



# Fighting Climate Change & Protecting Forests

Global Youth Fellowship Final Report  
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## Introduction

The focus of my fellowship was 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 the fellowship, my goal became to change the treatment of land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) within the Kyoto Protocol in a way that both helps to avoid dangerous climate change and supports biodiversity protection.

Lands and forests accumulate and store large amounts of carbon over time, and remove carbon from the atmosphere as photosynthesis converts carbon dioxide to plant materials. Lands and forests can also emit carbon back to the atmosphere as plants die or forests and other ecosystems are disturbed by human activity or natural causes, such as wild fires. Emissions and removals from land use, land-use change and forestry form part of the overall accounting that industrialized nations must undertake to demonstrate their compliance with emission reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

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

Only accounting of emissions/removals from deforestation, afforestation and reforestation is mandatory in assessing Kyoto compliance. Accounting for emissions/removals from all the other activities is voluntary. Forest management is the most important of these voluntary activities because the carbon fluxes are large. Roughly half of countries with Kyoto commitments have chosen to account for forest management, compared to relatively few electing to account for the other activities. Proper accounting of emissions and removals from LULUCF is significant, especially for Canada. As of 2005, Canada's emissions had increased 25.3% from 1990 excluding LULUCF, and 54.2% including it. But Canada's performance cannot be clearly judged based on this number: the current set of rules is flawed and needs to be fixed before such estimates can be taken as a reflection of compliance with Kyoto commitments.

Accounting for the emissions/removals of these activities follows complex rules. These rules are now being re-considered as part of the two-year negotiation for a new global climate change agreement under the UNFCCC.

During the course of my fellowship, I have researched these accounting rules and explored and promoted policy options that achieve my twin goals of helping to avoid dangerous climate change and supporting biodiversity protection.



Making a presentation on forest degradation in Bonn, Germany



Chairing a meeting of international researchers in Graz, Austria



Attending the Accra Climate Change Talks to present approaches to countries participating in the talks.

## Activities

The first focus of my fellowship project was to educate myself on the topic area, identify the landscape of issues and explore policy options. I committed myself to tasks that would force me to learn quickly. For example, I helped to organize a large meeting of conservation and climate change NGOs on the topic of forests and climate change and lead the authorship of the meeting's background paper ([www.forestsandclimate.org/background.pdf](http://www.forestsandclimate.org/background.pdf)). I also decided to integrate my fellowship project with my work responsibilities at the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS). Because CPAWS had never worked on international policy or on climate change, I had to first gain approval from the Board of Trustees. I supported my case to the Board with a background paper and a proposed CPAWS position on climate change, which was passed and can now be found at [www.cpaaws.org/programs/climate/position.php](http://www.cpaaws.org/programs/climate/position.php).

Reasoning that one individual or Canadian organization alone would be ineffective at promoting global policy change, I engaged with two influential networks. I reached out to the International Climate Action Network, a network of over 400 environmental and social organizations working on climate change and eventually became the co-chair of the working group dealing with issues of forestry and land use within the UN climate change negotiations. I started the group's work on the rules under the Kyoto Protocol and have been coordinating this work since last August. In this role, I authored four internal discussion papers to form the basis of our substantive policy work. The group has become quite productive, creating a document of principles for country negotiators this past June and a substantive discussion document on policy options in August. The discussion paper was considered a meaningful contribution to the negotiations by the UN Climate Change Secretariat and several parties to the Convention, including the European Union.

I also approached leaders within the international research community by organizing and facilitating a workshop of experts on policy options for the new climate change agreement. This workshop led to the publication of a working paper that was received with significant interest at recent climate change talks in Accra, Ghana.

As the co-chair of the CAN working group on forestry and land use, I have attended all formal UN climate change meetings since last August, as well as one informal meeting of negotiators. At these meetings I worked with CAN members to develop consensus positions, make several formal presentations at official events and promote our views with the delegations of several countries participating in the talks.

To build greater knowledge about this issue, I recently began a forests and climate change blog ([climateforests.blogspot.com](http://climateforests.blogspot.com)). The blog is aimed at a specialized audience of activists, governments, experts and media.

