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August 18, 2025

Washington Department of Ecology  
300 Desmond Drive SE  
Lacey, WA 98503  
[CCAOffsets@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:CCAOffsets@ecy.wa.gov)

**RE: U.S. Forest Protocol, version 1.0 Public Comment Period, August 2025**

Dear Department of Ecology,

I am submitting feedback on behalf of Washington Forest Protection Association (WFPA) during the public comment period for the Department of Ecology's ("Ecology") Draft U.S. Forest Protocol, version 1.0 ("Protocol").

WFPA is a forestry trade association representing large and small forest landowners and managers of more than four million acres of productive working forests, including timberland located in the coastal and inland regions of the state. Our members support rural and urban communities through the sustainable growth and harvest of timber and other forest products for U.S. and international markets. WFPA submits the following comments for the Cap-and-Invest Forest Offsets Protocol Informal Comment Period #1.

We support updates to Ecology's Protocol that reflect the best available science, robust data, and credible carbon accounting frameworks. We also recognize that carbon offset methodologies are rapidly evolving to advance high-quality, nature-based solutions, and we believe Washington should be a leader in this exciting and important field.

However, several proposed changes, including updates to the baseline, buffer pool contribution, and natural forest management criteria, risk significantly reducing participation by forest landowners. In particular, the natural forest management restrictions would exclude many owners whose forests have strong potential to deliver meaningful climate benefits. When combined with the already high costs of project development and long-term commitments, the proposed methodology would be out of reach for most forest owners in the state. This would not only limit individual participation,

but it would also reduce the state’s ability to meet its natural climate solutions and net zero goals.

To improve the accessibility of this protocol while also preserving its focus on high-quality, nature-based solutions, we offer several recommendations below. Each is designed to address our central concern; that the proposed approach will discourage landowner participation and reduce the climate mitigation potential of Washington’s forests.

Beyond these specific recommendations, we urge Ecology to adopt innovative strategies that reduce costs for landowners of all sizes and to maintain updates that are both scientifically rigorous and operationally flexible.

### **Recommendation: Adopt Washington Forest Practice Rules rather than Climate Action Reserve’s harvest retention requirements for even-aged harvesting**

#### **Ecology Revision**

##### **11: Natural forest management criteria**

#### **Overview**

Ecology’s earlier version of the Protocol limited clearcut size to 40 acres. After receiving feedback from tribes and other organizations that the requirement was overly restrictive for forest managers in Washington, Ecology is now proposing that the Protocol adopt the even-age harvest requirements in Climate Action Reserve’s U.S. Forest Protocol, version 5.1. In this requirement, maximum even-aged harvest unit size increases with greater basal area retention, according to the following table:

Harvest Retention (Sq. Ft. Basal Area/Acre of All Species)	Maximum Size of Harvest Block (acres)
0	40
>=15 < 20	60
>=20 < 25	80
>=25 < 30	120
>=30 < 40	400
>=40 < 50	600
>= 50	Unlimited

The Protocol also imposes the following limits:

Up to 10% of the harvest retention standard may be met with standing dead trees. Where any harvest occurs in harvest blocks where the harvest retention is less than 50 square feet of basal area per acre, additional harvesting may only occur within 300 feet of the harvest area (with less than 50 square feet basal area per acre) if the harvest retention of the additional harvest exceeds 50 square feet of basal area per acre. This requirement shall

remain in place until the regeneration within the original harvested area (i.e., with retention less than 50 square feet basal area per acre) achieves a height of five feet or is five years old.

### **Comments and Recommendations**

While we support the elimination of the 40-acre clearcut requirement, we do not think the harvest retention requirements as outlined in the new Protocol are the appropriate solution as they are overly restrictive for many landowners. Under the proposed methodology, leave trees, such as those in riparian management zones, do not count toward the basal area retention requirement. A clearcut of even-aged Douglas fir plantations leaves essentially zero basal area, making 40 acres the de facto maximum clearcut size. For most working forests in Washington state, this clearcut size is uneconomical and would likely preclude their participation in the offset program.

We suggest that Ecology remove the proposed basal area requirements and spatial harvest requirements. Instead, we propose that the Protocol aligns with Washington's Forest Practice Rules, as these rules are some of the most stringent forest management regulations in the county. Our proposed revision would tailor the Protocol to Washington forest management practices while also encouraging broader participation in the marketplace.

### **Recommendation: Remove the watershed-scale age-class distribution requirements**

#### **Overview**

The Protocol states that on a watershed scale up to 10,000 acres, all projects must maintain, or make progress toward maintaining, no more than 40 percent of their forested acres in ages less than 20 years. Areas impacted by a Significant Disturbance are exempt from this test until 20 years after reforestation of such areas.

### **Comments and Recommendations**

This requirement does not increase or incentivize carbon sequestration; instead, it imposes unnecessary restrictions on forest management that are inconsistent with Washington's forest practices.

