This week marks the 16th Annual Meeting of the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force (GCF Task Force), a unique network of states and provinces from 11 countries covering more than one-third of the world's tropical forests. These subnational governments are convening to advance what we call the New Forest Economy – an economic transition that protects intact forests, restores degraded lands, and creates jobs and economic opportunities for the millions of people who live in these forests. Governors, civil servants, leaders from Indigenous territories and local communities, academics, private sector actors, funding partners and investors, and nongovernmental organizations recognize the problems and will be highlighting opportunities to increase investment in large-scale, jurisdictional solutions.

Without this type of transition, the world's tropical forests will not survive, and entire regions will face ecological collapse. (I've written about the GCF Task Force's efforts to advance a New Forest Economy on Legal Planet previously, as well as the importance of subnational action through platforms like the GCF Task Force and other partner networks).

Over the past year, the world has seen substantial changes through national elections, economic disruptions, and other impacts "indicators" of global and societal well-being.

Some bright spots stand out

According to Global Forest Watch, tropical forest loss dropped 36% in 2025, as compared to 2024. This is a dramatic near-term improvement year-over-year and may reflect the implementation of good policies and enforcement, and less catastrophic fires between the two years.

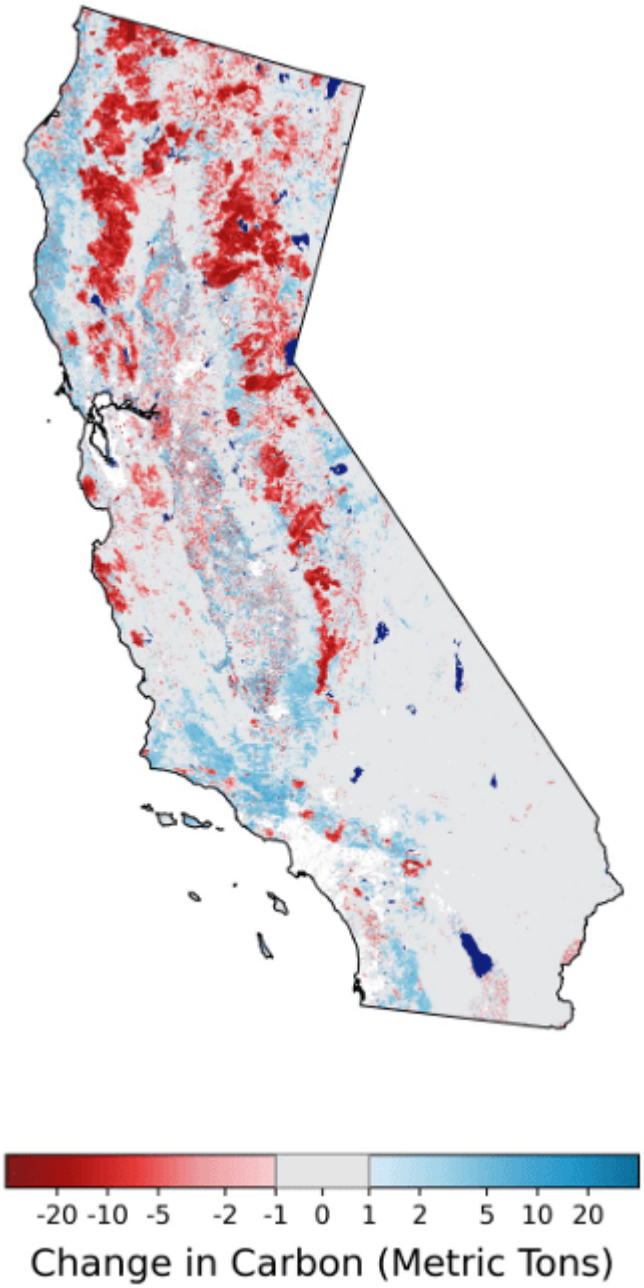
Similarly, within the GCF Task Force membership, new data from CTrees shows that of 35 states and provinces measured from within the GCF Task Force, 22 saw decreases in deforestation from 2016-2025, 7 had changes of less than 5%, and 6 experienced increased deforestation.

