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## California's Illegal Adoption of "Carbon Credits for Clearcuts" Forest Policy Challenged

SACRAMENTO, *Calif.*— The Center for Biological Diversity filed a formal letter today with the California Air Resources Board demanding that the board revoke its illegally adopted "Forest Project Protocol," which gives carbon credits to forest projects involving clearcutting and other destructive practices and thus contributes to greenhouse gas emissions instead of helping reduce them. The Board violated the California Environmental Quality Act, the state's premier environmental law, by failing to consider the foreseeable environmental consequences of adopting the policy.

The Air Resources Board has adopted an updated version of the Protocol that would grant carbon credits to forest-management projects that rely on clearcutting and other damaging practices. Trees and forest soils can help take carbon dioxide – the most prevalent greenhouse gas – out of the atmosphere and serve as an important source of carbon storage. Unlike projects to plant trees and conserve forest lands, projects that clearcut forests and replace them with plantations can actually release stored carbon back into the air while destroying forest habitat.

The state's adoption of the Protocol as a methodology for carbon accounting is the first step toward allowing forest landowners to accumulate credits for the CO<sub>2</sub> stored in trees and forest products. Instead of reducing their own greenhouse gas emissions, other polluters may be able to buy those credits under California's emerging "cap and trade" program or under other laws requiring mitigation of climate-change impacts.

"Clearcutting damages forest ecosystems, water, and wildlife habitat, while releasing greenhouse gases in the short term and reducing a forest's natural ability to clear the air of carbon pollution over the long term," said Center attorney Kevin Bundy. "By allowing clearcutting under this policy, the Air Resources Board is encouraging the worst kinds of forest management while doing little to address the immediate impacts of climate change."

The Protocol not only creates financial incentives for clearcutting, but also contains other loopholes allowing for the creation of questionable carbon credits – credits that in many instances do not represent real, reliable reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the Protocol allows timber companies to log their land intensively over the short term, based on projections that the forest will eventually grow back and take on more carbon.

"The Air Resources Board ignored its legal responsibility to consider the environmental consequences of its actions," said Bundy. "To

avert the worst impacts of climate change, we need to dramatically reduce emissions now – not give timber companies an added incentive to continue clearcutting the nation's forests.”

The letter demands that the Air Resources Board rescind its approval of the Protocol at its November 19, 2009 meeting. The letter can be viewed at: [http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/public\\_lands/forests/clearcutting\\_and\\_climate\\_change/pdfs/CBD\\_Forest\\_Protocol\\_CEQA\\_Comments\\_11-09-09.pdf](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/public_lands/forests/clearcutting_and_climate_change/pdfs/CBD_Forest_Protocol_CEQA_Comments_11-09-09.pdf).

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