



## The Trillion Trees Act Goes beyond Just Planting Trees

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The Trillion Trees Act, introduced by Rep. Westerman of Arkansas last month, has boosted the US commitment to support the Trillion Trees Initiative introduced at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The good news is that it doesn't stop at just planting trees, on which a good deal of the media coverage to this point has focused. Anyone who has planted a tree knows that the first year is crucial to ensure future growth and survival—and we want these trillion trees to survive, so they contribute to carbon sequestration goals. By calling for year growth targets (in Section 101) and promoting planting, management and regeneration of new trees (in Section 105), the bill encourages post-planting success.

Here's how the good news plays out: The Trillion Trees Act recommends a comprehensive approach that includes reforestation on public lands, especially on lands impacted by wildfire and insect and disease outbreaks. The plan enhances existing forest management authorities on private and public lands, so that the forests can be used for carbon sequestration. It provides incentive mechanisms to promote the use of wood for building materials with an explicit carbon storage goal, encourages the construction of tall wood (mass timber) building, and does not shy away from recognizing a role for forest bioenergy.

But the bill has a bit of an “everything but the kitchen sink” flavor—it could be strengthened by some strategic additions or refinements. For example, there is no provision to monitor forest growth or track forest carbon across all the forests of the United States. And this addition may be low-hanging fruit: the forest inventory and analysis (FIA) program of the US Forest Service has been in place for almost 90 years, measuring public and private forests, and so is well-positioned to provide this critical information. Explicitly including FIA would leverage current federal investments in this inventory; the program already is being used to great effect by states and by tribes to assess forest condition, and the FIA can provide useful data on changes in forest carbon.

The bill also skips over any pragmatic and necessary plans to revive the forest nursery system, which has been in a decades-long decline—without it, where are all these seedlings going to come from? Regeneration will occur in some

forests naturally, either if seed trees are present or from root growth, but many areas will need active planting. This is especially true in burned areas where few trees have survived. Support for forest nurseries began declining over 20 years ago as the federal timber program was reduced, affecting federally-run nurseries as well as private nurseries under contract to the federal government. This bill could support regrowth of the forest nursery system, with concomitant job creation across the country, in partnership with states and the private sector.

Forests are not the sole answer to mitigating climate change, but they have an important role to play—and the Trillion Trees Act would come with the additional benefit of improving the world around us. While many people are talking about just planting trees, this bill talks about nurturing a forest.

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