, and recreation opportunities, as well as carbon storage and sequestration.
2. Allocate public funds toward jobs in climate adaptation and defense such as:
  - a. Helping communities plan and prepare for wildfire through the creation and maintenance of defensible space around homes and infrastructure;
  - b. Retrofitting homes with fire proof materials (**home hardening**) to protect communities from wildfire;
  - c. Burying highly flammable infrastructure including power transmission lines to mitigate the risk of wildfire ignitions in at risk areas;
  - d. Creating smoke shelters to safeguard high risk populations during wildfire seasons; and
  - e. Implementing zoning to limit ex-urban sprawl into fire-adapted ecosystems.
3. Invest heavily in the rural infrastructure desperately needed throughout the region, some examples include but are not limited to:
  - a. Broadband
  - b. Drinking water source protection and enhanced water treatment and filtration
  - c. Road maintenance and repair
  - d. Public education
  - e. Community and roof top solar development
  - f. Support for local businesses

## **PILLAR 6: Act on the Best Available Science**

The Green New Deal for Pacific Northwest Forests invests in and utilizes the best available independent science to guide the defense of public forest lands, and the reformation of private land logging practices and ownership models in order to maximize ecosystem benefits for forests and communities. The GND focuses on the known natural solution to climate change—storing more carbon in forest ecosystems. We must:

1. Invest in synthesizing and establishing the best available forest carbon field-based data that can support immediate adoption of new regulations for private and state lands and ensure forests can meet their potential for **carbon sequestration and storage**, and climate mitigation.
2. Invest in jobs and comprehensive studies which include on-the-ground survey teams to monitor changes in forest ecosystems across multiple variables so we can better understand the role our forests are playing in global climate mitigation, and how they are adapting to climate change over time.
3. Honor traditional ecological knowledge and lessons that indigenous communities acquired since time immemorial through direct contact and relationship with ecological systems.
4. Explicitly reject the false solutions peddled by extractive industry, including
  - a. Unchecked logging and processing of trees for wood products
  - b. The use of biomass energy generation especially with the addition of the theoretical and extremely harmful concept of Bioenergy Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS)
  - c. The utilization of forests to create engineered wood products like cross-laminated timber (CLT)
  - d. Other strategies based on the unsustainable exploitation of forests

## **Conclusion**

In the face of the ongoing climate crisis, it is imperative that we not only work to reduce our carbon emissions in the Pacific Northwest, and nationally, but to utilize all resources available to increase our ability to sequester and store carbon while centering a just transition for frontline communities and workers currently employed in or impacted by the industrial timber industry. The region will not meet the bold emissions reduction goals necessary without first protecting forests and better managing its private timber lands, nor will it successfully address the economic and racial injustices without heavily investing in communities most heavily impacted by

extractive industry and the climate crisis. We can no longer afford to allow our forests and communities to be sacrificed for corporate greed or false solutions that threaten the health of future generations.

We do not have to wait for any new technological advances or large scale investments in facilities to do this — the means by which to draw down significant amounts of carbon already exist in our nation’s forested lands. The pathway for investing in good jobs to build a just and vibrant rural communities and economies in the PNW is clearly laid out through the GND’s just transition mandate. Through reimagining our relationship with forests across the Pacific Northwest, we can not only mitigate the climate crisis but also build a future for our region based on economic, racial and environmental justice.

By joining the call for a Green New Deal, the undersigned groups choose to frame how we value forests and seek climate and community solutions in the broad intersectional movement calling for justice, a transition from a carbon-based timber economy and the bold vision for a livable future.

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## Glossary of Terms

- **Carbon sequestration and storage:** Carbon sequestration refers to the process of removing carbon from the atmosphere, while carbon storage refers to the amount of carbon stored for a period of time.
- **Climate adaptation:** To ensure resiliency, resource availability and long-term ecosystem stability in the face of climate change.
- **Climate mitigation:** To lessen the future intensity of climate change through the sequestration and long-term storage of carbon.
- **Clearcut logging/Clearcutting:** When all or nearly all trees are removed from a forest stand in a single operation. The Society of American Foresters defines “clearcut” as “1. a stand in which essentially all trees have been removed in one operation...” Terms used by land managers such as “regeneration harvest” can also refer to clearcut practices.
- **Cooperative forest ownership:** Cooperative forest ownership is a descriptor for formal forestland ownership arrangements that fall under a number of equity models such as joint ownership or formal worker co-op ownership. Cooperative forest ownership is similar to community forest ownership but allows for more diverse models of collective forest ownership. Cooperative ownership can be based in many different organizational

structures: nonprofit, municipal, public utility or traditional worker owned co-op. Unique to a Green New Deal financed transition in forestland ownership, similar to the regular use of conservation easements, there would be specific limitations and requirements for the forestlands to meet carbon buildup, jobs and conservation goals.

- **Frontline and vulnerable communities (as defined by House Resolution 109):** Indigenous peoples, communities of color, migrant communities, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, the poor, low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth.
- **High priority forests:** Forests that are priority for protection due to their significance for climate mitigation and/or adaptation. Forests significant to climate mitigation are either significant carbon sinks currently or have the potential to store vast amounts of carbon. Forests that are significant for their climate adaptability can be prioritized for their role in ensuring community water supplies, habitat and safeguarding against climate threats such as wildfire.
- **Home hardening:** Taking practical measures to ensure a wildfire-safe home. Such measures often include reducing flammable vegetation around the home (also known as creating defensible space), and using fire-proof construction materials.
- **Industrial forestry/ timber production:** This refers to the standard forestry practices utilized on privately-owned forest land and some state-owned and federal land wherein trees are clearcut, replanted, often sprayed with herbicides, and then clearcut again when the trees have reached a merchantable size.
- **Just transition:** A transition away from an extractive to a regenerative economy that centers and uplifts those most impacted by redressing past harms. A just transition seeks more than remedial action but a righting of power imbalance, and a fundamental re-structuring of the systems that have produced economic inequality, racial oppression, ecological destruction and climate chaos<sup>1</sup>.
- **Traditional ecological knowledge:** refers to the evolving knowledge acquired by Indigenous and local peoples over hundreds or thousands of years through direct contact with the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Inspired by Climate Justice Alliance: <https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition/>