

Opportunities and Trade-offs among BECCS and the Food, Water, Energy, Biodiversity, and Social Systems Nexus at Regional Scales

PAUL C. STOY, SELENA AHMED, MEGHANN JARCHOW, BENJAMIN RASHFORD, DAVID SWANSON, SHANNON ALBEKE, GABRIEL BROMLEY, E. N. J. BROOKSHIRE, MARK D. DIXON, JULIA HAGGERTY, PERRY MILLER, BRENT PEYTON, ALISA ROYEM, LEE SPANGLER, CRISTA STRAUB, AND BENJAMIN POULTER

Carbon dioxide must be removed from the atmosphere to limit climate change to 2°C or less. The integrated assessment models used to develop climate policy acknowledge the need to implement net negative carbon emission strategies, including bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS), to meet global climate imperatives. The implications of BECCS for the food, water, energy, biodiversity, and social systems (FWEBS) nexus at regional scales, however, remain unclear. Here, we present an interdisciplinary research framework to examine the trade-offs as well as the opportunities among BECCS scenarios and FWEBS on regional scales using the Upper Missouri River Basin (UMRB) as a case study. We describe the physical, biological, and social attributes of the UMRB, and we use grassland bird populations as an example of how biodiversity is influenced by energy transitions, including BECCS. We then outline a “conservation” BECCS strategy that incorporates societal values and emphasizes biodiversity conservation.

Keywords: agroecosystems, biofuels, land-use management, natural resources, sustainability

Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) continue to increase as a result of land-use change, fossil energy production, and other anthropogenic activities (Le Quéré et al. 2013). To ameliorate the impact of GHGs on climate, international negotiations led by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) target a 2°C maximum increase in global average temperature (Meinshausen et al. 2009), assumed to be a “safe” threshold for climate change. The Paris Agreement, signed on 22 April 2016 by 195 countries, takes this effort a step further by pursuing efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C (Hulme 2016, Rogelj et al. 2016). Such targets guide policy scenarios for fossil-fuel management via integrated assessment models (IAMs) to achieve climate stabilization (Moss et al. 2010).

Integrated assessment models emphasize interactions among global economic, energy, land-use, and technology systems (Jones et al. 2013, Collins et al. 2015) and play a major role in climate-change-mitigation policy, with large implications for Earth-system management (Schellnhuber 1999, Barros 2014, Stocker 2014). Since the *Fifth Assessment*

Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR5; IPCC 2014), the development of global GHG reduction scenarios via IAMs has shifted to emphasize net negative CO₂ emission—that is, net carbon sequestration. This is because GHG emissions will now peak later than previously hoped and atmospheric GHG concentrations will decline less steeply than necessary to avoid climate warming of 2°C or less (Rockström et al. 2017).

Negative CO₂ emission pathways rely on emerging technologies, including *bioenergy with carbon capture and storage* (BECCS; Kriegler et al. 2013, van Vuuren et al. 2013), in which biomass is used to generate energy and CO₂ is removed from the atmosphere through geologic sequestration or by enhancing natural carbon (C) storage (Fuss et al. 2013, Smith et al. 2015). The proposed BECCS economy is important to modeling efforts in the latest IPCC AR5 (Tavoni et al. 2014) and continues to play a large role in the shared socioeconomic pathways (SSPs) of the forthcoming *Sixth IPCC Assessment Report* (Lotze-Campen et al. 2013, Riahi et al. 2017). To meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, global anthropogenic CO₂ emissions need to be reduced

