



# WILL CARBON MARKETS HELP THE CLIMATE CRISIS?



OUR FORESTS. OUR STRENGTH.

Stand4Forests Report Series

**Forests clean our water and clean our air. Forests provide homes for wildlife, keep greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere, and can even prevent floods.** Some believe that “carbon markets” may be a way to fix climate change. However, others have serious concerns about carbon markets. Carbon markets may not be scalable or effective. And, carbon markets might cause justice issues in local communities.

**Here’s the truth of the matter:**

- Carbon markets may not actually work.
- Carbon markets let major companies continue polluting practices.
- Carbon markets only reward the wealthiest people who own the most forests.
- Carbon markets don’t address pollution in communities where purchasing companies operate.

In conclusion, we need new policies designed to scale back forest disturbance from logging and leave more forests standing.

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**MYTH:** Carbon markets will help stop fossil fuel emissions

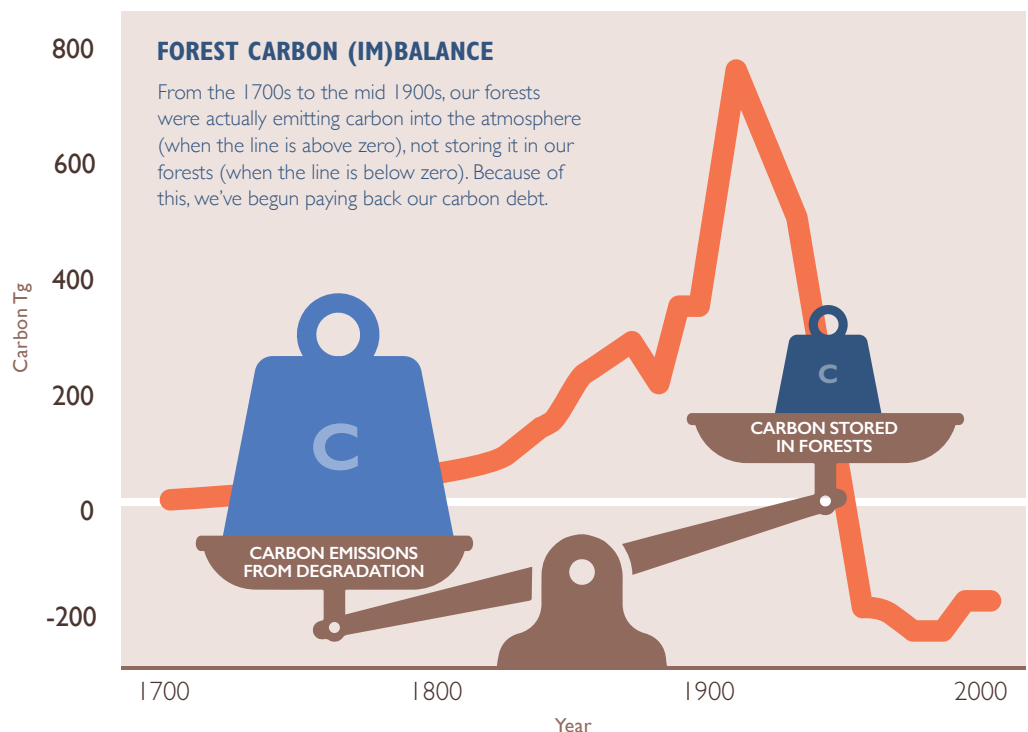
**TRUTH:** Carbon markets don’t acknowledge pre-existing carbon debt.

Carbon markets are based on the idea that forests are inherently carbon neutral. Carbon neutrality is when there are equal amounts of greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide, being stored and released by the forest. Unfortunately, forests in the United States are not carbon neutral because of past actions.

