

THE GREAT CARBON PUSH-PULL: WHERE SCIENCE IS PUSHING AND POLICY IS PULLING THE OFFICIAL FOREST CARBON INVENTORY OF THE US

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Abstract—A national system of field inventory plots (FIA) is the primary data source for the annual assessment of US forest carbon (C) stocks and stock-change to meet reporting requirements under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The inventory data and their role in national carbon reporting continue to evolve. The framework of the previous C accounting system (up through 2015) was developed more than a decade ago when FIA’s annual inventory system was just being implemented and contemporary questions regarding the terrestrial C sink (e.g., attribution) did not exist. The time has come to develop a new framework that can quickly address new questions, enables C analytics, and uses all the inventory information (e.g., disturbances and land use change) while having the flexibility to engage a wider breadth of stakeholders and partner agencies. The current and future status of the science and framework of the US’ official C inventory will be discussed in the context of UNFCCC reporting and future C commitments.

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