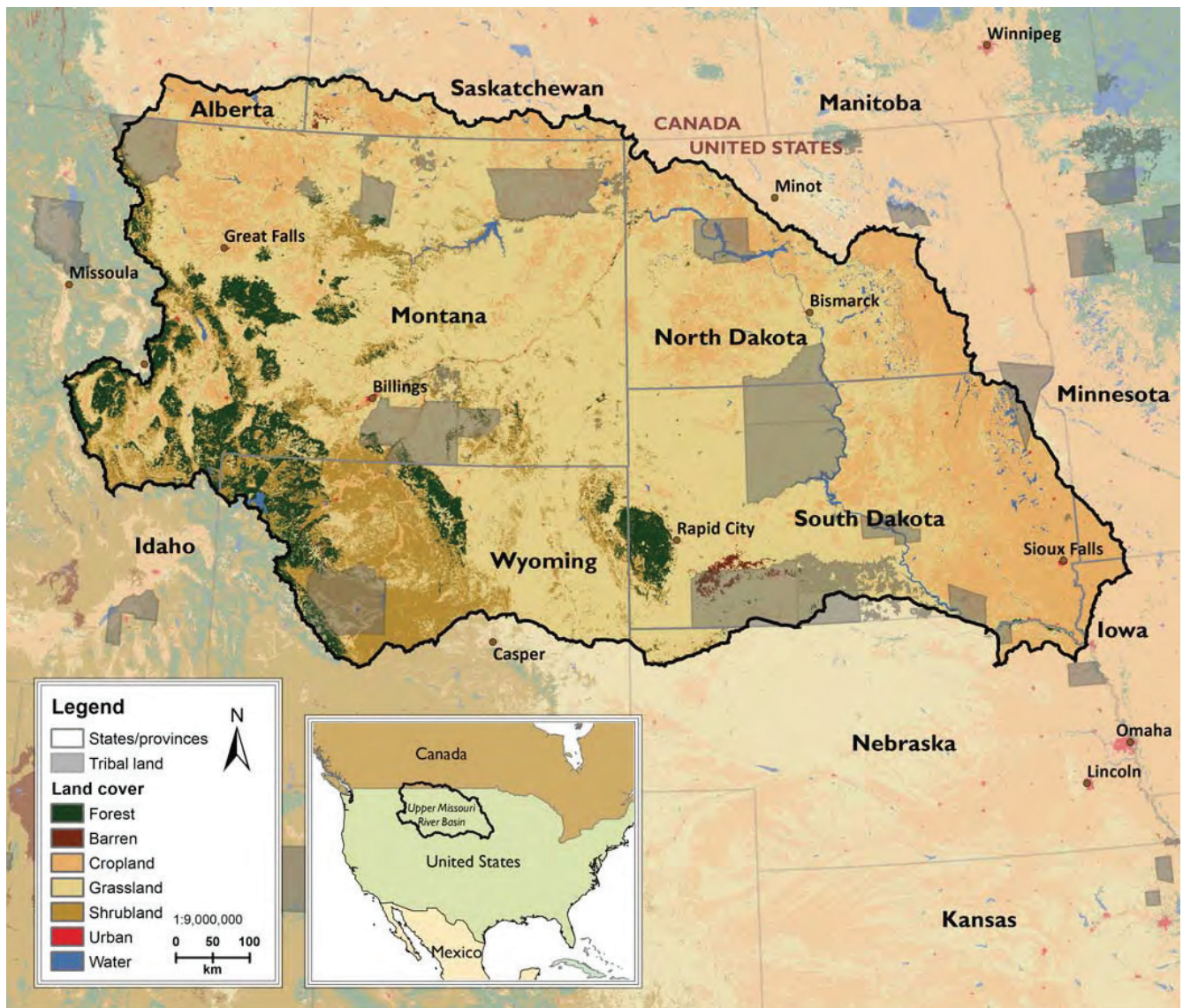


Figure 1. The Upper Missouri River Basin (UMRB) is defined as the region upriver from the confluence of the Big Sioux and Missouri Rivers in Sioux City, Iowa (excluding the Niobrara watershed), with major land-use classifications and administrative (state and reservation) boundaries.

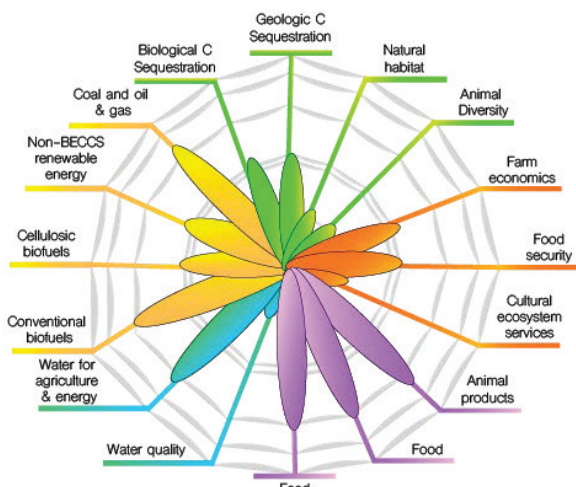
by approximately half every decade, and atmospheric CO₂ removal needs to approach 5 metric gigatons per year with no net land-use emissions—including those due to land-use change—by 2050 (Rockström et al. 2017), underscoring the importance of adopting CO₂ removal techniques such as BECCS globally.

