

Targeting Conservation to Maximize Forest Carbon



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- A focus on forest carbon can simultaneously address the biodiversity crisis and support human communities.
- Land trusts and state and federal agencies are adopting climate science to guide land protection efforts, yet lack the resources to put this work into action.
- OSI and its coalition partners are advancing updates to and use of the National Forest Carbon Monitoring System (NFCMS) to ensure groups have the knowledge and tools for action at this critical moment.

Climate change and its impacts are upon us. There is a need to accelerate every solution—and a prime strategy is the protection of nature.

U.S. forests absorb a full 15% of the nation's carbon emissions each year, making their protection essential to mitigating climate impacts. With historic conservation funding at federal, state, and local levels, we are at a moment of unprecedented opportunity. But conservation groups on the ground need the most up-to-date data and the knowledge to employ these funds effectively.

For over a decade, the Open Space Institute (OSI) has been working to ensure that land conservation practitioners are equipped to respond to the climate crisis. OSI has developed a unique data-driven approach that has supported the protection of over 75,000 acres of resilient and carbon-rich lands across the eastern United States.

To advance strategic land protection at scale, OSI's Climate Catalyst Program provides funding and technical assistance to federal agencies, states, communities, Tribes, and conservation organizations to ensure climate science is embedded into conservation planning and funding at all levels.

Imperative to every facet of this work is the best data. Currently, the conservation community lacks accurate data and tools to help assess the value of land protection for forest carbon capture – the data currently employed is over a decade out of date. The moment is now to update and distribute the tools that will direct conservation action to protect the lands our future depends on.


A coalition of leading conservation NGOs, funders, and scientists have joined together, led by the Open Space Institute, to complete essential updates to the carbon data to ensure its relevancy for the conservation field. Partners include Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, Land Trust Alliance, American Forests, Dr. Christopher Williams of Clark University, and the USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy program.

Up-to-Date Data Delivers Climate-Smart Conservation

This timely data update and outreach initiative has a budget of \$476,000 over three years.

The goal for the first phase of carbon revisions and user outreach is \$146,000 with commitments of \$111,000 secured to date. The next phase includes \$166,000 to integrate the data into online tools and validate the data and \$164,000 will provide outreach, guidance and technical assistance to support the conservation community in putting this data into practice.

Please join us in ensuring the conservation field has the tools to make every project a climate project.



To maximize carbon storage in our forests to meet state and national climate targets, it is essential to know where high carbon forests are today and also forecast forest carbon levels at 2050. Data must direct us to the most essential lands that, if lost, pose the greatest climate risk. It must also help us expand upon lands that are already protected.

To do this, conservation groups rely on modeled forest carbon data developed by Dr. Christopher Williams at Clark University to inform land protection and funding priorities. While still the best data available for this purpose, the working dataset is based on 2010 forest conditions and tools and guidance are not available.

Our goals:

- **Collect end-user input to maximize utility to the field.**
- **Update forest carbon data from 2010 to recently released 2020 to accurately depict forest cover.**
- **Revise forest carbon projections for 2050.**
- **Develop tools that display this data and support effective decision making.**
- **Provide guidance and technical assistance for land conservation organizations to utilize the data.**

Initial generous support provided from USDA Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, Jane's Trust Foundation, and individual contributors.

Founded in 1974, the Open Space Institute (OSI) has grown to become a national conservation leader, partnering in the protection of more than 2.3 million acres across the Eastern US and Canada. OSI protects land for clean drinking water, public recreation, healthy communities, wildlife habitat, and climate protection. We leverage our knowledge and attract resources to make innovative land conservation happen.

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