

California adopts forestry protocol

Published: 25 Sep 2009 10:38 PM CET Last updated: 25 Sep 2009 10:54 PM CET

California has given the thumbs up to an expanded forestry offset protocol.

The California Air Resources Board (Carb) adopted the Climate Action Reserve's new guidelines for forestry projects at a meeting on Thursday.

It opens the door to applications from private landowners, public lands and out-of-state projects.

"Landowners, forestry experts, academics, environmentalists and government agencies all came together to produce a protocol that will capture and store millions of CO2 emissions every year through cost-effective, sustainable forestry practices," said acting Carb Chair Barbara Riordan.

The Climate Action Reserve, a California-based offset standard, developed the new protocol.

One California-based project that involves re-forestry and storing carbon in Cayumuca State Park outside of San Diego, which was ravaged by wildfires in 2003, has already applied for certification under the protocol.

Carb officials called the project "promising".

The US has 755 million acres of forested land, with private individuals owning 427 million acres.

Eligible

Forestry offsets that meet the protocol's requirements will be eligible for use under the state's mandatory cap-and-trade system, which is expected to begin trading in 2012, a Carb official said.

"The forestry protocol will be included in the cap-and-trade programme we will develop by the end of next year via a vis offsets," said Leo Kay, communications director for Carb.

The credits generated from the projects, known as climate reserve tons (CRTs), are likely to be accepted as "early action" credits in regional and federal cap-and-trade schemes, analysts said.

California, the nation's most populous state, has called for a return to 1990 emissions levels by 2020, a reduction of about 169 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, and tasked Carb with designing the blueprint to achieve the goal.

The primary mechanism for achieving that goal is the implementation of a regional cap-and-trade programme under the Western Climate Initiative.

The cap-and-trade scheme, which will cover 85 per cent of the state's emissions, limits the use of offsets and allowances from other emissions trading systems to 49 per cent of the state's required emissions reductions.

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