The United States destroyed over 100 million acres of forest in less than a century. This turned American forests from forests that stored carbon into forests that put carbon into the atmosphere. Although US forests are once again storing carbon every year, they still haven’t repaid their “carbon debt” from historic forest destruction.<sup>4</sup>

**TRUTH:** Carbon markets let major companies continue polluting.

In theory, carbon markets offer a way for greenhouse gas emitters to cancel out the harm they’re causing. However, carbon markets do not help large polluters like pulp, paper, and pellet companies change their ways. Instead, carbon markets become just one more added expense to continue business as usual.<sup>3</sup> ProPublica reported that California’s oil and gas industries even increased their carbon emissions after a carbon program had begun.<sup>5</sup>



**TRUTH:** We’re not sure that carbon markets actually store enough carbon.

In order for a forest to qualify for credits in the carbon marketplace, the owner has to prove that the carbon stored is more than what would’ve already been stored. Of course, forest owners are in charge of reporting how their forest’s carbon is additional.

Another issue with carbon markets is the unintended side effects. “Leakage” is when forest protection in one area causes increased forest destruction in another area. In other words, protecting ten acres of a property causes ten extra acres to get logged elsewhere. There is no true way to safeguard against this, and it may wipe out any benefit received from the initial forest preservation.<sup>6</sup>

## **TRUTH:** Offsetting greenhouse gases can't fix climate change.

Even though oceans and forests do a good job of keeping carbon out of the atmosphere, it's just not enough. Scientists believe that only one-third of climate change can be addressed with improving oceans, forests, and land.<sup>7,8</sup> Most of our solution to climate change must be (a) reducing emissions and (b) eliminating our use of coal and other fossil fuels. In other words, solutions like carbon markets are just band-aids, not medicine. They stop the bleeding, but they can't fix the problem.



## **MYTH:** Carbon markets are good for forest landowners

### **TRUTH:** Carbon markets help the rich get richer.

The majority of family forest owners have less than ten acres.<sup>12</sup> Small forest owners like these can't use government incentives to improve their land, and they can't use carbon markets.<sup>13</sup>

Larger landowners can usually afford to use carbon markets, but they tend to be very rich and not racially diverse. Less than 1% of black citizens in the South are forest owners.<sup>14</sup> In other words, carbon markets are a tool for a small number of wealthy forest owners to accumulate more wealth. Subsidies for large forest owners may worsen inequalities coming from a long history of slavery and racial discrimination in this country.<sup>15</sup>

### **TRUTH:** Carbon markets do not help disadvantaged communities.

Carbon markets allow polluters in California to purchase a carbon "credit" from a forest in Wisconsin. Carbon markets don't actually help air pollution where companies do business. Industrial parks often have many polluters operating in one community. These industrial parks are usually near "environmental justice"

communities: high populations of non-white citizens with low income or social mobility.<sup>16,17</sup> Many people are concerned about the additive impacts of multiple polluters in an area. Carbon markets don't help and may even make this problem worse.

Native American communities are split on the benefits of carbon markets. Some indigenous communities are using carbon markets on their lands.<sup>18</sup> However, some indigenous communities don't like carbon markets because of previous land thefts, pollution, and other issues.<sup>3,19</sup>

### **TRUTH:** Carbon markets only reward the richest landowners.

California's carbon market is the biggest and best carbon market. Yet, California's carbon market only helps people who own more than 1,500 acres.<sup>9</sup> This is because getting enrolled in a carbon market is very challenging. It requires the owner to verify all of the trees on their property. Carbon markets also restrict what you can do on the land for at least 100 years.<sup>10</sup>

