

Carbon Sequestration: Frequently Asked Questions

Georgia's 24.7 million acres of forestland have long been recognized as an important source of timber. Forest products are a \$26 billion industry in our state, and the region's economy depends on our forests' continued health and performance.

Globalization and urbanization, however, have changed the landscape. Competition from overseas is impacting southern timber markets, at the same time that development and its consequences are reaching deeper into rural areas. It is a critical time for land owners to be fairly compensated for the forest resources and ecological services they provide.

What resources are we talking about? Certainly timber and its many by-products are the primary resource generated by well managed forests. But increasingly, the ecological services provided by forests are becoming recognized and given value.

What are ecological services? Ecological services are the natural benefits of a well managed forest: water filtration, erosion control, wildlife habitats, and clean air.

How does a forest provide clean air? Actively growing forests remove carbon dioxide (CO₂), a byproduct of burning fossil fuels, from the atmosphere. Trees store the carbon in wood fiber, and release oxygen. When trees capture and store carbon in forest vegetation, soil and forest products, it is called "Carbon Sequestration."

Why is "Carbon Sequestration" so important? Scientists say the world's atmospheric carbon dioxide levels are increasing by about three billion metric tons every year. As air pollution increases, so do the number of health problems for Georgians. Planting trees and managing their development is a proven way to reduce the number of harmful particulates in the air. Carbon Sequestration is also an emerging market opportunity for southern forest owners as they seek reasonable returns for the ecological services they provide.

How much carbon can southern forests process? Actively managed southern pine plantations sequester from one to four tons of carbon, per acre, per year. Annually, Georgia's forests offset approximately 8% of our state's carbon dioxide emissions.

How could a land owner realize value for Carbon Sequestration? The sale of "carbon credits" could provide a new opportunity for income on a regular, ongoing basis. Systems that match emission-dependent companies with tree growers have been developed in Georgia, California, Maine, Oregon, and in other parts of the world. Companies such as utilities cost-share tree planting or reforestation in exchange for "carbon credits," and transactions are recorded in a Carbon Registry. A national protocol for establishing such a registry does not yet exist.

What's happening in Georgia to encourage Carbon Sequestration?-The Georgia Forestry Commission and University of Georgia have defined a Carbon Registry protocol for Georgia and developed an online carbon sequestration registry to list and track forestry projects that are managed to sequester carbon.

Why is this important? By developing a carbon sequestration registry Georgia landowners will have the opportunity to certify that their forests meet specific standards required by those companies wishing to purchase carbon credits. The Registry will also list potential carbon credit markets and encourage those persons representing the market to contact Georgia forest owners regarding potential carbon credit transactions. Furthermore, forest growth would be encouraged and significant steps would be taken to protect Georgia's environment.

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