



Overview

Forest ecosystems are an important mitigator of climate change, absorbing approximately [10% of U.S. annual emissions](#). But globally, deforestation is [responsible for 10%](#) of annual emissions. By protecting existing forests and promoting afforestation — planting more trees — there is great potential to further mitigate climate change, all while preserving habitat, reducing water and air pollution, maintaining access to nontimber forest resources, and supporting overall well-being. Limiting deforestation and promoting afforestation is [one of the most cost-effective responses](#) to climate change.

Legislation

- **California's AB 1979** (2022) would create the Deforestation-Free Procurement Act by requiring a contractor with a state agency for the procurement of forest-risk commodities to certify that the commodities were not grown, derived, harvested, reared, or produced on land where tropical deforestation occurred.
- **Maryland's HB 991** (2021) incentivized and provided funds for afforestation and new forest conservation. It also set a goal for the state to plant 5 million new native trees, with a portion of those being planted in underserved areas.
- **New Mexico's SB 180** (2021) would create a reforestation center at a public university to address the impact of climate change on the state's forests and support reforestation through seed bank, nursery, and planting programs.
- **Washington's HB 1216** (2021) authorized state technical assistance to cities, counties, and tribes in the development and coordination of programs for urban and community forestry. The state must assess urban tree canopies and administer a grant program.

KEY POINTS

- Some forests can sequester carbon more efficiently than others, but all types of forest ecosystems have a role to play. By requiring [zero-deforestation in their procurement standards](#), states can help preserve forest ecosystems worldwide.
- Afforestation is an important climate strategy, but [it's important to plant trees in the right places](#). Afforestation on lands that were not historically forested (like prairies) can actually increase carbon emissions and destroy native ecosystems.
- Urban forestry helps bring cooler temperatures to heat islands, which are disproportionately located in communities of color.
- Voluntary emission [offset markets are easily manipulated](#) to result in greater, not fewer, emissions. Legislators can explore [payment for ecosystem services](#) models like direct payments and tax incentives to avoid unregulated voluntary markets.

Other Resources

- Researchers [have proposed a Strategic Carbon Reserve](#), or protecting areas of intact forest across the Western U.S., for climate mitigation and biodiversity protection. Legislators can pursue forest protection as part of the [30x30 movement](#).
- Legal Pathways for Deep Decarbonization has a [forestry page](#) with model legislation
- The Georgetown Climate Center's [adaptation toolkit](#) (chapter 4) outlines ways to promote urban forestry.
- The [Kew Declaration](#) provides a framework for policymakers to integrate climate change mitigation, biodiversity protection, and livelihood improvement.
- [Mongabay](#) is the leading forest news source.
- [American Forests](#) has programs on forests and climate change.

