

Landscape Carbon Sequestration for Atmospheric Recovery

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It is a great honor to be with all of you. I would like to give you a sense of how this project started and its vision.

We have convened because of a dire situation caused by massive carbon dioxide pollution of the atmosphere which threatens to leave our planet uninhabitable to humans and other species. We know that the necessary global response is two-fold. One is to decarbonize society and stop pumping CO₂ into the atmosphere. But that is not our subject today.

The other measure is cleaning up the legacy pollution in the atmosphere. As we all know, the highest safe level of CO₂ is 350 ppm, yet we have sailed past 415 ppm. Even if we decarbonized completely tomorrow, we would still careen towards a scenario of runaway heating because of the legacy pollution causing climate disruption.

So the task we address in this workshop is cleaning up this dangerous pollution through natural climate solutions that use trees and soil and other vegetation as engines to draw down and sequester atmospheric carbon. If we had an oil spill in the ocean, there would be a cleanup plan and funding to carry it out. We must have that same vision for the sky – in essence, a sky cleanup.

But no cleanup gets carried out without a plan. And that is what is missing in the climate crisis. Science shows tremendous potential for drawing down carbon through various natural methods, and pilot projects are burgeoning, but there is no framework and no plan to bring the effort to scale across regions.

What is needed, and what we hope this workshop plants the seeds for, is a coherent structure by which the drawdown potential may ripen into tangible, region-wide opportunity. We aim to develop the footings for a regional atmospheric recovery plan. But we should make clear that this effort is *not an offset effort*. If our goal was just to take these landscapes that are incredibly valuable for carbon drawdown and sequestration and use them to simply justify *more pollution* flooding the atmosphere, we would make no progress at all on sky cleanup or restoring the climate system. So this is an atmospheric cleanup effort, not an offset scheme.

All of you represent very different backgrounds and expertise because this effort is inherently interdisciplinary. To tap the potential of landscape drawdown, we need scientists, technology experts, rural economists, urban planners, landscape architects, conservation lawyers, communications specialists – a whole multitude of different perspectives converging on this challenge. As a group, we seek to identify the platform that already exists for a drawdown effort, but then we aim to focus on the gaps and the needs necessary to scale up the effort as rapidly as possible. And we need catalysts -- people from different sectors who can help identify and ignite opportunities for drawdown.

When I think of this grand endeavor, I think of it as joyous, heroic, and profoundly inspiring despite the truly terrifying circumstances of climate disruption propelling it. For this side of climate recovery does not involve regulation. It is premised on incentivizing communities to capitalize on a newly identified opportunity. This effort is not about telling others what they should do, but rather learning by meeting people and communities on their own landscapes, appreciating their reality, and then asking how we can get opportunities off the ground. It is asking the question: what would it take for landowners and land managers to decide to practice carbon farming, carbon forestry, carbon ranching, and wetlands restoration? And the approach includes identifying the remarkable co-benefits of many practices – such as economic boosts to rural and tribal

communities, increased food production, decreased toxic pollution, increased capacity for storm buffers, enhanced habitat, better resilience against drought, and much more. When you identify these opportunities, the funding will follow. But without creating practical approaches to capitalize on the drawdown opportunity – without bridging the conceptual potential that scientists have described with the practical realities governing working landscapes – we get nowhere very fast as the climate clock continues to tick down towards catastrophe.

Naturally, drawdown as a whole must be a global undertaking, because no one region has capacity to draw down the lion's share of excess CO₂ on its own. But while the ultimate endeavor must span the globe, it must be built from regional components. We have the great privilege of focusing this workshop on the vast Pacific Northwest. Our region has ancient forest, sprawling farmland, marine salt marshes, wetlands, expansive rangelands and grasslands, and pioneering urban centers. It contains potentially huge and diverse carbon drawdown potential, giving us an amazing laboratory. But our vision does not stop at our region's boundaries. We hope that this workshop will provide processes and inquiries that can be transferrable for other regional atmospheric recovery plans. We want to ignite this effort across the globe.

And lest you think we might be overly ambitious, let me conclude by sharing the words of General George C. Marshall in his famous speech outlining

the Marshall plan at Harvard University in 1947. He said, “With foresight, and a willingness on the part of our people to face up to the vast responsibility which history has clearly placed upon our country, . . . difficulties . . . can and will be overcome.” And indeed they were. That is the power of a plan that carries a bold vision forward.

As humanity inhabiting Earth at this perilous ecological moment, we too have a “vast responsibility which history has clearly placed upon our country,” and it is nothing short of planetary rescue. As we head into this invigorating workshop, let us not think too small, but rather remind ourselves continually that *the level of our ambition must match the scale of the threat*. As Winston Churchill famously said, “It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we must do what is required.”