CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

STATE CAPITOL
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
95814

September 18, 2009

Mary Nichols, Chair
California Air Resources Board
1001 I Street
P.O. Box 2815
Sacramento, CA 95812

Re: Forest Project Protocols

Dear Ms. Nichols:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the Forest Project Protocols (version 3.0), which measure and monitor forest projects that sequester greenhouse gases (GHGs), approved by the Climate Action Reserve (CAR) on September 1, 2009. In particular, we question the provision that appears to allow even-age management, including clearcutting, as an allowable harvesting technique eligible for carbon credits.

We urge you to delete this provision or postpone your anticipated September action to allow your staff more time to thoughtfully examine what we consider to be a serious flaw in the proposed protocols. Since the clearcutting provision was only made public on June 22, 2009, we are concerned that it did not receive the same stakeholder or public scrutiny as the other elements of the protocol.

Even-age management is not currently recognized or allowed by the existing protocols (version 2.1). The proposed protocols permit clearcutting in stands up to 40 acres in size and allow more spatially expansive clearcutting on a watershed scale. However, peer-reviewed studies have shown that clearcutting removes <u>more carbon from forests than any other disturbance, including fire</u>, and generally results in a net release of carbon into the atmosphere.

The intensity of clearcutting, the disturbance to carbon-storing soils and biomass, and the decomposition of dead biomass all release carbon at levels far greater than less-intensive harvesting. If ARB decides to retain even-age management within the protocols, we ask that they properly account for all of these associated emissions since, according to some estimates, they comprise a greater proportion of emissions than from the harvesting of

trees alone. With limited exceptions, quantifying these emissions remains optional under the proposed protocols before you.

We believe even-age management is inconsistent with the objectives of "Natural Forest Management," as defined in the proposed protocol. The proposed protocols require all "Forest Projects [to] promote and maintain a diversity of native species and utilize management practices that promote and maintain native forests comprised of multiple ages and mixed native species at multiple landscape scales." (Sec. 3.9.2). To the contrary, even-age management or clearcutting typically results in a near-monoculture of tree species and age classes that have few, if any, of the "co-benefits" (e.g., biodiversity, fish and wildlife habitat, water storage, soil stability) associated with other forms of conservation-based harvesting authorized by the existing protocols.

The October 2007 ARB staff report supporting the adoption of the current protocols states, "Criteria embedded within protocols should maintain carbon benefits of forests without losing ecosystem and other benefits." The report further states that, "Managing forests for multiple benefits fits into the larger framework of managing for climate change mitigation and adaptation in which forests, and forest protocols, can play an important role." We ask that you maintain these objectives when considering the proposed protocols before you.

Our forests have already been impacted by climate change. We have experienced more frequent and devastating wildfires and increased infestation by insects and diseases. A 2006 study by scientists at U.C. Berkeley predicted that the state's forests will become less productive, and thus, more susceptible to a number of risk factors, including fire and disease, under varying climate change scenarios. Even-aged plantation forests are most at risk to these factors. As a climate-adaptive strategy, the study found that forests with a diverse mixture of species and ages are best suited to withstand such risks. We question whether it is appropriate to grant carbon credits to a management practice that increases carbon emissions and exacerbates the climate impacts that the protocols seek to mitigate.

We acknowledge the important contribution of our state's forests to the economy and the environment and the valuable jobs they provide. Given the critical role our forests play in sequestering carbon emissions, we fully support the voluntary efforts of landowners to manage their forests in ways that optimize sequestration. To this end, we ask that you delay adoption of the even-age management provision until your staff can determine that it does not conflict with the objective of "maintaining carbon benefits of forests without losing ecosystem and other benefits," articulated by your staff.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nancy Skinner
Assemblymember, 14th District

Jerry Hill
Assemblymember, 19th District

Tom Ammiano
Assemblymember, 13th District

Dave Jones
Assemblymember, 9th District

Julia Brownley
Assemblymember, 41st District

William Monning
Assemblymember, 27th District