Although BECCS may make sense in global climate scenarios, the implications of BECCS for food security, clean energy, water resources, biodiversity, social systems, and other attributes of value to society at regional scales are less clear (Rhodes and Keith 2008, Bonsch et al. 2014, Tian et al. 2016). Despite the importance of BECCS in the UNFCCC process, environmental and socioeconomic trade-offs for large-scale deployment of BECCS are poorly considered in regional studies and are of growing concern, calling into

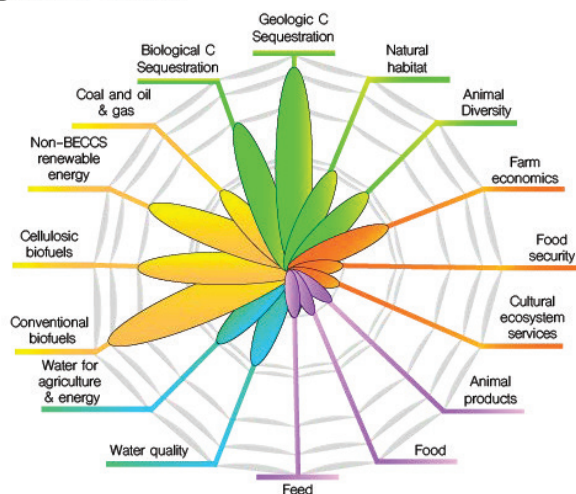
question the overall validity of IAMs as they guide policy (Fuss et al. 2014, Smith et al. 2015, Zilberman 2015).

Here, we describe an interdisciplinary framework for analyzing the trade-offs and opportunities among emerging BECCS strategies and the regional food, water, energy, biodiversity, and social systems (FWEBS) that they affect across a diverse and changing region of North America, the Upper Missouri River Basin (UMRB; figure 1). We first describe the FWEBS research framework (figure 2) and characterize the UMRB as a case study for regional BECCS implementation; we then discuss how scenario development can help us understand its interaction with the FWEBS nexus (figure 3). The discussion is guided by our goal to understand whether negative CO₂ emissions can be reached in the UMRB, under what land-use configurations, and at what cost or benefit to

Business as usual



Aggressive BECCS



Conservation BECCS

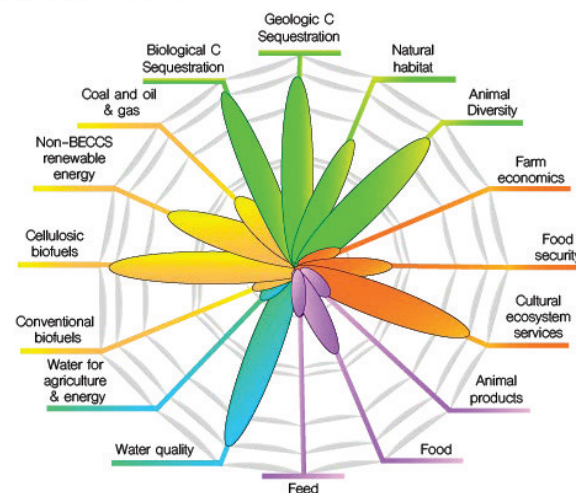


Figure 2. Conceptual diagrams following Foley and colleagues (2005) for business-as-usual scenarios, “aggressive” bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) scenarios, and “conservation” BECCS scenarios that integrate sustainable management of the food, water, energy, biodiversity, and social systems (FWEBS) nexus.

local communities and ecosystem (as well as Earth-system) services.

The food, water, energy, biodiversity, and social-systems research framework

The implementation of a BECCS-based economy will affect multiple ecosystem and societal services, including water quality and supply (Popp et al. 2014, Albanito et al. 2015), human nutrition (Tilman and Clark 2014), technology (Baum 2014), regional economics (Muratori et al. 2016), biodiversity (Powell and Lenton 2013), and cultural ecosystem services (Galaz 2012, Scholes 2016). The processes influenced by regional BECCS strategies must be studied in concert; we need to take into account how to provide for society’s growing demand for food, water, and energy while maintaining biodiversity, ecosystem services, and economic and social systems, including cultural values and identity, social networks, and livelihoods. The interconnectedness of these systems that support human well-being and lifestyles is increasingly evident and has led researchers to approach these systems as a nexus—the water–energy–food (WEF) nexus—for identifying cross-sector efficiencies (Scanlon et al. 2017) and to develop solutions to pressing resource challenges without unintended consequences (Scott et al. 2015). Each system within the WEF nexus can be viewed as a socioecological system comprising biophysical components and human components that are characterized by dynamic feedback loops. BECCS approaches that emphasize terrestrial C storage may prove technically feasible, but in the context of the WEF nexus, their implications for regional economies may make such approaches socially impractical. Scholars, practitioners, and policymakers have promoted the WEF nexus as a conceptual tool for approaching sustainability, including the United Nation’s sustainable development goals (SDGs), and protecting against potential risks of future water, energy, and food insecurity (Biggs et al. 2015). However, research frameworks for nexus thinking often fail to incorporate biodiversity and other ecosystem services, as well as social dimensions such as livelihoods (Biggs et al. 2015).