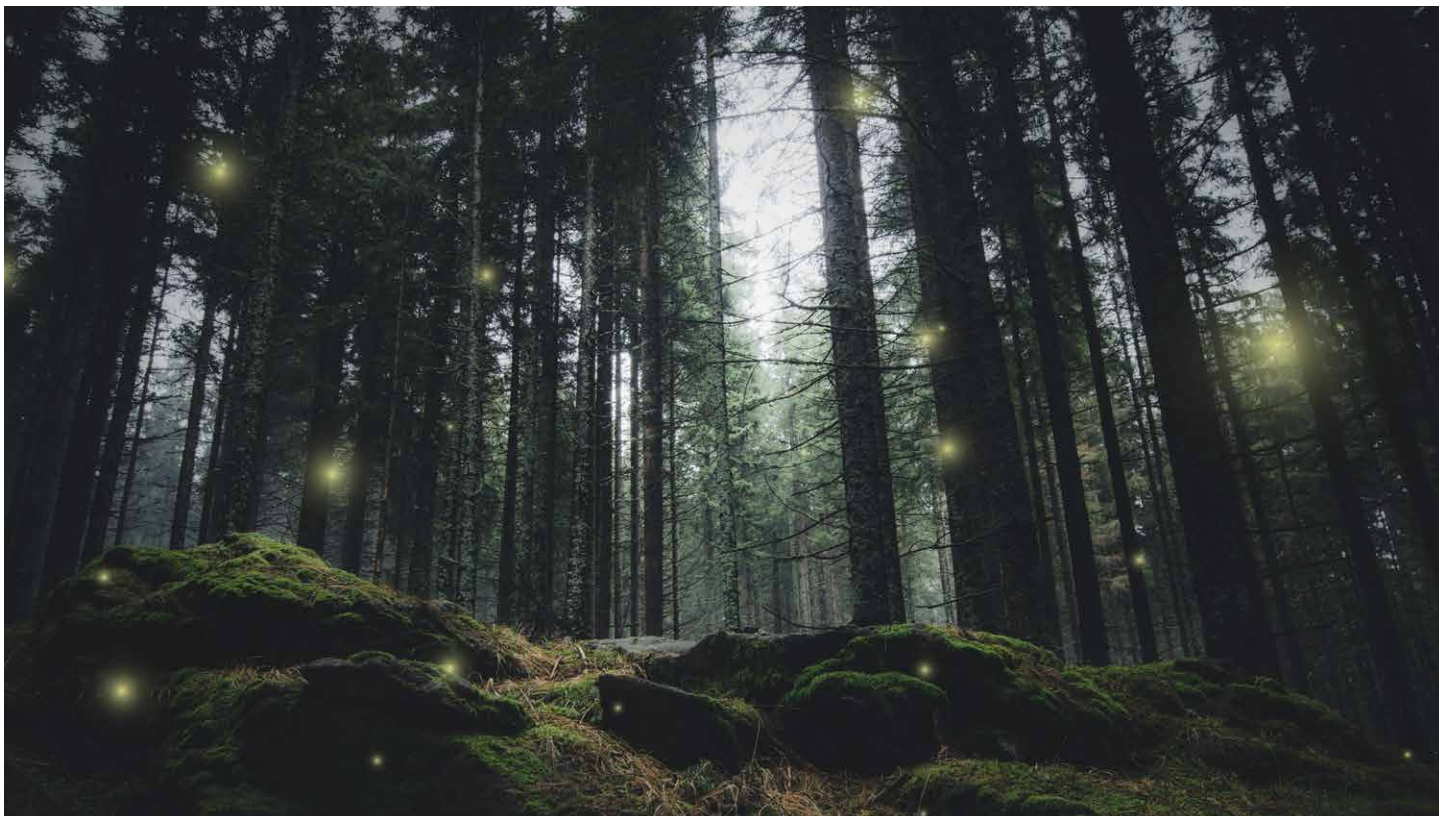
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**THE MAJORITY OF FAMILY  
FOREST LANDOWNERS  
CAN'T ACCESS  
CARBON MARKETS.**







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**ABOUT DOGWOOD ALLIANCE** • Dogwood Alliance mobilizes diverse voices to protect Southern forests and communities from destructive industrial logging. For over 20 years, Dogwood Alliance has worked with diverse communities, partner organizations and decision-makers to protect Southern forests across 14 states. They do this through community and grassroots organizing, holding corporations and governments accountable and working to conserve millions of acres of Southern forests.