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Fighting Global Warming — Hawaiian Style

By Lewis Rothstein | 02/04/2013

The verdict is in. Our planet is in a sustained warming trend. The undeniable scientific evidence points to various human activities as the main cause.

Although this is a worldwide dilemma, Hawaii is uniquely positioned to offer the world community a blueprint for how best to structure public-private partnerships for addressing global warming. With this approach we can sequester greenhouse-enhancing carbon dioxide (CO2), re-establish native biodiversity and preserve our most precious resource – water – while enhancing both our economic and societal well-being.

The foundation for this blueprint is Hawaii's tropical forests.

Before we examine how Hawaii's forests might serve as a test bed for the simultaneous stewardship of our environment and our economy let's take a closer look at the problem of global warming.

There are two broad categories that determine the evolution of earth's climate: natural climate variability and climate change. While humankind has no control over natural climate cycles (for example the changing of the seasons and the El Niño cycle) we do have much to say about climate change.

We can mitigate global warming in two broad categories: reducing the injection of earth-warming 'greenhouse gases' (e.g. CO2); and/or removing existing CO2 from our atmosphere. Reducing CO2 levels alone will not bring us to where we need to be with respect to atmospheric CO2 levels called for by the scientific community. We must also actively encourage CO2 removal techniques.

Arguably the most natural way to actively remove CO2 from present-day atmospheric levels is afforestation (planting trees). Management of our tropical forests with the goal of CO2 reduction, sustainable biodiversity and water resource preservation is the category that Hawai'i can take global leadership.

This leadership takes shape through the support of public-private partnerships that apply creative forestry business models on State of Hawaii lands. Most of the pieces are in place. There is a convergence of public policy and entrepreneurship in Hawaii that is globally unique and franchisable.

On the policy side, the State has programs for preserving water resources and a stated goal to regulate greenhouse gases. This can be accomplished by designating State lands for carbon sequestration through sustainable forestry and afforestation.

On the entrepreneurial side, a local company, Hawaiian Legacy Hardwoods (HLH), has implemented a business model that combines forestry stewardship with a fully vetted carbon sequestration program that is moving towards becoming the first Hawaiian koa forestry program formally registered in one of the premiere US carbon markets.

The HLH business model has been proven to work on relatively small-sized private lands however it was specifically designed to scale significantly upward as well as to work in regions outside of Hawaii. The result is not only carbon sequestration. A well-managed forest protects water resources, restores native biodiversity, provides sustainable timber harvests and provides tourist venues.

The impact on the State economy would be substantial, both for revenue generation and job creation. Millions of dollars per year could be generated by reforesting Hawaii with fast growing native hardwoods such as koa while simultaneously preserving our indigenous ecosystems and preserving our water resource. With climate change a clear and present threat to the future of the planet, carbon sequestration is not only the right thing to do but could be lucrative and beneficial for the citizens of Hawaii.

About the author: *Lewis Rothstein, a UH graduate, is currently Professor of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography.*

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Planting trees may not work, since atmospheric conditions have already deteriorated to the extent that trees may not be able to grow. Planting Cannabis hemp would sequester more carbon (nine tons per acre, per growing season), faster; while producing atmospheric aerosol "monoterpenes" that refract UV-B radiation away from the

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