In order to address this shortcoming regarding the WEF nexus, we propose a research framework that explicitly considers biodiversity and social systems as part of the WEF nexus in what we present here as the FWEBS nexus (figures 2 and 3). It is expected that a FWEBS research framework that explicitly accounts for biodiversity and social systems will allow us to more comprehensively examine trade-offs and opportunities with various climate change and climate mitigation scenarios including BECCS. We anticipate that others can adapt the FWEBS framework for application and testing in other regions, including low-, middle-, and high-income countries. In addition, it is expected that the FWEBS framework can be widely applied by practitioners, scientists, and policymakers to develop and monitor policy and management plans in regional- and global-climate and sustainable-development agendas.

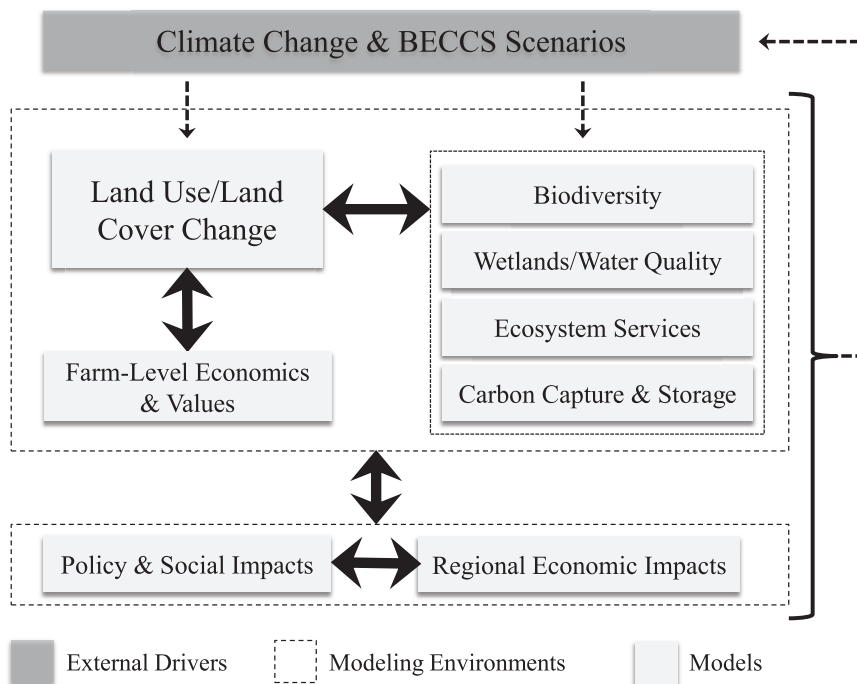


Figure 3. The interaction among climate change and bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) scenarios, with key attributes of the food, water, energy, biodiversity, and social systems (FWEBS) nexus, including the domain in which coupled interactions in the Upper Missouri River Basin will be modeled.

The Upper Missouri River Basin

For the purposes of this study, we consider the Upper Missouri River Basin to be upriver of confluence of the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers in Sioux City, Iowa, excluding the Niobrara watershed. By any definition, the UMRB extends from the Crown-of-the-Continent headwaters in Montana and the Front Range of Wyoming to the Prairie Pothole region of North and South Dakota (figure 1). The UMRB as we define it is dominated by the states of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming (and small parts of Canada, Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska). It represents some 30% of wheat production in the United States, 13% of soybean production, 11% of cattle production, and 9% of corn production, the last concentrated in the eastern Dakotas. Most of the region is rural, and only Alaska has a lower population density among US states than Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The largest city in the UMRB, Sioux Falls in South Dakota, has a population of approximately 175,000. The UMRB encompasses diverse land uses and land-use trajectories, climate attributes, and social and cultural geographies, as well as carbon capture and storage (CCS) potential, all of which must be considered when understanding the consequences and opportunities of BECCS.

Land management. Over the past decade, land-use practices in the agricultural and industrial sectors of the UMRB

have responded to policy drivers, markets (especially the amenities market), commodity price cycles, climate variability, and energy production, among other factors. Regional elasticity to market pressures appears to be high, as has been illustrated by recent conversion rates between grassland and cropland (figures 4 and 5; Wright and Wimberly 2013). Agricultural land in the region has been exiting the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) at increasing rates (figure 5), with over 50% (17,000 square kilometers) of enrolled land exiting the program since 2007 because of declining federal enrollment caps, expiring CRP acreage, and economic incentives to plant, largely to corn and soybean (Morefield et al. 2016). Such conversions from extensive to intensive land uses are associated with negative consequences for soil C sequestration and biodiversity (Claassen 2011). Expansion of oil and gas production since the mid-2000s has also created new hybrid landscapes in which agricultural- and energy-production demands for water and land intersect in complex ways.

