



119 Washington Avenue, Suite 1G  
Albany, NY 12210  
518.432.1405  
[info@aceny.org](mailto:info@aceny.org) | [www.aceny.org](http://www.aceny.org)

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## [Agriculture & Forestry Advisory Panel - Update from March 16, 2021](#)

By Jeff Jones

Meeting on March 16th, the Agriculture and Forestry Advisory Panel discussed ongoing work to refine its recommendations to the Climate Action Council. The meeting featured staff reports on three main categories: Developing the bio-based economy; agriculture and forest conservation strategies to maintain and expand carbon sequestration; and forest and land management.

Maureen Leddy, Director of the Department of Environmental Conservation's Office of Climate Change presented subcommittee results on a wide agenda of bio-remediation strategies. These include expanding the market for sustainably harvested long-lived wood products and a sustainable biomass feedstock action plan targeted to 2050 for hard-to-decarbonize products. Developing strategies for increasing market access for low-carbon products will be the focus of an Empire State Development economic analysis research team that has begun tracking and reporting on related emerging trends. A goal of this work is to spur innovative use of low carbon procurement requirements for state government projects. This will include identifying high-value products from bio-based processing of New York grown feedstocks. Strategic use of incentives to scale-up high demand products where low carbon alternatives are not yet cost effective will also be part of the panel's recommendations.

Other recommendations will focus on promoting carbon sequestering products such as hemp that are substitutes for fossil fuel-based materials will also be addressed. In conclusion, Leddy said, planners need to be thinking about where the state want to be in 2050. How can New York grow the bio-based product sector to drive their establishment as an economic alternative? As other panels are recommending, a dashboard needs to be deelopod to help buyers find and understand low-carbon products.

Reporting on an overview of forest conservation, Jeff Mapes, DEC land conservation specialist, noted the importance of developing strategies to maintain and enhance the state's carbon sequestration potential through avoided forest conversion. Given the strength of New York's conservation community, especially land trusts, Mapes noted that the land conservation infrastructure is in place. What is missing are sufficient tax incentives, and staffing levels needed to implement land conservation goals, audits and

regulatory changes. State reimbursement of municipalities must be sufficient to deal with shifting revenue that may result from enhanced forest conservation goals and policies.

Mapes noted there are nearly 700,000 individual forest owners in New York. Many of these owners face hard choices about the future of their properties. Like agricultural lands that are developed for housing and commerce, forest lands will be lost without more financial support for conservation. The subcommittee report will address the need to reinvigorate the state's open space planning process with emphasis on conservation as a climate strategy, while state policies and incentives are needed to reduce sprawl while spurring climate smart investments in community development. Working in partnership with the Land Use and Local Government Advisory Panel, the Ag & Forestry panel will be recommending the use and expansion of existing state smart growth-oriented programs. With help from the state, these should also be reinforced in county and regional planning.

Additional reporting by the DEC's Peter Innes on climate smart forest management practices is available on the NYSERDA Climate Action Council website.