

AASHE STARS INNOVATION CREDIT FOREST SEQUESTRATION PROJECT

Deforestation, land use changes and poor land management practices are all considered major contributors to global climate change. It follows that sustainable forest management and conservation of open lands can be an important part of the climate solution. Higher education is leading the way against climate change. Colgate University in particular is following an innovative track by considering the role of their forest land in achieving institutional goals to reduce or neutralize the university's climate impacts.

What is the role of campus forests and open lands? These lands are valuable assets that could be allocated toward any number of university goals, including developed uses. Colgate has made a conscious choice to view these resources as part of the institution's carbon budget. With this in mind, existing and emerging forests are carbon emission sinks – rather than true offsets. Until recently very little work or serious dialogue occurred in this important area. Colgate's internal review uncovered true opportunities for innovation in this area.

After careful deliberation, sustainability practitioners at Colgate University have acknowledged the important role of their forests in achieving climate neutrality. Failure to explicitly express that role in Colgate's campus greenhouse gas inventory and climate action plan would overlook a critical opportunity to educate faculty and students on the value of forests in addressing global climate concerns. As a result, the university is pursuing third-party certification for sustainable forest management and has approved a long-term forest stewardship plan. As a part of this plan, the university adopted a carbon sequestration measurement protocol, and established a baseline inventory, following commonly accepted measurement practices. These steps provide formal recognition of Colgate's effort to quantify and maximize the annual rate of sequestration of their existing and emerging forests. Ultimately, inclusion of forests in the university's climate action plan adds an important objective to the sustainable management of Colgate's forests and expresses a long-term commitment to protection of open space uses as a means of ameliorating climate change.

Altogether, this work will help Colgate achieve climate neutrality and provides a rationale for inclusion of campus forests in their greenhouse gas inventories. Ultimately, this work can serve as a model for other institutions.

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