



Adirondack Mountain Club

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Lake George, NY 12845

1 July 2022

Draft Scoping Plan Comments  
NYSERDA  
17 Columbia Circle  
Albany, NY 12203-6399  
[scopingplan@nyserda.ny.gov](mailto:scopingplan@nyserda.ny.gov)

Dear Climate Action Council,

Thank you for the tremendous work you have done on the draft scoping plan to develop pathways to meet the requirements of the statewide GHG emission limits and achieve statewide net zero emissions in accordance with the New York State Climate Act. Please consider our comments below regarding Chapter 15 Agriculture and Forestry, Chapter 6 Achieving Climate Justice, Chapter 7 Just Transition, Chapter 13 Electricity, and Chapter 22, Outreach and Education.

### **Carbon Sequestration (Chapter 15 Agriculture and Forestry)**

#### Carbon Sequestration

We appreciate the acknowledgement in the introduction to Chapter 15 that maximizing carbon sequestration in forestry and agriculture is key to achieving net zero emissions, “Maximizing the carbon sequestration potential in the agriculture and forestry sectors is a key strategy for achieving the Climate Act goal of net zero emissions across all sectors of the economy by 2050.”

The best way to maximize and provide long-term carbon sequestration is by the retention of mature trees and standing timber.<sup>1</sup>

A study published in *Nature* shows that the [Rate of tree carbon accumulation increases continuously with tree size.](#)<sup>2</sup> The study explains that large, old trees are better at absorbing carbon from the atmosphere. Other scientists researching the carbon storage potential of old trees include William Moomaw, Emeritus Professor of International Environmental Policy, Center for International Environment and Resource Policy, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Moomaw was a lead author of five Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports. He currently serves as co-director of the Global Development and Environment Institute at Tufts, which he co-founded, and he is also a Visiting Scientist at Woodwell Climate Research Center. Moomaw works on natural solutions to climate change and promotes “proforestation” in which older and middle-aged forests are left intact because their carbon-sequestration abilities are superior to immature trees. Dr. Moomaw supports efforts to plant young trees, but explains that “preserving existing mature forests will have an even more profound effect on slowing global warming in the coming decades, since immature trees

sequester far less CO<sub>2</sub> than older ones.” Large-diameter trees store disproportionately massive amounts of carbon and are a major driver of carbon cycle dynamics in forests worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

Moomaw acknowledges that “we’ll continue to need and want forestry products — that’s understood.” But what needs to change is the attitude that forests must be managed by principles that improve forests for timber production. The goal, Moomaw suggests, should be to promote natural forests which are managed for ecosystem services and biodiversity, especially biodiversity that is associated with older forests. Less than 7 percent of U.S. forests are over 100 years old—making older forests a rare habitat.<sup>4</sup>

Maximizing carbon sequestration should be a priority for our New York State Forests. We must continue to maintain and grow our state’s forests while also protecting our coastlines, riparian corridors and wetlands to maintain an interconnected network of protected lands and waters enabling flora and fauna to adapt to climate change.

Over 18 million acres of New York State land is covered by trees.<sup>5</sup> There are 3.7 million acres of forested public lands in New York State<sup>6</sup> of which nearly 3 million is the Forest Preserve of the Adirondack and Catskill Parks. Protected by Article 14 of the New York State Constitution, the Forest Preserve is not logged and provides long-term carbon sequestration and habitat protection.<sup>7</sup> Although the Forest Preserve is a model for maximizing and providing long-term carbon sequestration and protecting watersheds through the retention of mature trees and standing timber, it is not mentioned in the scoping plan. **The Forest Preserve and its contribution to goals in the scoping plan must be highlighted in the final plan.**

Approximately 14.4 million acres of forested lands are privately owned.<sup>8</sup> How these forests are managed can play an important role in carbon sequestration and mitigating impacts of climate change. New York’s over 18 million acres of trees<sup>9</sup> hold a lot of carbon as do forest soils. We urge New York State to manage its forests and encourage and incentivize the management of private forests with the primary goal of combating climate change, long-term carbon sequestration, and improving climate resiliency.<sup>10</sup> Management of New York’s state forest areas to promote stands of mature trees to increase forest carbon stocks will help clean our air and water, preserve wildlife habitat, and provide a setting for outdoor recreation.

### Forest Products

The Climate Action Council (CAC) should revisit the data and sources that led them to conclude that logging forest stands for forest products enhances carbon storage. There are good reasons to produce forest products, but meaningful carbon storage isn’t one of them. The current rate of logging forests in the United States has decreased the carbon storage potential of the U.S. Forests by 42 percent.<sup>11</sup> Although logging and promoting forest products may ultimately keep a specific landscape forested, it is not the most effective way to enhance carbon storage. In fact,

more carbon dioxide is released annually from timber harvesting in the U.S. than from the combined fossil fuel emissions of the U.S. commercial and residential sectors.<sup>12</sup> Carbon Sequestration should be considered a forest product with economic benefit for the purposes of management.