In addition to increasingly useful remote sensing data from Global Forest Watch, CTrees, and other organizations such as Chloris Geospatial, the science of assessing emissions from deforestation – and other types of land use change – is constantly improving. For instance, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) released its most comprehensive and scientifically advanced Natural and Working Lands Carbon

Inventory in February 2026. This inventory incorporates the latest methodologies and science in land measurement and remote sensing, bringing together government agencies, public and private actors, and academics in its design.

The California inventory provides a “quantitative estimate of organic carbon stored in California’s landscapes,” and “captures the influence of climate, wildfire, other disturbances, land-use change, and management on carbon stocks and stock change, including in vegetation, soils and harvested wood products.” Importantly, CARB published all the data used for the analysis and committed to continuing to publicly refine and update the inventory using the best available field, remote sensing, and land management data into the future. This information is vital to inform ongoing improvements to California’s climate, conservation, and carbon neutrality targets and to advancing actions and opportunities for nature-based solutions to be front-and-center in these efforts.

The analysis in the inventory found that between 2001-2022, California’s lands gained 45 million metric tons of carbon. However, the analysis also found carbon stocks declined by about 4% over the 2014-2022 timeframe, primarily in forests. The following figure from the inventory depicts change in total carbon stocks (biomass and soil carbon combined) between 2014-2022.



Change in total carbon stocks (biomass carbon and soil carbon combined) across California between 2014 and 2022. Source: CARB NWL Carbon Inventory (2025)

More work to do

Even while these bright spots exist, the same Global Forest Watch data shows that

deforestation in 2025 was still 46% higher than a decade ago, covering approximately 10.6 million acres of primary tropical forest area. So, there is still more work to be done. Advances in data quality, ease of access, and ability to depict and interpret results are key factors in how forest carbon, deforestation, degradation, and climate impacts are measured, analyzed, and used by policymakers and others to affect change. These factors can help build a virtuous cycle for improving how governments and communities develop forest, climate, and economic initiatives locally and at scale.

- Putting data into policy. Translating data into policy and ultimately into action is easier said than done, but governments, data providers, and partners are working together to make this happen. This is one of the GCF Task Force's pillars of work – ensuring that as remote sensing and other technological tools increase, the tools and the data are useful for governmental technicians and decision-makers. See here and here for write-ups on this key interconnection between policy, science, and data.

- Putting policy into practice. Once this data is put into policy, governments, communities, and companies need support to use it to implement their policies. This will look different in different places, but what is certain is that good governance requires transparency, evidence, and the ability to measure results and learn from them.

- Invest in implementation. As I've written here, the most fundamental barriers to halting and reversing deforestation are (a) the persistent and severe shortfall in forest finance that is available to protect forests and (b) current economic drivers that continue to place a higher value on land conversion and extraction than on standing forests. Investing in systems of governance and economic development to create robust and policies/laws – based on transparent decision-making processes and the best-available data, in a way that is practical and sustainable for local decision-makers – is the only way to address these barriers over the long-run.

- Report on progress. And then we must support mechanisms to report on the results. How are the policies working? Are they making a difference as a whole in terms of addressing the social and economic drivers that have resulted in the still-terrifying loss of 1 soccer field of tropical forest per minute? If not, why not? If so, why and can good practices be replicated and scaled?

Advances in the GCF Task Force

The GCF Task Force continues to advance our Blueprint for a New Forest Economy, focusing on diversifying, innovating, and localizing new and existing funding mechanisms to develop a thriving bioeconomy, sustain critical natural infrastructure, build out stronger and more transparent supply chains, restore degraded lands and increase resilience to fire, drought, and pests, and build this with underlying governance tools to combat forest crime and protect communities, biodiversity, long-term economic health, and the climate. These efforts are underway across all of our member jurisdictions and will be discussed in greater detail during this week's annual meeting in Caquetá, Colombia.

Stay tuned here for results.