I have created an extensive network of ENGO contacts across Canada and around the World and have established a working relationship with researchers in this area. I have regular contact with Government of Canada staff working on this file and have met with the Forest Products Association of Canada, Canada's Climate Change Ambassador and the Federal Environment Minister. I have had formal and informal meetings with several government delegations including Australia, Brazil, Canada, European Union, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Tuvalu, and Switzerland.

# Challenges

My greatest initial challenge was becoming more familiar with the topic. I largely overcame this challenge by taking on tasks that stretched my understanding and forced my learning, such as drafting background papers and coordinating meetings of experts.

There have been two significant challenges to my work. The first has been moving from broad positions to detailed policy proposals within the international environmental community; the second has been gaining a policy audience with governments. More substantive policy proposals have now begun to flow from the environmental community as trust has been built, familiarity with the issues has increased and the Convention negotiations on this topic have intensified. My attendance at all of the formal and informal international meetings has allowed me to develop relationships and trust with environmental and governmental representatives alike. With the development of more coherent and interesting policy ideas has also come greater interest from government delegations.

Thoughtful analysis, respectful dialogue and a search for constructive compromise between interests have helped overcome both of these challenges.

# Personal Learning

I have learned an immense amount about the topic area as well as about the process and politics of international treaty negotiations. I have met all of my desired personal outcomes including the development of a network of contacts within the environmental community and government.

I have acquired a relatively clear sense of the interests driving positions of environmental groups and countries. While I am confident that a resolution can be found within the environmental community, a positive outcome to the negotiations is much less certain and depends in part on larger political issues.

My experiences have also reinforced two insights for me: First, legitimacy can be earned simply by taking the initiative on a task that is being neglected. Second, a slow, incremental process is an effective way to bring people along, assuage fears and build confidence.

# Policy Learning

Through my project I have uncovered a number of the issues, challenges and considerations related to the enhanced inclusion of emissions from land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) within the Kyoto Protocol:

- The overall objective of avoiding dangerously high concentrations of atmospheric greenhouse gases requires drastic and immediate cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. The current negotiations need to arrive at emission reduction commitments for countries in keeping with this objective. Success at avoiding dangerous climate change requires that ambitious reduction commitments apply especially to fossil fuel emissions because they are the most difficult and expensive to reduce. If targets are too weak or if countries can use emission reductions / removals from LULUCF to meet these targets, the larger objective would be undermined. If countries focus too much of their effort and investments on reducing emissions or increasing removals from LULUCF, we may miss the opportunity to reduce fossil fuel emissions in a timely way.
- There is significant concern about uncertainties and inaccuracies associated with the measurement of terrestrial carbon stocks, which heightens concerns that countries would use this sector to meet their emission reduction commitments. The uncertainties mean that the emission reductions / removals we think we are making may not be real or may be inflated, leaving us further behind.

- The current framework for LULUCF accounting has many flaws, exacerbating concerns about countries using this sector to meet their emission reduction commitments. Critics site an asymmetry in the system that allows countries to account for removals (which help their overall Kyoto compliance) and emissions (which hurt their overall Kyoto compliance). For example, countries can claim credits for re-vegetating an area, but there is no requirement to account for emissions resulting from loss of vegetation from an area ('de-vegetation'). More importantly, the voluntary nature of accounting for most LULUCF activities means that countries are free to claim credits (removals) if lands and forests are a net sink of carbon but also free to not account for emissions if lands forests are an overall source of carbon to the atmosphere. This means that LULUCF accounting helps countries meet their Kyoto commitments, but doesn't help reduce overall emissions.
- In addition, a poorly crafted definition of forests has allowed countries to replace carbon-rich natural forests with agricultural tree plantations without having to account for the significant loss of carbon stocks that results. Because both natural forests and plantations are defined as "forests", this is not included in a country's mandatory accounting of "deforestation".
- Boreal forest countries, especially Canada and Russia have a lot to fear about the poor separation in the current accounting rules between emissions that are directly human-caused and those that are natural or only indirectly caused by humans. Canada's managed forest will be a net source of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere during Kyoto's first commitment period (2008-2012) mostly because of the mountain pine beetle epidemic in British Columbia. Canada is promoting new approaches that would more effectively 'factor out' or remove these emissions from national accounts. Others are concerned that doing so could create loopholes that excuse countries from accounting for emissions for which they are at least partially responsible.
- Countries are considering adding new activities to the list of seven accepted activities described above. Accounting for some of these, such as forest and peatland degradation could have positive biodiversity effects (because these activities would then be discouraged), while the addition of carbon storage in harvested wood products could have negative biodiversity impacts by encouraging the transfer of carbon from forests (trees) to storage in wood products, thereby increasing harvest pressure.
- Inclusion of LULUCF within the Kyoto framework creates incentives to manage lands differently. Conservationists and environmentalists are hoping that these incentives will have co-benefits for biodiversity, but this is not a certain outcome. Whereas forest protection demonstrably reduces emissions compared to forest harvest, a further industrialization of our forests in order to grow trees faster could increase removals from the atmosphere. The Kyoto Protocol requires that LULUCF contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of resources but this principle is not in operation.

