

Why Some Forests get Carbon Credits & Why Forests are Good for You

by Charles Etherington of Warren Forestry Ltd

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Many people are sceptical about the whole 'Climate Change' thing and see The Emissions Trading System ('ETS') started up by the last government as a useless bureaucracy at best or even a scam. Maybe.

The current government is reviewing it so we'll see what they come up with but in the meantime they have gone ahead with the forest plantation part of it i.e. the issuing of carbon credits to first rotation plantations established on pasture after 1990. Not everyone follows why only they qualify and not just any forest.

The reason is, it's only new plantations that are taking a net amount of carbon out of the air and putting it on the ground permanently. As long as they are replanted after harvest about a third of their carbon is always there on site. That is a long term net gain over grass or scrub. Forests that have been in place for a long time store a lot of carbon (dry wood is about 50% carbon) but are not adding to that store over time, as new growth just balances death and decay or harvest.

Of course new forests only do their carbon capture service once, but it is quite a substantial service. A pine or Douglas-fir rotational forest will store an average of about 350 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare. That is about the amount each of us is responsible for from fossil fuels in our lifetime. So if we each put in a hectare of new forest then we would offset all our current excess CO₂. Of course we can't keep doing that forever although doing it for just one generation would buy us time to replace fossil fuels. Coal is 70% of the global source of fossil carbon. Oil and gas plus deforestation are the rest.

A third of the accumulated excess CO₂ in the air has come from deforestation since the industrial revolution. Even currently there is still more deforestation than reforestation so there are large net forest emissions. The world needs to reforest and stop deforesting at the same time as we replace fossil fuels, and not just to recapture carbon.

There are other reasons it would be good if we all put in some new forest. Forests provide multiple environmental, social and economic benefits, such as soil stabilization and improvement, water capture, cycling and cleansing, biodiversity, fuels and low energy building products, wealth creation and employment. It is no co-incidence all the wealthiest countries except the oil and coal exporters have lots of forest. Deforest too much and your civilisation will be history.

So don't worry about whether climate change is a con or the ETS a scam, get yourself a forest because they are a good thing anyway and you never know, the scientists and polities may just be right after all. They have to be sometimes!



Forests: An environmental, social & economic good. Wood: The only environmentally sound building material



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