

Clearcutting near Eugene.



Cutting carbon

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Report recommends reining in timber industry greenhouse gas emissions – the second largest source in Oregon

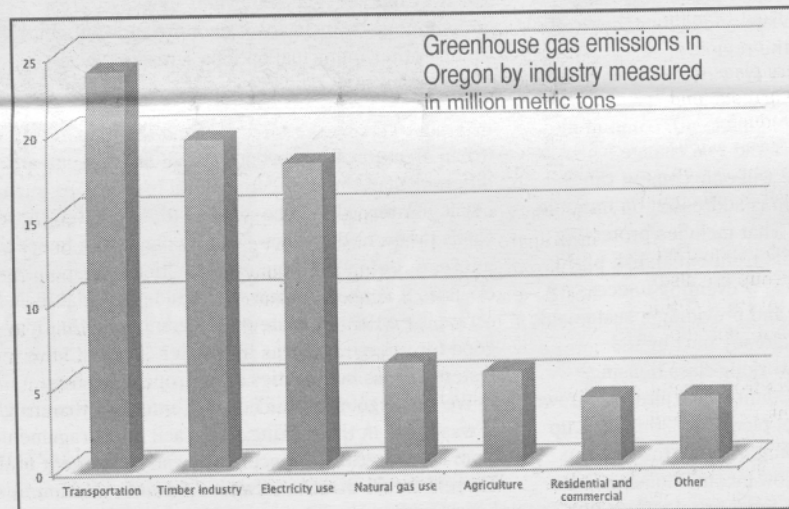
EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

Greenhouse gas emissions from timber industry practices in western Oregon are at least four times greater than emissions from Oregon's last remaining coal plant in Boardman, and equivalent to between 2 and 4 million new cars on the road, according to a report released Tuesday by the Center for Sustainable Economy, Geos Institute and Oregon Wild.

"Emissions from industrial forestry – and no one's disputing this – rank near the top of Oregon's greenhouse gas emissions," said lead report author and president at the Center for Sustainability, John Talberth. He said using standard measurements, forestry ranks second as the largest source of greenhouse gas in Oregon, averaging between about 9.8 and 19.4 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year since 2000.

The report, "Clearcutting our Carbon Accounts," argues forestry-industry carbon emissions should be counted and monitored and the industry should also be required to make changes consistent with state climate goals. It suggests Oregon policy makers find alternatives to clearcutting, lengthen harvest rotations and incentivize carbon storage in the tax code.

The report blames an "accounting trick" used by the forest industry nationwide to exempt itself from scrutiny for its emissions.



Greenhouse gas emissions from forestry in western Oregon state and private forests with emissions from five other sectors last estimated by the Oregon Department of Environmental Equality in 2012. Source: *Clearcutting our Carbon Accounts*

"The timber industry is taking credit for carbon absorbed on non-timber industry lands," said Talberth.

Carbon dioxide absorbed by forests conserved by nonprofits, landowners and the government count against timber industry emissions, which the industry claims brings its net emissions to zero, states the report.

In a letter to Oregon Global Warming Commission Chair Angus Duncan, the report's authors asked that his agency start monitoring the forest industry in its reports to the state legislature and promote policies that will rein in the industry's carbon emissions. His commission is tasked with making policy recommendations to the legislature for meeting state carbon emission targets.

Oregon's current trajectory will not meet the 2020 goal of getting carbon emissions to 10 percent below 1990 levels. The letter

states "getting a grip on the substantial emissions from industrial forestlands should be part of the solution."

In response, Duncan told Street Roots, "The letter writers are absolutely right in asserting this."

But, he said, his commission is "somewhat hamstrung" because while the legislature gave it many responsibilities, it gave it little authority, "and no budget whatsoever."

He said the commission doesn't have the resources and capability to do the kind of analysis the letter is asking for. He said he plans to meet with other state agencies to formulate a response to questions the letter raised, but it's unlikely that the response will be satisfactory given his commission's limited capabilities.

The largest source of forest industry carbon emissions comes from decaying

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CENTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY

branches and stumps left at logging sites, decaying short-use wood products like paper, and the decaying portions of trees milled off when creating lumber, said Talberth.

Trees store a lot of carbon, so when they decay – that carbon is released back into the atmosphere.

"The irony of that is, if well managed, Oregon's forests can sequester and store more carbon per acre than any other forests in the country," said Talberth. "And yet the opposite's occurring. We are releasing more carbon per square acre than any other acre of forest in the country."

Duncan said when creating the state's climate Roadmap to 2020 five years ago, a forest management committee concurred. This group, which included both timber companies and academics, "came to the general proposition that west side forests should be simply left alone," he said, and that forest products should largely come from privately owned forests, not state and federal lands as is common practice.

In addition to decay and the loss of carbon sinks, fertilizers used for replanting also contribute to climate change. Emissions from the same fertilizers are tracked and monitored when used in agriculture, said Talberth.

emily@streetroots.org