## Policy Solutions

In addition to several background papers that I wrote as part of my project, I led the development of three papers containing substantive policy suggestions:

- A list of principles from the Climate Action Network to be used by country negotiators in the UN process (<http://cpaws.org/files/climate-consensus-0608.pdf>)
- A discussion paper from the Climate Action Network containing policy options (<http://cpaws.org/files/climate-discussion-082508.pdf>)
- A working paper from the international research community containing policy options (<http://cpaws.org/files/climate-copenhagen.pdf>).

Most of the issues I've identified could be resolved by completely separating LULUCF accounting from the accounting of emissions in all other sectors and creating a LULUCF emission reduction target. This would ensure that countries have to reduce emissions from this sector, and that LULUCF does not dilute emission reduction commitments in other sectors. The only issue it would not effectively address is the biodiversity impacts resulting from inclusion of LULUCF emissions/removals in accounting. As a radical change from the current architecture of the Kyoto Protocol, this approach could meet with resistance from Parties and could have other consequences that I have not yet fully considered.

Solving these issues without completely separating LULUCF from the other sectors is a more viable option.

Here are some policy options:

- Accounting of emissions/removals from forest management should be mandatory.
- Accounting of emissions from large-scale forest and peatland degradation should be mandatory.
- Carbon stored in wood products should not be included in LULUCF accounting.
- The contribution of LULUCF to overall compliance under the Kyoto Protocol should be limited.
- Even if the LULUCF sector is included along with other sectors within a national emission reduction target, an additional target should be developed for LULUCF.
- Countries should not be held liable for forest emissions from natural causes but should also not be able to claim credits from forest management unless overall forest carbon stocks are going up; this ensures that credits from LULUCF reflect the emissions actually occurring to the atmosphere.
- New international definitions are required for natural forests, plantations and degraded (semi-natural) forests.

I will continue to work to resolve policy options over the next year.

Biodiversity protection would be supported by these policy approaches insofar as they promote the protection of natural forests and ecosystems. My project has not yet turned up any more directed ways to incorporate biodiversity protection objectives. This task is made especially difficult by the separation of biodiversity issues into a separate convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity.

## Outputs and outcomes

All of the outputs anticipated in my Statement of Interest, ranging from workshops to policy submissions have been delivered through my project. The most significant outputs are the substantive policy papers released by the Climate Action Network and leading researchers as well as the forests and climate change blog, which I am using as a forum to update the broader community on policy developments.

Some hints at policy outcomes are already evident: the formal list of policy options being negotiated by Parties to the Kyoto Protocol includes mandatory accounting of forest management emissions and the addition of responsibility for emissions from forest and peatland degradation. I have advocated both of these options through my work with the environmental and research communities.

Policy outcomes will not be finalized until December, 2009 when the negotiations conclude, but the outcome for forests and land use will likely be evident in spring of next year.

## Next Steps

Fortunately, my work on this project will continue because it has been integrated into my work plan at CPAWS.

It is my hope that preferred policy outcomes will be articulated by the Climate Action Network at the annual Conference of the Parties to the UN Climate Change Convention this December in Poland and that this will form the basis for lobbying international governments.

I also hope to engage in a policy discussion with the Canadian government this fall, in advance of the December Climate Change Talks, and into next year.