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Carbon Markets and Forest Management Incentives For Washington’s Small Family Forest Owners

In 2023, the nonprofit Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA) celebrates its 70th year supporting the stewardship of small family forest owners. This anniversary is especially significant as we are partnering on one of the most important projects in our history—to cultivate a viable future for the communities and ecosystems we care about.



Two years ago, the Washington state legislature passed the [Climate Commitment Act \(SB5126\)](#) establishing an initiative that incentivizes and funds carbon reductions in Washington. The Act recognizes that prevention of forest loss, changes to forest management practices, reforestation or afforesting areas without forest cover, and wise use of harvested wood products are all crucial in mitigating climate change.

The legislation calls for recommendations to encourage the voluntary participation of interested small forest owners in markets that pay for storing carbon; and, in management techniques that improve carbon storage—which in turn benefit forest health and fire hazard reduction.

WFFA was awarded a contract from the Department of Natural Resources in 2022 to develop these recommendations with a work group of small family forest owners and technical experts, and in partnership with the Washington Tree Farm Program and the American Forest Foundation. A final report is due to the legislature in June of 2024. Once implemented, this landmark effort will reward tree farmers who wish to receive payments in exchange for ecosystem services provided to the state, the region, and the world.

Work group responsibilities include:

- understanding the needs—and possible barriers to participation—of Washington’s small woodland owners in additional carbon storage;
- evaluating existing and potential carbon markets;

- coordinating with managers of state and federal forests, which link to the larger forest ecosystem and economy;
- gathering substantive input from underserved community members as part of environmental justice considerations;
- developing cost-effective remote sensing tools to inventory carbon stocks;
- tracking carbon from the tree farm to the marketplace in order to quantify real outcomes created by carbon storage.

The 218,000 small forest landowners in Washington account for about 15% of the state’s forests—nearly 3 million acres—and produce roughly 15% of the harvested wood products in Washington. Success of WFFA’s comprehensive approach depends on listening closely to our small woodland owners across the state, and to all of those who care about the health of our forests, communities, and economy.

We are eager for your input, and there are numerous ways to participate—as advisers, through surveys and focus groups, and in creative conversations with members of our work group. Please join our mailing list to stay informed about opportunities as the program develops. To join our list, or for additional information, reach out to Elaine Oneil, executive director of WFFA: eoneil@wafarmforestry.com.

