

# ***CARB Adopts Tropical Forest Standard That Opponents Say Violates Indigenous Sovereignty***

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***Community*** (This content is not subject to review by Daily Kos staff prior to publication.)

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On the evening before the Global Climate Strikes that took place on September 20, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) voted 7-4-1 to approve the controversial Tropical Forest Standard (TFS) at its 10-hour-long meeting in Sacramento.

Environmental justice advocates said the decision will pave the way “for California’s polluters to continue paying to further pollute through a flawed market scheme that hurts public health, with no meaningful climate mitigation or protections for indigenous sovereignty.”

Indigenous leaders from Brazil, Columbia and Peru in the Amazon Basin, Chiapas and Indonesia testified against the so-called “Tropical Forest Standard” at the meeting. Yurok Tribal Members also testified in opposition to their Tribal government’s support of the TFS and cap-and-trade programs.

Tom Goldtooth, Executive Director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, stood in solidarity with members of the Yurok and Hoopa Valley Tribes who testified at the meeting against the adoption of the Tropical Forest Standard (TFS).

“Carbon Markets is Colonialism at its core,” said Thomas H. Joseph II, Hoopa Valley Tribal Member. “Signing trade agreements with corporations is the same as signing treaties with foreign governments. Allowing companies to use your ancestors carbon print to destroy your children’s and the world’s future is a shame.”

At the end of the meeting, indigenous leaders and their allies, led by Isabella Zizi and Maria Xiomara Dorsey of Idle No More of SF Bay, marched out of the EPA building singing, followed by a prayer by Chief Ninawa Huni Kui, president of the Indigenous Federation of the Huni Kui in Brazil.

“Despite strong objections of environmental justice and indigenous groups from around the world, as well as overwhelming evidence that international offset programs have largely failed and result in human rights abuses, the deciding vote in favor of endorsing TFS was Hector De La Torre, the Assembly’s purported environmental justice representative on the CARB,” according to a statement from the California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA).

Board member Dr. John Balmes abstained from the vote, citing public health concerns, while Senator Dean Florez, Supervisor John Gioia, Supervisor Nathan Fletcher, and Ms. Diane Takvorian all voted no, citing serious concerns with the integrity of the TFS and need to uphold the mandate of CARB to protect public health and focus on reducing emissions here in California.

“It is unacceptable that a CARB Board member who is supposed to represent environmental justice communities was so clearly hostile to their concerns and positions, and was the deciding factor in moving this flawed and dangerous measure forward,” said Gladys Limón, Executive Director, California Environmental Justice Alliance. “While we expect to have to advocates against false climate solutions pushed by groups who recklessly disregard the welfare of our communities, we are astounded to find ourselves also fighting against a person holding a position that statutory law intends to be our voice on the CARB. Hector De La Torre has not been an ally to the environmental justice community since his appointment, and he is not our representative.”

Limón noted that the TFS is a non-enforceable offset protocol promoted by Environmental Defense Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and Earth Innovation Institute

– all environmental groups that take money from regulated industries and who frequently promote strategies that purport to help the environment while sacrificing the health and well-being of communities of color. These organizations often argue that what is good for the most people is the responsible choice, even when those choices mean that those most vulnerable suffer severe consequences.

“It is a shame that – yet again – environmental justice communities are forced to defend themselves against a strategy promoted by corporate-funded environmental groups,” said Katie Valenzuela, Policy & Political Director, California Environmental Justice Alliance. “These groups often promote strategies that sacrifice the health and well-being of communities of color in the interest of promoting dubious solutions for our climate crisis. In this case, these environmental groups promoted the TFS as a way to help companies “greenwash” their organizations without actually reducing emissions, and created serious divisions within indigenous communities to accomplish their goal.”

In his speech at the end of the hearing, Mr. De La Torre cited the fact that the vote was not about including any offset credits generated by the TFS in California’s Cap-and-Trade program, ignoring the fact that such a linkage is discussed on the first page of the TFS.

“It was also discovered that Mr. De La Torre used his role on CARB to lobby legislators for the proposed TFS, thus actively working against the position of the environmental justice communities he was appointed to represent,” according to the coalition.

AB 1288, authored in 2015 by Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins, changed the composition of CARB to add two members to represent environmental justice communities – one appointed by the Senate Rule Committee and the other appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly. Mr. De La Torre was appointed to serve as Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon’s environmental justice appointee in December 2018.

