

September 17, 2008

GYF Activity Summary for Chris Henschel

Policy Issue

My policy issue is the inclusion of emissions from lands and forests within the new global climate change agreement being negotiated through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The specific policy question I identified at the outset of my fellowship was whether rules could be developed under the UNFCCC to encourage forest protection as part of climate change response strategies. During my fellowship my goal has become to successfully promote the inclusion of the forestry and land use sectors into the new global agreement in a way that supports the broader goal of avoiding dangerous climate change and supports biodiversity protection.

Carbon emissions and sequestration (removals) from lands and forests are relevant to commitments under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce emissions. Because measuring full carbon fluxes from lands and forests is very difficult, the Kyoto Protocol instead takes the approach of measuring and reporting emissions and removals from certain activities:

- Deforestation, afforestation, reforestation
- Forest management
- Cropland management
- Grazing land management
- Revegetation

Countries are only required to include emissions/removals from deforestation, afforestation and reforestation in assessing Kyoto compliance. Inclusion of emissions/removals from the other activities is voluntary.

Which activities are included, whether activities will remain voluntary, and which new activities to add are among a number of issues currently being negotiated for the new global climate change agreement that will take effect post-2012.

Ensuring that the inclusion of emissions and removals from lands and forests supports the broader goal of avoiding dangerous climate change requires that decreases in emissions from this sector are real, mandatory and complementary to deep reductions required in other sectors. Ensuring that rules support biodiversity protection requires that countries are held accountable for emissions from the degradation of forests and wetlands.

Activities

- Participation in the planning and implementation of a national meeting of Canadian conservation and climate change NGOs on the topic of forest carbon and climate change.
- Co-authorship of an ENGO background paper on forest carbon and climate change.
- Coordination and facilitation of an international meeting of leading researchers on the topic of land use, land-use change, forestry and the Kyoto Protocol

- Co-authorship of an academic paper on options for changing the rules for land use, land-use change and forestry within the new global climate change agreement.
- Founding and co-chairing a new working group of Climate Action Network International on new rules for land use, land-use change and forestry.
- Leading the development of CAN Principles for Parties to the UNFCCC on the topic of land use, land use change and forestry rules.
- Leading the development of a CAN discussion paper on policy options for rules governing land use, land use change and forestry under the new global climate change agreement.
- Attendance at all United Nations Climate Change meetings since August 2007 and promotion of policy options with the government of Canada and countries including Brazil, the European Union, New Zealand and Norway.
- Presentation of policy options at side events at UN meetings in Germany and Ghana.
- Creation of a forests and climate change blog.
- Conducting interviews to support a strategic inquiry aimed at influencing the Government of Canada's position in the negotiations.

Key findings

- There are policy options that could support the twin objectives of limiting dangerous climate change and supporting the protection of biodiversity.
- Major forest nations are resisting these policy options.
- There is a tension within the environmental community between those who want to change rules to achieve conservation outcomes and promote climate change mitigation in this sector and those who are cautiously protecting the integrity of the broader Kyoto Protocol.
- A consensus is achievable within the environmental community
- Achieving a good outcome within negotiations is less certain.

Next steps

- Development of firm policy proposals from Climate Action Network International
- Completion of a strategic inquiry into influencing Canada's public policy on this issue.
- Promotion of policy options with the Government of Canada and within the international negotiations.
- Developing a communications plan for supporting this policy and advocacy work.