### Biomass

The final scoping plan must take steps to stop incentives for burning forests as renewable energy. The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) excludes biofuel as a source in carbon offset programs and under the Tier 1 Clean Energy Standards. Biomass is more carbon-intensive than petroleum due to upstream emissions. Net contribution poses potentially irreversible impacts as it depletes, through logging, the same resources that reabsorb emissions. Trees can be regrown to pull CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, but it takes a century for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from burned wood to be reabsorbed in a growing forest. Burning wood to generate electricity releases more carbon dioxide than fossil fuels to produce the same amount of energy.<sup>13</sup> Harvesting biomass impedes carbon sequestration and weakens the ability of forests to sequester carbon. Harvesting biomass as a substitute for fossil fuels can also lead to soil degradation, flooding, and landslides due to land-use change.<sup>14</sup>

The final scoping plan, particularly as it relates to the agriculture and forestry section, must address the fundamental benefits of leaving forests intact and carefully account for continued carbon sequestration in any proposals that suggest harvesting as a climate mitigation strategy. **The final scoping plan must remove AF20 as a strategy** for New York's bioeconomy because it calls for an expansion of biomass and bioenergy (feedstocks and bioenergy products).<sup>15</sup>

### **Indigenous Nations (Chapter 6 Achieving Climate Justice, Chapter 7 Just Transition, Chapter , Chapter 13 Electricity)**

In the scoping plan we appreciate the acknowledgment of indigenous sovereignty in the *Just Transition Principles* (Table 2, page 42) under *Preservation of Culture and Tradition*, “Ensure that transition plans, policies, and programs reflect and respect local wisdoms, cultures, and traditions, including recognition of indigenous sovereignty.”

However, the scoping plan has not followed this principle in its process to date by not acknowledging the need for, or pursuing State to Nation consultation with Native Nations, such as the Seneca Nation, the Seneca Nation of Indians, the Saint Regis Mohawk and others of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, as well as other Indigenous Nations within New York State. We appreciate the work that some New York State Agencies, such as the Department of Environmental Conservation who is part of the CAC,<sup>16</sup> have been doing in an on-going process of understanding how to respect and meet Indigenous people's rights in the context of the agency's

conservation responsibilities. However, **the CAC must acknowledge the need for State to Nation consultation with Native Nations in New York.**

## **Chapter 22, Outreach and Education**

The scoping plan should acknowledge and address concerns expressed in public meetings about the potential negative financial impacts on business, industry, and private citizens. Without support from business and private citizens it will be difficult to meet the objectives and goals outlined in the scoping plan. Some of the concerns include the increased costs for electric only vehicles and expenditures for new heating and cooling systems. Programs or processes that will help address costs associated with replacement and upgrades to commercial and private systems should be highlighted in the final plan and promoted as the plan is implemented. A new section or chapter should be developed that speaks directly to individuals, families, and business owners that will help address concerns about the proposals outlined in the scoping plan.

Sincerely,  
Cathy Pedler  
Director of Advocacy, ADK (Adirondack Mountain Club)



**ADK** (Adirondack Mountain Club) works to protect New York State wild lands and waters by promoting responsible outdoor recreation and building a statewide constituency of land stewardship advocates. Based out of the Adirondack Park in New York State, ADK is a leader in providing outdoor education, promoting responsible recreation, and organizing stewardship experiences. Since 1922, the organization has worked to increase access to the backcountry by building trails, conserving natural areas, and developing a stewardship community that supports the ethical and safe use of New York’s outdoor spaces. A member, donor, and volunteer-supported organization, ADK reaches across New York through its 27 chapters to inspire people to enjoy the outdoors ethically.

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<sup>1</sup> “proforestation is the lowest cost opportunity for reaching the zero net carbon goal by 2050.” <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/ffgc.2020.594274/full>  
<https://e360.yale.edu/features/why-keeping-mature-forests-intact-is-key-to-the-climate-fight>  
<https://www.ehn.org/forest-carbon-sequestration-2649749746/carbon-sequestration>  
<https://insideclimatenews.org/todaysclimate/do-young-trees-suck-up-more-carbon/>  
<sup>2</sup><https://environment-review.yale.edu/carbon-capture-tree-size-matters-0>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/ffgc.2020.594274/full>  
<sup>4</sup> <https://e360.yale.edu/features/why-keeping-mature-forests-intact-is-key-to-the-climate-fight>  
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/309.html>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/309.html>  
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4960.html>  
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/309.html>  
<sup>9</sup> <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/309.html>

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- <sup>10</sup> <http://theconversation.com/to-curb-climate-change-we-need-to-protect-and-expand-us-forests-76380>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://cbmjournals.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s13021-016-0066-5>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://cbmjournals.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s13021-016-0066-5>
- <https://theconversation.com/to-curb-climate-change-we-need-to-protect-and-expand-us-forests-76380>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.wri.org/insights/insider-why-burning-trees-energy-harms-climate#>.
- <sup>14</sup> NY Renews, <https://www.nyrenews.org/submit-a-public-comment-on-nys-draft-scoping-plan>
- <sup>15</sup> NY Renews, <https://www.nyrenews.org/submit-a-public-comment-on-nys-draft-scoping-plan>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://climate.ny.gov/Our-Climate-Act/Climate-Action-Council>