



## **Briefing Note on Forests, Peatlands and the Copenhagen Climate Deal**

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### **The Issue**

The Kyoto Protocol offers no incentive for protecting Canada's carbon-rich northern forests and peatlands; this could be fixed through the current negotiations for a global climate change agreement in Copenhagen this year.

### **Background**

Ensuring national accountability for emissions from forests and peatlands is an important part of the current negotiations to arrive at a new global climate change deal under the United Nations in Copenhagen this December.<sup>1</sup> Creating accountability also means creating incentives for domestic actions aimed at reducing these emissions, especially if they are included in the global carbon market.

Protecting intact ecosystems is the most effective strategy to keep carbon stored in forests and peatlands safely out of the atmosphere and to help biodiversity survive in the face of climate change threats to their habitat.

It is widely accepted that the current accounting rules for forests and peatlands under the Kyoto Protocol need to be improved.

There is great concern among developing countries and among environmental groups that developed countries will use these negotiations to keep or widen existing loopholes and that this will result in a lack of accountability for activities that are bad for the atmosphere and bad for biodiversity.

Weak rules for developed countries will also hurt our chances of getting strong rules to curb deforestation in developing countries, responsible for roughly 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Current Situation**

Under the current Kyoto rules, Canada must account for the effects of afforestation, reforestation and deforestation. Canada elected not to account for the effects of forest management, grazing land management and revegetation. Canada has elected to account for the effects of cropland management. There is currently no requirement to account for emissions from peatlands. In 2006, forest management activities accounted for 164 Mt of CO<sub>2</sub>, an increase

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<sup>1</sup> This part of the negotiations is formally called 'land use, land-use change and forestry' (LULUCF) and deals with emissions and removals of CO<sub>2</sub> from forest management, cropland management, grazing land management and revegetation.

of 62% since 1990.<sup>2</sup> Of greatest concern are the carbon losses that occur when primary forests are converted to managed forests. Although not as big of an issue in Canada, the conversion of forests to plantations also results in a large and important loss of forest carbon in other countries. Emissions from natural disturbances add to this total, but are often beyond human control.

The total emissions from Canada's peatlands are unknown. However, emissions resulting from direct peat extraction resulted in the emission of 7.4 Mt of carbon between 1990 and 2000.<sup>3</sup> Globally, peat drainage in developed countries is estimated to result in 930 Mt of annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>4</sup> Canada's total emissions in 2007 were 747 Mt of CO<sub>2</sub>.<sup>5</sup>

### **Recommended Approaches**

***Greenhouse gas accounting rules for forestry and land use in the Copenhagen climate change deal should have a number of important features:***

- Accounting of carbon losses from **peatland degradation** is included as a new mandatory activity;
- Accounting of carbon losses from **'forestry in primary forests'** and **'forest conversion to plantations;'** are included as new mandatory activities;
- Accounting of GHG emissions and removals from **forest management** is based on a comparison of actual emissions in the commitment period to actual historical levels;
- A mechanism to **factor out** natural disturbance emissions from national accounts is added but should only address the most extraordinary/unpredictable natural disturbances;
- The current accounting approach for carbon stored in **wood products** is maintained: assume the carbon is emitted at the time of tree harvest

***Domestic policies, markets and incentives for mitigation in the forest sector should be appropriate to the forest landscape context:***

- Largely intact forested landscapes: Avoiding emissions by **protecting carbon stocks**
- Landscapes in which forests have already been largely cleared and degraded: Growing new carbon stocks
- Forested landscapes subject to ongoing clearing and degradation: Reducing emissions from deforestation, degradation and land-use change, including through sustainable forest management

These approaches will increase incentives for mitigation in this sector, reward Canada for these activities and contribute to a better global climate change framework.

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<sup>2</sup> Environment Canada. National Inventory Report: Greenhouse Gas Sources and Sinks in Canada, 1990 -2006. Chapter 7 (Land Use, Land-use Change and Forestry), section 7.3.1 (Forest land remaining forest land), section 7.3.1.1 (methodological issues). [http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/GHG/inventory\\_report/2006\\_report/s7\\_3\\_eng.cfm#s7\\_3\\_1](http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/GHG/inventory_report/2006_report/s7_3_eng.cfm#s7_3_1)

<sup>3</sup> Cleary, J., N.T. Roulet and T.R. Moore.2005. Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Canadian Peat Extraction, 1990–2000: A Life-cycle Analysis. *Ambio* 34(6): 456-461.

<sup>4</sup> Prof. H. Joosten, University of Greifswald, 2009, personal communication.

<sup>5</sup> Environment Canada. National Inventory Report: Greenhouse Gas Sources and Sinks in Canada, 1990 -2006. Chapter 7 (Land Use, Land-use Change and Forestry), 2007 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trends: [http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/ghg/inventory\\_report/2007/som-sum\\_eng.cfm](http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/ghg/inventory_report/2007/som-sum_eng.cfm)