Land management across the UMRB changes distinctly from west to east, and more than 20 Native American tribes manage tens of thousands of square kilometers within the UMRB (figure 1). The capacity of tribes to influence regional land- and water-use patterns is gaining momentum, as has been demonstrated, for example, by the active restoration of native species on tribal lands and worldwide sympathy for the Water Protectors movement (e.g., Elbein 2017). Together, these trends add complexity to the social dimensions of land management (Hendrickson et al. 2016) and their influence on the FWEBS nexus in a rapidly changing region with ongoing fossil-fuel extraction (Jackson et al. 2014) and associated CCS potential.

Climate. High decadal climate variability and warming temperature trends, especially during winter (figure 6), are superimposed on this matrix of changing land cover (Mehta et al. 2013), raising concerns about the resiliency of existing socioeconomic systems and food security faced with unprecedented climate change (Seifert and Lobell 2015, Cook et al. 2015). Interestingly, climatological summer (June, July, and August) temperatures may have cooled across parts of the UMRB from the 1970s until 2015 (figure 6), similar to the adjacent Canadian Prairie Provinces, for reasons thought to be due in part to changes in land management, including the reduction of summer fallow and the widespread adoption of no-till agriculture (Gameda et al. 2007, Vick et al. 2016), although 2017 brought an acute summer drought to much of

