



Connect with Us:

- [home](#)
- [health/toxics](#)
- [farming](#)
- [natural resources](#)
- [energy choices](#)
- [chemical index](#)
- [health tips](#)
- [media center](#)
- [about ewg](#)
- [take action](#)

**sign up**   [SIGN UP](#)



EWG RESEARCH



## Clearcut Disaster: Carbon Loophole Threatens U.S. Forests

By Mary S. Booth, Ph.D. with Richard Wiles

1  
tweet  
retweet

[Full Report](#) | [Press Release](#) |

[Share](#)

[ShareThis](#)

find something



**At EWG,**  
**our team of**  
**scientists,**  
**engineers,**  
**policy experts,**  
**lawyers and**  
**computer**  
**programmers pores**  
**over government**  
**data, legal**  
**documents, scientific**  
**studies and our own**  
**laboratory tests to**  
**expose threats to**  
**your health and the**  
**environment, and to**  
**find solutions. Our**  
**research brings to**  
**light unsettling facts**  
**that you have a right**  
**to know.**

### Executive summary

Almost no one would support massive clear-cutting of America's forests as a way to slow global warming and promote renewable energy. Yet that is precisely what is destined to happen under the incentives created by current and proposed policies, at both the state and federal level.

The reason for this outcome, which would sharply increase greenhouse gas emissions while wiping vast out numbers of trees that today help draw carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, is a fundamental flaw in current carbon accounting practices. This Enron-style accounting makes a glaringly false assumption, that burning trees and other biomass fuels produces zero net carbon emissions.

This false premise was identified in 2009 but remains deeply embedded in both pending climate change bills in Congress and in the "renewables portfolio standards" being promulgated by state and federal agencies.

How bad would it be?

EWG calculates that the current goal of generating 25 percent of U.S. electricity from renewable sources by 2025 would require the equivalent of clear-cutting between 18 million and 30 million acres of forest. Sufficient amounts of other biomass fuels simply don't exist in usable form. That amounts to leveling more than 46,000 square miles of forest - an area larger than the entire state of Pennsylvania.

By 2030, as utilities become more dependent on biomass to meet their renewable fuels targets, the devastation could encompass 50 million acres of forest.

EWG makes a number of recommendations to forestall this dismal result.

- Fix the flawed carbon accounting practices.
- Require biomass-burning plants to purchase carbon emissions allowances under any cap-and-trade scheme.
- Eliminate federal tax and funding incentives that subsidize forest cutting for fuel.
- Allow only high-efficiency, small-scale biomass plants to be considered "renewable."
- Require a thorough environmental review of the nation's plans for biomass power.

[Click to download full report](#)

#### Health/Toxics

- [Children's Health](#)
- [The Environment](#)
- [Our Food](#)
- [Our Water](#)

#### Farming

- [Farm Subsidies](#)
- [Black Farmers](#)
- [Conservation Programs](#)

#### Natural Resources

- [Fishing Subsidies](#)
- [Mining](#)
- [Oil & Gas](#)
- [Public Lands: Who Owns the West?](#)

#### Energy Choices

- [Biofuels](#)
- [Nuclear Waste](#)
- [Transportation](#)

[Consumer Products](#)  
[BodyBurden](#)  
[Pet Health](#)

[Water Subsidies](#)  
[Chemical Industry](#)

[Increase Text Size](#)  
[Decrease Text Size](#)

[PRIVACY](#)

[HEADQUARTERS](#) 1436 U Street, NW, Suite 100 | Washington, DC 20009 | (202) 667-6982 | [Contact Us](#)  
[CALIFORNIA OFFICE](#) 2201 Broadway, Suite 308 | Oakland, CA 94612 | [Contact Us](#)  
[MIDWEST OFFICE](#) 103 E. 6th Street, Suite 201 | Ames, IA 50010 | [Contact Us](#)  
[SACRAMENTO OFFICE](#) 1107 9th Street, Suite 340 | Sacramento, CA 95814 | [Contact Us](#)

Copyright 2007-2009, Environmental Working Group. All Rights Reserved.