29 October 2018

Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.

State Capital, Suite 1173

Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Support for the California Tropical Forest Standard**

Dear Governor Brown,

As researchers who, for many years, have been analyzing policies and programs to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and promote conservation, sustainable management and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+), we write to express our support for inclusion of the California Tropical Forest Standard in the state’s regulatory cap-and-trade program.

Tropical deforestation and land use change are leading contributors to global carbon emissions, second only to fossil fuels, and tropical forests serve as important natural sinks for removing CO2 from the atmosphere.[[1]](#footnote-1) Tropical forests also harbor significant biodiversity, and support the well-being of millions of people who directly depend on forests for their livelihoods.[[2]](#footnote-2) Reducing deforestation is therefore a key strategy in climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development.

The California Tropical Forest Standard applies to subnational jurisdictions that are implementing jurisdiction-wide, sector-based crediting programs for REDD+. The potential benefits derived from this standard would support the efforts of subnational jurisdictions across the tropics, such as the state of Acre in Brazil, which have made impressive progress towards jurisdictional sustainability.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Acre was the site of a renowned grassroots social movement to protect forests from encroaching cattle ranchers in the 1970s and 80s, and its state government has focused on sustainable forest use and management since the late 1990s.[[4]](#footnote-4) The state is one of the most advanced jurisdictions globally in developing and implementing state-wide policies, programs, and market opportunities designed to conserve tropical forests and promote sustainable development.[[5]](#footnote-5) Acre’s State System of Incentives for Environmental Services (SISA) includes robust monitoring, strong multi-stakeholder engagement, and social and environmental safeguards that were created through a participatory process.[[6]](#footnote-6) Acre is a founding member of the world’s largest network of tropical forest states and provinces, the Governors’ Climate and Forests (GCF) Task Force, and was involved in the REDD+ Offsets Working group that led to the development of the California Tropical Forest Standard.

So, have interventions implemented under the umbrella of SISA led to positive outcomes? Since 2010, through its Global Comparative Study on REDD+[[7]](#footnote-7), the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) has analyzed the impacts of early REDD+ initiatives on forests and people at 22 sites across the tropics, including Acre. Acre’s jurisdictional REDD+ program through SISA includes a unique benefit-sharing arrangement for all stakeholders in the state. CIFOR’s work in Acre has focused on 240 rural families, including both colonist farmers and traditional forest extractivists, who reside along the BR-364 highway in an area targeted by SISA interventions early on. We assessed these smallholders’ land use and livelihoods in 2010, and again in 2013, comparing families who had participated in SISA interventions to varying degrees.

Interventions in this area included: incentives to decrease the clearing and burning of forests, including a cash bonus, and the use of nitrogen-fixing cover crops to improve crop yields; support for forest-based livelihoods over livestock-based ones; and efforts to secure land tenure. Between 2010 and 2013, households in the study area increased their average household incomes and assets. These improvements came from statistically significant increases (*P* < 0.05) in environmental income (e.g. from forest products), crop income, and wages earned. During the same time period, average household income from livestock decreased significantly (*P* < 0.05). Households that began using cover crops or that received land titles were most likely to decrease their reliance on livestock, while still improving their overall economic well-being.

Rural producers in this area also gained access to new income-generating opportunities, including aquaculture and commercialization of non-timber forest products. Acre’s government assisted these producers by providing training opportunities, materials and resources to initiate production, and by helping to establish infrastructure necessary to support forest product value chains. From 2010 to 2013, households in the study area significantly diversified their livelihood portfolios (*P* < 0.05), especially those that received a cash bonus to engage in more sustainable land use practices.

Our analyses therefore suggest that rural livelihoods improved in terms of income, assets and diversification in an area targeted by interventions under the SISA umbrella. These findings offer initial evidence that a jurisdictional program to promote forest conservation and low emissions development pathways can positively benefit rural producers. We believe the institutional investments made by Acre through SISA are important enough to continue to assess its impacts over time. We will soon conduct a third round of data collection with the same rural producers, which will provide a fuller picture of the longer-term impacts of SISA in this area.

The state of Acre represents a laboratory for experimental governance, and for the development of best practices to reconcile environmental and development goals. Other subnational jurisdictions across the tropics are closely observing Acre’s progress, successes, and challenges, and are poised to learn from its example. As such, the approval of the California Tropical Forest Standard – and a flow of benefits to support efforts for sustainable development on the ground – will serve as a needed trigger to continue to motivate action by subnational governments across the tropics, especially during these times of national political upheaval.

Thank you for your continued leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Amy Duchelle, Senior Scientist, Center for International Forestry Research, Indonesia

Anne Larson, Principal Scientist, Center for International Forestry Research, Peru

Arild Angelsen, Professor, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway

Christopher Martius, Principal Scientist, Center for International Forestry Research, Indonesia

Erin Sills, Professor, North Carolina State University, USA

Jan Börner, Professor, University of Bonn, Germany

Peter Newton, Assistant Professor, University of Colorado Boulder, USA

Rayna Benzeev, PhD Student, University of Colorado Boulder, USA

Sven Wunder, Principal Economist, European Forest Institute, Spain

William Sunderlin, Senior Associate, Center for International Forestry Research, Indonesia

1. Griscom et al. 2017. <http://www.pnas.org/content/114/44/11645> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Angelsen et al. 2014. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X14000722> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Stickler et al. 2018. <https://earthinnovation.org/state-of-jurisdictional-sustainability/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Schmink et al. 2014. <https://www.cifor.org/library/5093/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Leal et al. 2018. <https://earthinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/profiles_led/SJS_Profiles_ENG/Brazil/Profile_ACRE_Leal_2018_ENG.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://redd-standards.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5&Itemid=111> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.cifor.org/gcs/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)