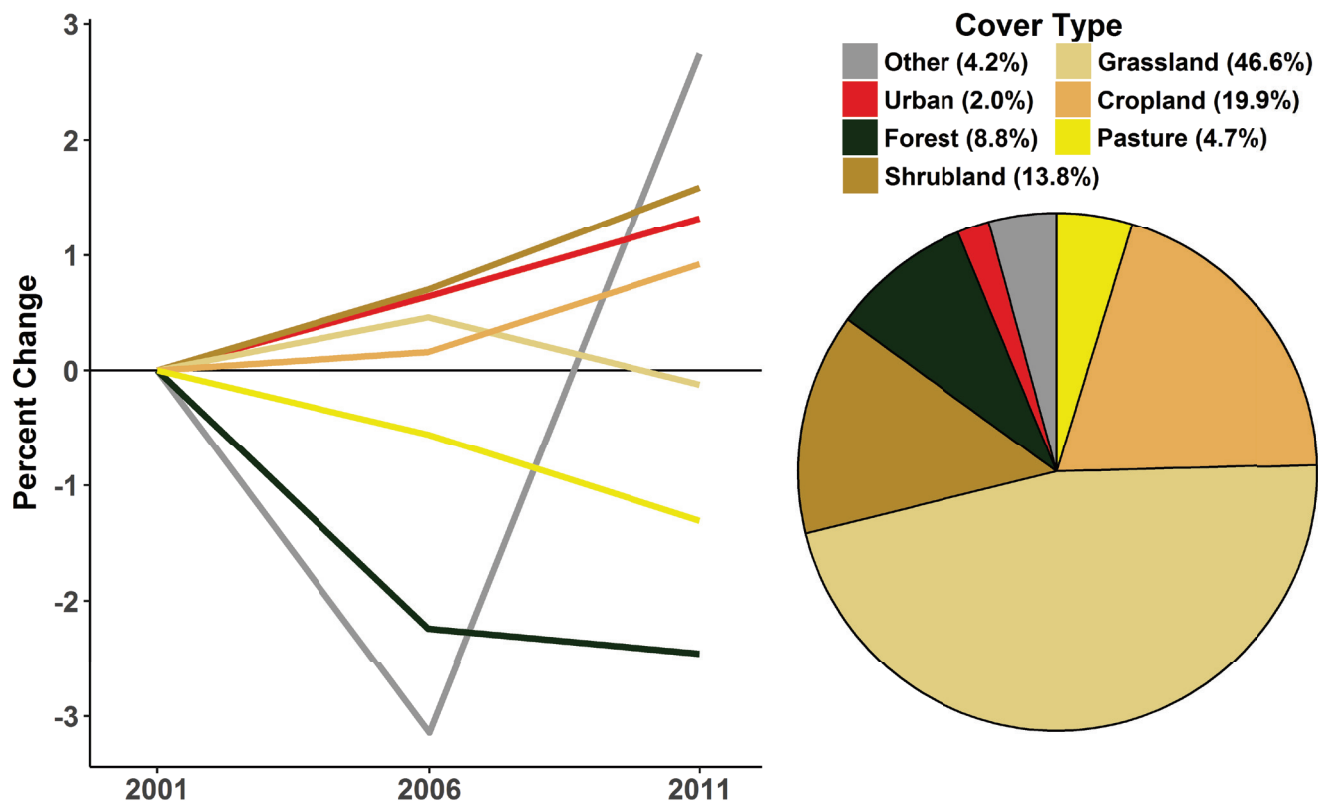


Figure 4. Recent trends in land cover (2001–2011) and the percentage of total land-cover area (2011) in the Upper Missouri River Basin. The cover classes of similar type were aggregated to a common class (e.g., four urban classes were collapsed into a single class). The “other” cover class includes water, wetlands, and barren and are subject to the interannual variability of the exposed shoreline of reservoirs, as well as misclassification errors given the ephemerality of wetlands and/or irrigation practices. The data were obtained from the National Land Cover Database (Homer et al. 2007, Fry et al. 2012, Homer et al. 2015).

the UMRB. General circulation models (GCMs) agree that annual average temperatures in the UMRB will continue to increase, using the bias-corrected ensemble Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 8.5 predictions as an upper limit to expected future temperature changes in figure 7, but it remains unclear how future changes in land management, including BECCS strategies, will affect water, energy, and GHG balances and thereby global and regional climate (Hallgren et al. 2013, DeLucia 2015).

Carbon capture and storage. Carbon capture and storage efforts can be internal or external to any region for global BECCS to take place (e.g., Muratori et al. 2016). The UMRB and surrounding regions have extensive carbon storage potential in geologic formations (Litynski et al. 2009), and a number of CCS test sites have been established by the Big Sky Carbon Sequestration Partnership in carbonate formations (e.g., Kevin Dome, Montana), in deep basalts in Washington State, in depleted oil reservoirs or for enhanced oil recovery, and with respect to enhanced coal-bed methane in the Powder River Basin of Montana and Wyoming within the UMRB, where it was found that additional incentives were required

to make CCS economical. Initial storage resource estimations indicate large storage potential, but implementation of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Underground Injection Control (UIC) Class VI regulations for CO₂ injection defines underground drinking water sources by salinity only, not allowing exemptions available under other UIC well classes. This rule will reduce the geologic carbon storage potential in the UMRB owing to fresh water recharge of formations at basin edges. The UMRB also has the potential to store C in agricultural soils given the widespread adoption of no-till agriculture (West and Post 2002, Watts et al. 2011) and the ongoing decline of the practice of summer fallow, which represents a source of CO₂ to the atmosphere (Merrill et al. 1999, Vick et al. 2016). In other words, select CCS efforts are possible within the UMRB and interact with the FWEBS nexus.

Food, water, energy, biodiversity, and social systems in the Upper Missouri River Basin

We discuss the FWEBS nexus as it applies to the UMRB sequentially, noting of course the interactions among food, water, energy, biodiversity, and social systems that we highlight in part in supplemental appendix S1.

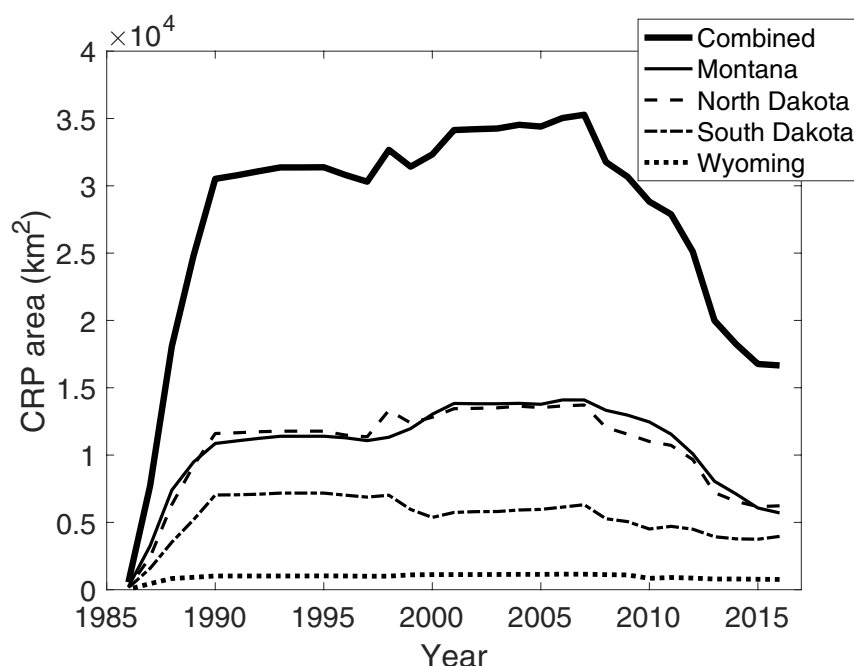


Figure 5. Trends in conservation reserve program (CRP) areal extent in the four states that constitute the greatest area of the Upper Missouri River Basin, as we defined in figure 1.

