**LEADERSHIP SUMMIT FOR CLIMATE, WOOD & FORESTS**

***Envisioning how the mass timber building movement can support healthy forests for climate, people & nature in North America***

***DRAFT Joint Principles Statement***

Climate change poses unprecedented threats to life on Earth, including to the forests and people of North America. Recognizing that the energy used to construct and operate buildings accounts for approximately 40% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the green building community in North America and globally has led a revolution that has greatly increased the energy efficiency of buildings and resulted in significant reductions in GHG emissions. But this focus on operational carbon does not address the carbon embodied in building materials throughout their lifecycle through emissions generated from the extraction, manufacturing, transport and use of these materials, estimated to account for at least 10% of the global total. Embodied carbon represents one-fourth of annual building sector emissions and is growing. Given that the global building stock will double in area by 2060, **it is critical that we move as fast and far as possible to reduce embodied carbon, creating buildings whose net carbon footprint is neutral or even negative.**

This is the basis on which interest in “tall wood” buildings made from mass timber products such as cross-laminated timber (CLT) is growing. Through the process of photosynthesis, trees capture and store atmospheric carbon in wood; therefore, substituting wood and other bio-based materials for more energy-intensive, non-renewable materials in building construction is widely viewed as a potential climate solution.

The degree to which increased wood use mitigates climate change hinges on understanding and appropriately harnessing the economic, and ecological relationship between forests and solid wood products Three factors are critical to this effort: 1) We depend on private working forests for ninety percent of the wood used in the U.S. built environment; 2) private working forests are already carbon negative, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the annual forest carbon sequestration in the lower 48 states; and 3) existing forest certification programs are effective in determining sustainable forest practices beyond decarbonization.

In addition to pursuing decarbonization through wood use, we must also seek decarbonization in forests. Forests store more carbon than any other type of terrestrial biome, including carbon stored aboveground in live and dead trees and other vegetation, as well as carbon stored below ground in roots and soil. Scientists increasingly recognize that a key strategy to combat climate change is through forest management, forest restoration, and forest conservation. These approaches can help retain forest extent and productivity while also maintaining and enhancing ecological health and resilience.

**AFFIRMATIONS**

As building owners, developers, architects, engineers, contractors, mass timber producers and advocates, LCA professionals, forest and forestry experts, environmentalists, and Indigenous leaders committed to combating climate change, we put forth the following affirmations to align and guide our efforts:

1. **Life cycle assessment and forest carbon accounting are essential tools to enable the procurement of wood products.** Current practices of life cycle assessment must be improved to provide verifiable, transparent, and measurable estimates of the relative carbon impacts of wood products. The LCA, forestry, wood products, and design communities must work together to improve the quality, resolution and availability of environmental impact data on forestry practices and wood product manufacturing.
2. **Building and architectural codes should fully consider the carbon benefits of advanced wood construction.** Local codes should be updated to better incorporate whole building LCAs that account for embodied and embedded carbon in building materials.
3. **Public funding should be invested to improve decision making about building materials**. Training programs for architects, builders, and other professionals will help them make informed decisions about the carbon impacts of building materials and their sourcing.
4. **Market and incentive-based approaches are needed to increase carbon sequestration and storage in forests in addition to the use of wood in the built environment.** Voluntary measures to increase carbon sequestration and storage in forests to add to and complement the carbon benefits of wood utilization in the built environment provides a powerful mitigation combination. Approaches to promote restoration, afforestation, conservation of natural forests, and improved forest management may include:
   1. Performance-based payments for carbon sequestration;
   2. Other payment for environmental services programs;
   3. Funding for conservation easements;
   4. Investments in community forests;
   5. Investments or incentives to improve soil health;
   6. Investments or incentives to promote reforestation and afforestation.
5. **Carbon trading programs** **can play an important role in incentivizing projects to enhance forest carbon stocks**.Such carbon sequestration projects must be quantifiable, verifiable, additional, and permanent, and subject to credible third-party verification.
6. **Active forest management in private working forests must be complemented by forest restoration and conservation in the broader landscape**. Often forest restoration and management for timber can go hand in hand (e.g. reducing the risk of severe wildfire and widespread disease and insect infestations by thinning small trees in overcrowded stands and creating strategic fuel breaks).
7. **Other environmental and social values are essential to a comprehensive climate solution**. While increasing carbon mitigation through wood utilization and forest carbon sequestration, we must also maintain or enhance environmental and social values, such as biodiversity, water and soil quality, Indigenous Peoples’ rights, and human and economic health in economically disadvantaged rural communities.
8. **Forest certification is an important way to demonstrate sustainable forest management.** Certification systems are important because they can independently verify sustainable forestry and facilitate the procurement of sustainably sourced wood. Certification systems continue enhance their standards to ensure forest management activities address climate change adaption and mitigation. Credible North American certification systems include the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and American Tree Farm System (ATFS).
9. **Federal investment in data collection and analysis will enhance our ability to measure forest carbon.** The U.S. and Canada have well-established forest inventory and analysis programs that can provide baseline and ongoing measurement of forest carbon stocks by region and nationally. Additional investments in these programs will enhance our ability to advance forest carbon benefits.

We invite others to join us in pursuing, refining and realizing this draft vision. Acting together, we can steward our forests, stabilize the climate, and secure a just and sustainable future for generations to come.