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MEDIA RELEASE

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Can BC forests help keep climate change in check?

A major new study announced today will help ensure one of British Columbia's (BC's) most important sectors – forestry – can endure under a changing climate, and even help slow down the rate of global warming.

The five-year, \$1.5-million project funded by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS), a collaboration of BC's four leading research universities hosted and led by the University of Victoria, brings together climate, forestry, and socio-economic policy experts from academia, government, industry, and First Nations.

PICS executive director Tom Pedersen says the diverse team involved in the new PICS Forest Carbon Management Project reflects the complexity of safeguarding forests in the face of climate change but also in maximizing their potential to help meet provincial greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets.

“The devastation wrought by mountain pine beetle in this province has been our wake-up call to the impacts of climate change,” he says. “BC must design forest management policies that will work under a range of climate change scenarios. For example, how will a particular tree species in a region respond to one, two or three degrees of warming, and more generally where will climate change enhance or reduce forest growth?”

British Columbia's 55 million hectares of forests can help slow or mitigate climate change by removing heat-trapping carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere and storing that carbon in living forests or forestry products that can be used instead of emission-intensive steel, concrete or plastics products.

The PICS Forest Carbon Management Project – led by Werner Kurz, a senior research scientist with Natural Resources Canada – will investigate how forest management strategies can be structured and regionally customized to maximize the forestry sector's “carbon sink” and climate change adaptation potential.

The project will test how various approaches to harvesting, silviculture, site preparation and stand reestablishment activities can alter GHG balances. For example, reducing delays in forest regeneration, not burning harvest slash and modifying harvesting and wood processing can lower emissions. The research team will also identify opportunities to substitute timber products for carbon-intensive steel, concrete or plastics products in many sectors, including the building industry.

With one in five jobs in British Columbia related to forestry, there is more than the environment on the line.

Pedersen says the forest sector can help the province meet its GHG reduction targets as well as its socio-economic goals, despite the warming climate. But he says first, the right actions to achieve this must be identified and their impacts on the GHG balance quantified. Results from the first phase of the five-year project, are expected by March 2016.

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