

Increasing access to carbon markets

The Family Forest Carbon Program aims to give small, family-owned forests access to carbon markets for the first time. Traditionally, these markets have been inaccessible to these landowners due to high up-front costs, the complex nature of carbon markets, and the duration of projects, which often span about 100 years.

As a result, more than 98% of the forest carbon projects in the United States have been developed on properties measuring 5,000 acres or larger. Properties ranging in size from 20 to 1,000 acres represent less than 1% of the acreage in today's existing carbon markets.

Given that families and individuals own about 36% of U.S. forestland, more than one-third of the nation's forests have thus far been excluded from participation in carbon markets. Expanding access to carbon markets by lowering the up-front costs is one key to addressing climate change through natural resources.

Despite common misperceptions, family forest owners are not wealthy landowners but average Americans, with 33% falling below the U.S. median income. While family forest owners have a desire to make their forests healthier and more productive, few are actually doing so due to the high cost of forest management and conservation and a lack of expertise.

"The amount of carbon we get out of our forests is directly related to how well we steward them," said Tom Martin, President and CEO of the American Forest Foundation. "It's crucial that we enable family forest owners to overcome barriers and take needed action if we are to capitalize on the potential in our forests to help address climate change."

The FFCP was piloted in 16 counties in Pennsylvania in 2020. Based on the initial success, substantial landowner and carbon credit buyer interest, there are plans to expand the program throughout the rest of Pennsylvania and into West Virginia and Maryland in 2021. The hope is to then provide the opportunity throughout the entire Central Appalachian region, including portions of Virginia, in 2022.