



December 15, 2014

Members of the California Air Resources Board,

Ecological Carbon Offset Partners (ecoPartners) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the cap-and-trade forest protocol. While ecoPartners welcomes the majority of the proposed changes to the Compliance Offset Protocol for U.S. Forest Projects, we would like to comment on the following proposed changes:

- The adjustments to the classification of high and low site class for determining common practice lack clarity. Item (d) in Appendix F uses the terms “site class productivity class” and “basal area growth” to define high and low site classes, yet does not cite or define these terms. Item (e) contradicts itself, providing four options for determining site class (soils data from federal agency, direct site class data from state or federal agency, attestation of state forester, or field analysis), and in the subsequent sentence requiring the Offset Project Operator (OPO) to demonstrate field analysis to determine high and low site class. Please clarify how site class is to be determined by the OPO.
- The Common Practice Values in the updated assessment area data file vary greatly from those in the previous version, some demonstrating higher growth than expected over a short time period. For transparency, please include standard error estimates for all Common Practice Values in the assessment area data file.
- The requirements for projects that practice even-aged management are inconsistent with forest practices in many areas around the country. The definition of open canopy harvest units as a harvest area of 3 acres or greater that have less than 50 square feet of basal area retention is not accurate for many forests. In some areas of the country, in particular the Southeast, typical uneven-aged silviculture regimes result in basal area retention of less than 50 square feet per acre. Additionally, the proposed spatial and temporal buffer requirements for harvests lack clarity and necessitate more discussion to ensure a thorough understanding of potential management impacts. Please remove these requirements from the protocol or provide rationale for their inclusion and conduct further stakeholder review.
- The modification to the minimum baseline level (MBL) calculation of the for improved forest management (IFM) projects where initial carbon stocks are above common practice is detrimental to the interests of the OPO and the ARB. Using the modified equation for MBL now requires that the weighted carbon stocks (WCS) be calculated for all forest projects, for those that are below common practice and now likewise for those that are above common practice. The calculation of WCS is complicated and expensive; it requires an inventory of all OPO or affiliate owned forests or a high intensity stratified vegetation-type analysis. These further analyses, in addition to the associated increase in verification intensity, escalate the costs of

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project development and discourage forest owners from participating in the program. Please consider removing this amendment as the protocol already requires “sustainable and long-term harvest practices” be maintained on all forestland holdings controlled by the Forest Owner.

- Please clarify in section 3.5 that an intentional reversal that has been compensated for per section 95983 of the Regulation does not result in the termination of a project.
- Please define “forest ownership” as used in section 3.1.b.1.C.
- Additionally in section 3.1.b.1.C, please include a new set of qualifications for ownerships less than 200 acres, as the current qualifications preclude these small ownerships from practicing forest management. For example, a 200 acre forest ownership harvesting 40 acres would likely fall below 20% less than the carbon stocks at project initiation while a 1,000 acre forest ownership harvesting 40 acres would likely be unaffected. As written, the current qualifications in this section unfairly penalize small landowners with fewer than 200 acres.
- Please clarify timelines for compliance with proposed amendments. A number of the proposed changes (updated assessment area data file, revised equations, etc.) are extremely important in project development and the determination of project feasibility. As project development can exceed a year (inventory data collection often takes months and may be dependent on season), a clear timeline on the proposed changes would be helpful to developers, consultants, and interested forestland owners.

ecoPartners thanks you for the opportunity to comment on these proposed changes and we look forward to continuing to work with the California Air Resources Board.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Holland", is positioned above the name of the signatory.

Kyle Holland, Managing Director