



Carbon and Critters: Ensuring Natural Climate Solutions in Forests and Woodlands Account for Wildlife Habitat Needs

NACCB 2022 Interactive Session Report

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The critical role that forests play as a natural climate solution (NCS) via carbon storage and sequestration is now widely accepted. However, potential trade-offs between maximizing carbon and meeting unique wildlife habitat needs are often overlooked—in forest carbon offset protocols, in replanting and reforestation initiatives, and, more generally, in mounting public pressure to cease all forest management that may seemingly compromise carbon storage. This can set us on trajectories that may maximize carbon storage in some contexts, but that may ultimately undermine our ability to restore and maintain the habitat conditions that many species rely upon. *It is critical that we begin to characterize these trade-offs—as well as potential synergies—that may exist between pursuing natural climate solutions in our forests and supporting wildlife.*

To that end, this interactive session sought to explore these trade-offs and synergies and identify opportunities and challenges for elevating these considerations in various players' pursuits of NCS. We began the session with four brief presentations:

1. Littlefield gave an introduction to forest contexts in which these trade-offs are readily apparent
2. Graves explained TNC's approach to envisioning a gold-standard for NCS
3. Dybala introduced how a multiple-benefit conservation framework can establish jointly-acceptable outcomes for potentially conflicting objectives
4. Ontl spoke to the lens of climate change adaptation and how proactive, near-term reductions in carbon storage may ensure long-term carbon benefits.

Following these presentations, the approximately 15-18 session participants—including undergraduates, university scientists, and both NGO and foundation program directors—then broke into smaller groups to discuss several questions, including:

- *Can the lens of multiple-benefit conservation or of climate change adaptation help advance carbon and wildlife objectives in pursuing a given NCS? What other co-benefits or ecosystem services should also be considered?*
- *What are the opportunities that exist for advancing both carbon and wildlife needs for a given NCS and in what contexts? What are the challenges to doing so? Who are the key players or avenues we need to work with or engage (e.g., agencies, conservation non-profits, private landowners, carbon offset developers, etc.)?*



After 20 minutes, the whole group reconvened for a discussion facilitated by Littlefield. The conversation was lively and from it emerged several avenues by which these trade-offs may be elevated in conversations surrounding NCS, including:

- Convening a working group to develop a set of best practices for siting and pursuing NCS, which may result in a peer-reviewed paper, a set of recommendations in response to the recent USFS Secretary's Memo, and/or guidance for program evaluation
- To substantiate the above best practices, design and carry-out several case studies in diverse forest contexts in which imperiled species may lose critical habitat if carbon storage were to be maximized. These would rely on existing empirical data and likely forest structure simulators.
- Convening representatives from forest carbon offset providers, program developers, larger purchasers to present and workshop sector-specific best practices.

Participants willing to remain engaged in this conversation shared their email addresses with session organizers. Littlefield is in the process of compiling notes from the group discussion and generating a prospectus of next steps to acquire funding that may support the continuation of this important work.