Food. BECCS presents unique opportunities and trade-offs with the FWEBS nexus in the UMRB (figure 2). Agriculture in the western UMRB is concentrated on the production of feed crops and animal products, with limited inroads by bioenergy production at the present, mainly due to the high value placed on food and, to some degree, climatic conditions. Bioenergy production is currently more prominent in the eastern UMRB and is largely derived from standard agricultural row crops, such as corn-grain ethanol. Common crops in the western UMRB include winter and spring wheat, with a growing influence of “pulse” legumes, such as lentils and peas (Burgess et al. 2012). Corn and soybeans dominate the eastern UMRB and continue to increase in area (figure 4). Large swaths of the UMRB remain in native grasslands used for range-cattle production (Gascoigne et al. 2013).

More diverse cropping systems, including pulse crops, are improving regional soil quality in the western UMRB (Miller et al. 2015), especially versus alternative management practices such as summer fallow, which is still common in parts of Montana but detrimental to soil C (Merrill et al. 1999, Vick et al. 2016). If managed appropriately, fallow replacement with pulses can grant economic benefits to producers, resulting in a win-win from both economic and climate perspectives (Bagley et al. 2015, Miller et al. 2015). Increases in the areal extent of pulse crops and oilseed bioenergy production have followed incentives from the US Farm Bill, but it remains to be seen whether enhanced bioenergy and pulse cropping is economically viable in a variable climate (Cutforth et al. 2007) and whether biofertilizers, such as

N-fixing cyanobacteria, could improve nutrient management (Bhat et al. 2015). The consequences of BECCS strategies for regional biogeochemical cycles, particularly those of carbon and nitrogen, have not been studied to date.

Water. Water resource management faces multiple challenges across the UMRB, including intersectoral competition between energy production, agriculture, biodiversity, and utilities as well as inter-jurisdictional competition among states and between states and sovereign Native American nations. The consequences of water competition are exacerbated by institutional failures, such as over-allocation of ground- and surface-water resources and major difficulties in adjudicating interjurisdictional and Tribal water rights. The response of water-use issues to a BECCS economy given current conflicts and with a changing climate requires additional research (Smith et al. 2015).

Trends in water quality emphasize the scalar mismatch between land-use dynamics and existing governance frameworks (Allred et al. 2015). For example, the onset of new land and water uses associated with the rapid expansion of hydraulic fracturing activities in the region revealed the limits of existing regulatory frameworks and the limited capacity of state and local governments for oversight, monitoring, and enforcement. Environmental monitoring provides insight about aggregate land-use effects such as the management of resource extraction and energy production waste (Bauder et al. 1993, Stackpoole et al. 2014) and would need to be expanded to account for additional impacts of BECCS strategies on agricultural and industrial practices, as well as biodiversity and other FWEBS attributes.

Energy. The energy industry of the UMRB is dominated by conventional systems, namely fossil fuels and large-scale hydropower, despite substantial solar and wind resources (Elliot et al. 1992, Lopez et al. 2012). For example, the Colstrip power plant in eastern Montana is the second-largest coal-fired generating facility west of the Mississippi River and produces approximately 45% of Montana’s total CO₂ emissions. The energy industry is changing rapidly (e.g., two units of the Colstrip plant are slated for decommissioning), providing new opportunities such as retrofitting power generators to use alternative fuels or spare transmission capacity for development of new generation facilities (Cao and Caldeira 2010).

The dramatic expansion of oil and gas extraction in the UMRB includes the mid-2000s coal-bed methane boom in the Powder River Basin and the 2004–2014 Bakken shale-oil

