

## **New program opens carbon market to small forest owners in West Virginia**

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CHARLESTON, WV (AP) — A new program enabling owners of small forestlands to prosper from improving forest health while slowing climate change is launching in West Virginia.

The Family Forest Carbon Program, which pays family and individual small forest owners to implement practices that increase the amount of carbon sequestered and stored on the land, is opening enrollment to West Virginia landowners.

The program could pay significant financial and environmental dividends in the Mountain State, given that West Virginia is the third-most forested state in the nation with more than 12 million acres of forestland.

“The thing that excites me the most is that it provides small family forest owners a way to get income so that they can do these conservation processes, store carbon in their land and at the same time have a little bit of extra funds so that they can pay their taxes and keep the forest in their family,” said Edward Brzostek, an associate biology professor at West Virginia University who studies ecosystem carbon storage.

The program, a product of the American Forest Foundation and the Nature Conservancy, enables the carbon sequestered by enrolled landowners to become part of a carbon market in the form of carbon credits to be verified by a third party. The program provides expert consultation from foresters to landowners and a forest management plan customized for the landowner’s property.

“We built into (the program) a management plan, not to tell them what to do but to help them reach the goals and visions they have for their land, put it into a management plan so that their woods are producing timber, wildlife, carbon for the years to come,” American Forest Foundation CEO Tom Martin said.

The program is opening enrollment to landowners with between 30 and 2,400 acres.

“It’s a way to get these small family forest owners into this larger market where they can get at least some of the economic benefits that have always been going to the larger, corporate landowners,” Brzostek said.

The carbon market helps landowners cover the cost of forest management.

The Family Forest Carbon Program first launched last year in Pennsylvania, where a pilot run of the program in 18 counties in the central part of the state has so far drawn 62 landowners owning nearly 10,000 acres, according to the American Forest Foundation. Those owners have received \$613,000 collectively in payments from the program so far, the foundation said.

“We wanted to make sure that when we began to scale it up, landowners found the process simple, easy and straightforward,” Martin said.

Payments will be determined by property size and forest conditions.

The state is nearly 80% forested.

Brzostek wants West Virginia to benefit from a carbon sequestration economy that also fights climate change by resulting in less carbon driving global warming in the atmosphere.

“Our forests put us in a place where we can be a major player in the carbon credit market moving forward,” Brzostek said.

Credits in the Family Forest Carbon Program will be verified by Verra, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that develops and manages carbon standards.

“Most folks who own forestlands, they value their forests,” Brzostek said. “They value what it can do environmentally. They value the wildlife that’s on their land. They’re looking for ways they can enhance those benefits while getting some income at the same time. So I think, in that respect, this is really a win-win.”

Source: [https://www.wvnews.com/news/wvnews/new-program-opens-carbon-market-to-small-forest-owners-in-west-virginia/article\\_4f5fda4b-ebfb-575d-9965-c0fcc71cb78a.html](https://www.wvnews.com/news/wvnews/new-program-opens-carbon-market-to-small-forest-owners-in-west-virginia/article_4f5fda4b-ebfb-575d-9965-c0fcc71cb78a.html)