2019

Jul

TEN WAYS FOR THE NEXT AMERICAN PRESIDENT TO LEAD ON CLIMATE AND FORESTS

Jonah Busch | Research Associate

The president that American voters elect in 2020 must rise to the challenge of climate change. Given the stakes – from rising seas to parched cities, scorched farms, and threatened homes and livelihoods – she or he can leave no greater legacy. And while the United States can and must do more to fight climate change at home, there is also much more it can do internationally.

Tropical forests are one of the biggest "win-win-win" opportunities for climate on the planet today. Protecting and restoring tropical forests offers as much as one-third of the near-term greenhouse gas reductions needed to stabilize the climate. It helps prevent the extinction of many of the million species of animals and plants threatened by habitat loss and climate change. And it benefits indigenous peoples and other rural communities who depend on forests. Tropical forests also help maintain intercontinental weather patterns that nourish agriculture in the United States and elsewhere.

Here are 10 ways the next president can lead on climate change and tropical forests.

1. Set a good example at home by rapidly cutting emissions from all sectors. When America leads, other nations act. When America delays and denies, other countries have an excuse to do so too. The United States is already reducing emissions by transitioning toward cleaner energy. The next president should accelerate the decarbonization of the American economy across all sectors, including zero-carbon energy, electric transportation, energy efficient buildings, climate-smart agriculture, and regrowing forests.

2. Remain in the Paris Climate Agreement. Climate change is a global problem that requires global solutions. International cooperation through the Paris Climate Agreement helps leverage climate action in countries outside our borders, which produce a combined 84% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The United States should ratchet up the ambition of its international climate pledge and should exercise international diplomacy to encourage other countries to do likewise.

3. Replenish the Green Climate Fund and bilateral climate assistance. The president should follow through on and augment America's pledge to capitalize the Green Climate Fund. The Green Climate Fund's portfolio of climate-friendly initiatives includes results-based payments for reduced

emissions from deforestation. The United States should also increase its bilateral assistance to help international partners protect and restore tropical forests and promote sustainable landscapes.

4. Build a U.S.-China Alliance for Tropical Forests. U.S.-China partnership on climate change was essential to achieving the Paris Climate Agreement. That partnership has suffered from the current trade war and should be revitalized. A new U.S.-China climate partnership should lead to trade agreements for sustainably-produced commodities with Brazil, Indonesia, and other tropical nations such as Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru that are major suppliers of beef, soy, palm oil, wood, paper, cocoa, coffee, and other "forest-risk commodities" whose production can drive deforestation.

5. Prioritize low-deforestation commodity sourcing in trade policy and federal procurement. American consumers are the destination of a significant amount of forest-risk commodities whose production can drive deforestation. The federal government is among the largest purchasers of forest-risk commodities. The president should use the power of trade policy and federal procurement to preferentially source commodities from regions that have committed to reducing deforestation.

6. Work with Congress to put a price on forest carbon. A carbon price is the simplest and most efficient way to encourage emission reductions broadly and cheaply across the economy. The president should work with Congress to pass comprehensive climate legislation that includes a price on carbon pollution. A carbon pricing system should help American companies achieve strict and rapid emission reduction targets in part by enabling them to buy credits from tropical countries or states that reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. This could take the form of offsets to a carbon market or deductions on a carbon tax.

7. Establish a federal aggregate purchase facility for emission reductions achieved internationally, to be counted toward U.S. mitigation commitment. The Paris Climate Agreement allows for "*internationally* transferred *mitigation outcomes" (*ITMOs). The president should instruct a federal agency to purchase international credits for emission reductions, including those that are not suitable for offsetting in a regulatory market. In this way the United States can use its aggregate purchasing power to get lower prices and achieve its climate targets more quickly and easily.

8. Partner with American companies for low-carbon, healthy global food production systems. Hundreds of American companies have committed to eliminating deforestation from their supply chains of raw materials. The president should build an alliance across companies, federal agencies, universities, and civil society organizations to help translate these corporate commitments

into vigorous, inclusive agricultural and forestry production systems that protect and restore tropical forests. Such an alliance should provide incentives for companies that are taking concrete actions to help their supplier regions move towards sustainability, making companies committed to sustainable sourcing more competitive.

9. Take law enforcement actions against illegal logging and wildlife crime. Deforestation often violates international conventions and the laws of the countries where it takes place. Criminal cartels don't limit their activities to environmental crimes; cracking down on illegal logging and wildlife crime overlaps with efforts to combat drug trafficking and terrorism. The president should direct law enforcement agencies to interrupt, intercept and prosecute environmental crimes to diminish the power of organized criminal cartels.

10. Invest in satellite monitoring and earth observation. American satellites are an irreplaceable source of information about how Earth's forests, grasslands, and farmlands are changing. Landsat and other American satellites have been critical to driving progress in monitoring and protecting tropical forests. Few other nations can match our cutting-edge remote sensing infrastructure. The president should keep these valuable satellite missions flying and keep the United States in the scientific lead.