

Green Notes: Weekly tips for reducing your carbon footprint from First United Methodist's Green Team

Protect natural areas to reduce carbon emissions

Living in Missoula, we are privileged to know firsthand the many benefits of natural areas – old-growth forests, native grasslands, crystal lakes and free-running rivers. But that abundance has meaning beyond the solace and sustenance we find in our valley's surrounding mountains and waters.

New [research by the Center for American Progress](#) shows that President Biden's plan to conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands, waters and oceans in the next decade could stop about 215 million metric tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere each year. That's the equivalent of taking 47 million cars off the road, and illustrates the value of conserving natural areas – which store carbon and help slow the rate of global warming.

Already, U.S. forests, wetlands and grasslands sequester 10-15 percent of our nation's annual carbon emissions, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. But we're losing those natural areas at the rate of a football field every 30 seconds, the new report warns. Put another way, we lose 15 percent of these areas' carbon-storage capacity each year.

So how can the Biden administration achieve its 30 percent goal by 2030? The Center's researchers provided these guidelines: Stop all further loss of natural areas. Replant forests that have been logged on private lands. Restore historic fire patterns on up to 15 million acres of Western forests. Restore the West's millions of acres of burned forests. In fact, the Center said fire restoration

projects alone could reduce U.S. carbon emissions by up to 30 million metric tons a year.

“The point we wanted to get across is that nature is a foundational piece of climate action and achieving President Biden’s carbon reduction goals,” Jenny Rowland-Shea, the Center’s deputy director, told the Washington Post this week. “Under the status quo right now, the U.S. is quietly and rapidly losing its best defense against climate change.”

The Center for American Progress isn’t alone in its conclusions. Researchers at Oregon State University bolstered the Center’s work with a detailed analysis of the carbon-storage capacity of Western U.S. forests and the accompanying benefits to biodiversity. That [paper was published](#) this week in the journal Nature Communications & Environment.

What can we do as members of First UMC and residents of Missoula? Support statewide and local groups that advocate for the preservation of natural areas: Montana Conservation Voters, Northern Plains Resource Council, Trout Unlimited, Wild Montana, MEIC, Defenders of Wildlife, Montana Wildlife Federation, to name a few. And support federal legislation like the [Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship Act](#) that protects and restores our western Montana forests and waters.