Many timbered watersheds in Washington currently exceed 40% of acres under 20 years old due to historic harvest patterns. Bringing these watersheds into compliance with the Protocol would be prohibitively expensive. In addition, many of Washington's forests can be

harvested before age 45 without compromising sustainability, making policies that enforce California's standards both ineffective and overly restrictive.

This requirement is also particularly burdensome for small parcels within a watershed. For example, in a 40-acre block, the existing Protocol could require three small, uneconomical harvest entries over 40 years.

We recommend that Ecology remove this requirement and instead require projects to comply with applicable state forest practice rules. At a minimum, Ecology should include a minimum-acre threshold within a watershed before applying this rule. This change would likely increase landowner participation statewide and enable more of Washington's forests to contribute to the state's climate goals.

## **Recommendation: Remove the HUC 14 forest area enrollment requirement**

### **Overview**

Ecology's Protocol requires that the carbon project must include all forested areas owned by the Forest Owner within an area no smaller than an area defined by HUC 14-digit hydrological units where available (or 12-digit HUC area if 14-digit is not available) or the entire area owned by the Forest Owner, whichever is smaller. Note that HUC-12 units are about 10,000 to 40,000 acres in Washington. HUC-14 units are about 3,000 to 10,000 acres and do not cover the entire state.

This requirement is consistent with the Climate Action Reserve's IFM methodology, version 5.1.

### **Comments and Recommendations**

We recommend that Ecology remove this requirement. Landowners in Washington should have the flexibility to determine which lands are best suited for a carbon project, and requiring enrollment of all acres within a given geography is unnecessarily restrictive. In many cases, a landowner may hold or manage only certain areas that are well-suited for carbon projects. Allowing enrollment of these areas would enable landowners to pursue nature-based solutions where they deliver both meaningful climate benefits and positive outcomes for the landowner.

## **Recommendation: Increase the threshold of credit generation for small projects that are seeking to reduce their verification frequency**

### **Ecology Revision:**

9: Reduce verification frequency intensity for smaller projects

## **Overview:**

Ecology is proposing to reduce verification frequency for small offset issuances from every 6 years up to 12 years for projects generating less than 4,000 credits each year or until 48,000 credits have been accumulated.

## **Comments and Recommendations**

We generally support efforts that reduce unnecessary project costs and improve overall financial feasibility of forest carbon projects. We recommend that Ecology increase the credit limit for this requirement, which will allow a wider variety of landowners to benefit from this rule change.

Our analysis of the Climate Action Reserve (CAR) registry found that fewer than 5% of ARB-compliant IFM projects were issued fewer than 4,000 credits per year. Because of Ecology's added baseline, leakage, and buffer pool requirements, the updated Protocol will likely yield fewer credits than a comparable project under the ARB program.

We therefore find that the limit of 4,000 credits per year is overly restrictive, and the limit should be increased to allow greater flexibility for additional landowners.

## **Recommendation: Increase the single forest owner enrollment size limit for aggregated projects**

### **Ecology Revision:**

7: Adopt aspects of project aggregation guidance from CAR 5.1 Protocol

## **Overview**

Ecology is proposing to adopt an amended version of the Climate Action Reserve's [Guidelines for Aggregating Forest Projects](#), with a few alterations. The updates include:

- 1) Retaining the requirement that all lands enrolled in a project not extend across more than two supersections
- 2) Requiring that no single forest owner in the aggregate own more than 5,000 acres
- 3) Limiting the project-level target sampling error for projects in the aggregate to no more than 10%

## **Comments and Recommendations**

The proposed change to limit single forest owners to 5,000 acres in aggregated projects is overly restrictive. Ecology's revisions to the baseline, leakage, and buffer pool requirements will likely reduce the carbon credit potential of many hypothetical projects. While these

changes increase the rigor of the methodology, it is unlikely that a standalone project of 5,000 acres would be financially viable given these updates.

Ecology's updated Protocol should encourage more landowners to enroll in aggregated projects rather than make it more restrictive. We recommend maintaining the Climate Action Reserve's requirement of limiting individual forest owner enrollment to up to 25,000 acres in an aggregated project. Given the overall crediting potential of projects under the proposed methodology, this is a more feasible size limit for aggregated projects.

## Summary

In summary, we support Ecology's commitment to fostering high-integrity forest carbon offsets, but some proposed changes risk making participation increasingly difficult for forest owners of all types. Washington's forests deliver critical benefits. They support biodiversity, sustain local economies, produce renewable materials, and provide other vital ecosystem services. The Protocol is an important opportunity to expand these public benefits, and we urge Ecology to reduce barriers to entry and pursue solutions that enable broad participation in this market.

Thank you for considering these comments and for your service to Washington's environment and communities.

Sincerely,

On behalf of WFPA,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Olivia Jacobs', written in a cursive style.

Olivia Jacobs  
Principal and Founder  
Xyla Land & Resource Advisors