

Webinar Summary Report: Forests National Chapter

Introduction

The Fourth National Climate Assessment (NCA4), currently in development, will assess the science of climate change and its impacts across the United States. It will document climate change-related impacts and responses for various sectors and regions, with the goal of better informing public and private decision-making at all levels.

To ensure that the assessment is informed by and useful to stakeholders, engagement activities were planned for many of the 17 National Chapters. These activities provided stakeholders an opportunity to provide input to and exchange ideas with the chapter author team on key message formulation, share relevant resources, and give individual feedback on issues of importance to the chapter topic.

Webinar Structure

National chapter webinars were organized and hosted by the coordinating lead authors (CLA) and chapter leads (CL) with coordination from NCA4 staff from the U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP). Invitations to the webinars were distributed by the hosts, author team, and USGCRP staff to their stakeholder networks.

Forests Engagement Webinar

On May 11, 2017, the NCA4 Forests chapter team held a public engagement webinar with support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The objectives of the webinar were to gather input from stakeholders, including authors of the regional chapters, to help inform the writing and development of NCA4, and to raise awareness of the process and timeline for NCA4.

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Overview and Topics of Discussion

David Reidmiller, Director of the National Climate Assessment, opened the webinar by giving an overview of USGCRP, the structure of NCA4, and the timeline for completion. Margaret Walsh from the USDA's Climate Change Program Office provided an overview of her agency's involvement with USGCRP, the NCA4 process, and previous special assessments, including USDA's 2015 report, *Climate Change, Global Food Security, and the US Food System*. Jim Vose, CLA for the Forests chapter, then presented on the process for developing the chapter, the author team, NCA3 key messages, and the current state of the chapter for NCA4.

Jim Vose and co-CLA Dave Peterson presented draft NCA4 forest sector key messages and the chapter outline, requesting input on relevant literature, case study examples, and overall direction. The chapter draft focused on rapid forest change in terms of fire, insects, and disease; long-term forest change; tree growth; carbon sequestration; water resources; and climate change adaptation.

The presentation slides and additional resources related to the NCA4 Forests Engagement Webinar can be viewed [here](#).

Key Information Resources

Participants asked questions and provided comments, specifically around forest ownership challenges and the role of forests in carbon offsetting. Key takeaways from each of these are listed below.

Forest Ownership Challenges

- There was discussion on the challenge of incentivizing active forest management when the majority of forests are privately owned and not actively managed.
- Many forest landowners are older and there is a risk of losing forested lands as ownership turns over.
- It may be useful to engage with suburban land trusts, preservation groups, etc. which hold woodland areas to encourage management for climate change adaptation.

Carbon Offsetting from Forests

- Trees and forests in urban environments can play an important role in contributing to carbon sequestration and offsetting climate impacts. For example, urban trees can have a cooling effect and can moderate hydrologic extremes.
- According to some calculations, current forests offset 11 percent of US carbon release from fossil fuels. There was discussion on how much additional CO₂ emissions could be offset by increasing forest area in the US.