As the Biden Administration and Congress work together to implement the $9 billion “Plan to Conserve Global Forests: Critical Carbon Sinks” we recommend the following guiding principles for implementation of the Plan and for the funding pledged between now and 2030. The U.S. has an important role to play in both helping build the global agenda to conserve forests and other critical carbon sinks and in leading the way through its own bilateral programs.

**Prioritizing Intact Forest Ecosystem Conservation:** To meet the Paris climate goals, we must not only succeed in halting and reversing the rate of deforestation globally by 2030, we must ensure that the integrity - the health - of forest ecosystems is conserved. While attention is needed on the current frontier of agricultural expansion to reduce emissions from near-term deforestation, protecting critical carbon sinks must focus resources on protecting the sink or “sponge” effect of intact forest ecosystems. These forests are removing over 30% of our CO2 emissions from the atmosphere each year. Intact forests are preventing at least an additional ½ degree Celsius of global temperature increase above current levels and remain critical for achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. The value to the global economy of this forest carbon sponge is estimated to be in the tens of trillions of dollars, but there are currently no financial incentives to invest in its conservation. The U.S. effort must prioritize efforts to protect intact forests and primary tropical forests in the three major rainforest areas of the planet, as well as tropical peatlands and mangrove ecosystems. In that context, U.S. investments should address the particular needs and situations of the “high forest, low deforestation” tropical countries, in addition to providing support to countries with currently high rates of deforestation and forest degradation.

**Carbon Markets, Results-Based Payments, and Dedicated Funding for Capacity Building:** We support the inclusion of carbon markets and results-based payments as mechanisms for incentivizing forest conservation while also including mechanisms to support the implementation of measures and activities to address drivers of deforestation and habitat conversion. A portfolio of U.S. support should include technical assistance to forest countries to enable them to develop and implement sustainable land use policies, equitable land tenure systems, and alternative livelihood pathways. It should also enable them to meet compliance-grade standards of international carbon markets and non-market results-based payment using public funds to incentivize performance in countries not yet able to meet those standards, to access markets, or to meet their land-use targets in their Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement. Programs to support access to carbon markets and results-based payments should incentivize a rapid transition towards jurisdictional-scale implementation and accounting, including fully nested projects, to meet demand for high-quality tropical forest carbon credits with necessary safeguards, monitoring, and verification measures.¹ Some portion of the pledged U.S. funding should be allocated to meet associated needs for capacity-building, and USAID is the agency with the greatest relevant experience and technical expertise to implement such programs.

¹ For more information, see [Draft Consensus Statement on High Quality Tropical Forest Carbon Credits](#).
**Ensuring Funding Has the Greatest On-The-Ground Impact:** The mechanism or mechanisms by which the $9 billion is managed need to be carefully designed to ensure the greatest on-the-ground impact, with robust monitoring and transparent reporting against objectives. Effective delivery mechanisms, including through civil society organizations such as regional and national Indigenous organizations, must ensure that funding gets to the frontlines to support climate and conservation objectives within a clear framework that specifies adherence to the UNFCCC Cancun Safeguards. Decision-making governance must also ensure credibility and transparency with respect to funding allocations.

**Biodiversity Conservation:** Efforts to conserve forests for climate mitigation goals should also prioritize safeguarding the estimated 80% of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity contained in the remaining tropical forests. Not only is conserving that biodiversity an important U.S. objective on its own; the ecological integrity of intact tropical forests is one of the key reasons those forests are such effective carbon sinks. Intact tropical forests are complex and dynamic ecosystems that contribute to food and water security, wildlife protection, and pandemic prevention—in addition to sequestering carbon pollution.

**Rights and Livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs):** U.S. financing for the Plan must contain effective measures to ensure recognition and effective protection of the land and resource rights and livelihoods of IPLCs, as well as effective, informed participation and equitable benefit sharing in forest conservation initiatives and pay-for-performance schemes. Not only does basic social justice demand this approach, it is also the most effective basis for durable forest protection in many parts of the tropics. Further, funding under the Plan should support building the capacity of IPLCs to employ remote sensing and other technologies to monitor and defend their territories against deforestation threats, a strategy which has proven to be effective in the Amazon Basin and elsewhere.

**Combating Forest-Related Crimes and Associated Corruption:** Funding under the Plan must also support efforts to eradicate forest-related crimes such as illegal logging, illegal forest land conversion, and illegal gold mining, along with associated corruption. Left unaddressed, persistent illegality and impunity undermine all conservation efforts, including payment-for-performance initiatives.

**The Role of Restoration:** Restoration of degraded landscapes is a critical global development priority, and can be crucial for protecting and connecting areas of natural forest, but restoration cannot and should not replace or outcompete investments in protecting intact and primary forests.

**Coordination with Other Forest Conservation Measures:** Finally, implementation of the Biden Plan to Conserve Global Forests should be fully coordinated with other U.S. measures to address global deforestation and forest degradation, including existing and proposed legislative measures to restrict imports of illegally sourced timber and agricultural commodities. The “whole of government” approach to halting global deforestation by 2030 must include strong and coherent diplomatic, aid, and trade measures, including U.S. representation in international financial institutions such as the World Bank, and U.S. participation in public-private partnerships such as the LEAF Coalition.

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