

A significant proportion of California's woody vegetation occurs in the form of Chaparral. This plant community is an important part of California's landscapes, worthy of preservation, and worthy of recognition as a significant carbon pool and a significant carbon sequestering plant community. However, it has not been considered as such by policy makers in the carbon-credit arena. If Chaparral is not viewed as a conservation-worthy plant community with significant carbon storage/sequestration function, it greatly risks being obliterated and replaced by lower-carbon-storing agriculture, or simply being eliminated for the sake of elimination.

Chaparral needs to be considered an important carbon pool. Not only does the above ground biomass store carbon, but there is a large below ground biomass component (in part what allows chaparral species to exist in soils where neither tree communities nor productive native perennial grasslands can exist). In addition, research from the labs of Edith Allen and Michael Allen at University of California, Riverside, shows that Chaparral increasingly captures carbon as atmospheric CO₂ concentrations increase, and sequesters it in the soil. If Chaparral is eliminated, not only do we lose the standing pool of fixed carbon and whatever plant growth would have continued to fix carbon, but we also lose a plant community which provides an additional function of depleting atmospheric CO₂ by funneling it into the soil through soil-microfloral associations.

While soil carbon storage is worthy of a white paper on carbon pools, Chaparral certainly is also worthy...arguably much more worthy than is downed wood. While I recognize that the current white papers consider forests specifically, the scope of consideration needs to be expanded to include significant natural plant communities that occur in climax state (i.e. are not a transitional community in a successional progressions towards forest) and if protected from destruction harbor and sequester substantial carbon.

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