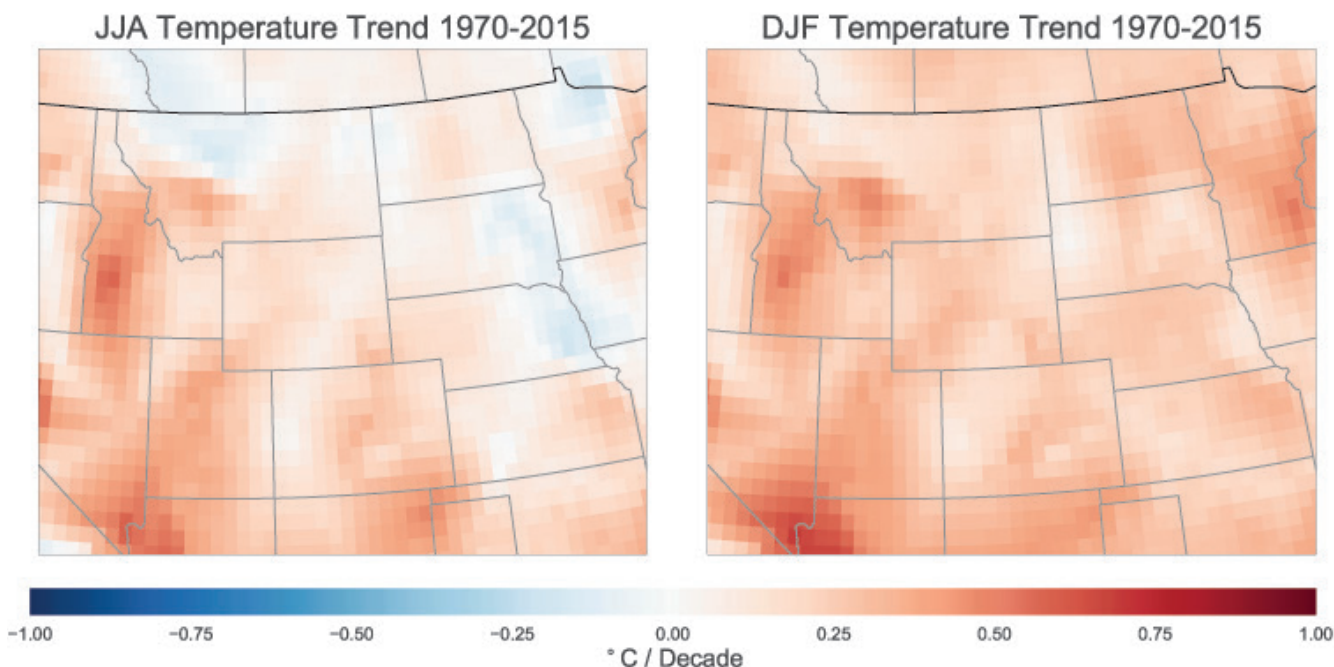


Figure 6. Decadal trends in summer (JJA) and winter (DJF) temperature from 1970 until 2015 in the region, including and surrounding the Upper Missouri River Basin (figure 1) from the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) database (Harris et al. 2013).

boom. These activities have resulted in an approximately 700% increase in regional crude-oil production between 2000 and 2017 and nearly a 400% increase in natural-gas production, along with new pressures on already limited water resources (Jackson et al. 2014). Energy production could potentially be coupled with geological CCS (Eccles et al. 2012) or the removal of atmospheric CO₂ by ecosystems (Zhu et al. 2014), with both approaches demonstrating high potential in the UMRB (West and Post 2002, Litynski et al. 2009).

The feasibility of CCS, via public and political acceptance of such technology and its risks, is not clearly quantified. Using natural ecosystems to store carbon may also be problematic because of climatic constraints within the UMRB that limit net primary production. Potential reductions in carbon storage in carbon-rich grasslands converted to crops or woody vegetation must be taken into consideration when accounting for net atmospheric CO₂ removal (Jackson et al. 2002, Gelfand et al. 2011). The existing matrix of coal- and natural-gas-based energy production and carbon sequestration from geologic and natural ecosystems in the UMRB provides a rich opportunity for interdisciplinary research (Humpenöder et al. 2014).

Bioenergy expansion in the western UMRB would require substantial economic incentives because of strong and sustained markets for high-quality food production, particularly cereals and beef. Bioenergy production may also become more financially competitive under projected climate change or with advancements in new bioenergy

(including biofuel) crop cultivars (Berdahl et al. 2005, Gesch et al. 2015). The expanded adoption of bioenergy ultimately rests on economic viability but also intersects with cultural values, including biodiversity protection, that likewise influence decision-making.

Biodiversity. It is estimated that 70% of the grasslands in the Great Plains have been converted to other land uses. Those that remain are crucial reservoirs of biodiversity (Samson et al. 2004). The UMRB has attracted public and private ecological restoration efforts at local to landscape scales, but recent reductions of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands (figure 5), native grasslands, and wetlands (Johnston 2013, Wright and Wimberly 2013) are key examples of how quickly land management can respond to economic drivers and associated changes in policy. Intensively managed agricultural landscapes can provide habitat, but conversion of CRP, native grasslands, and wetlands to agriculture—especially row-crop production (Brown et al. 2005)—can have strong negative impacts on biodiversity (Best et al. 1995, Lehtinen et al. 1999). These impacts extend beyond direct habitat loss (see supplemental appendix S1); for example, water quality and contaminant exposure pose a range of serious risks to amphibians, from direct mortality (Relyea 2005) to endocrine disruption (Hayes et al. 2002), emphasizing the need to study connections within the FWEBS nexus.

Social systems. It is expected that BECCS expansion in the UMRB will influence social systems via impacts on farm

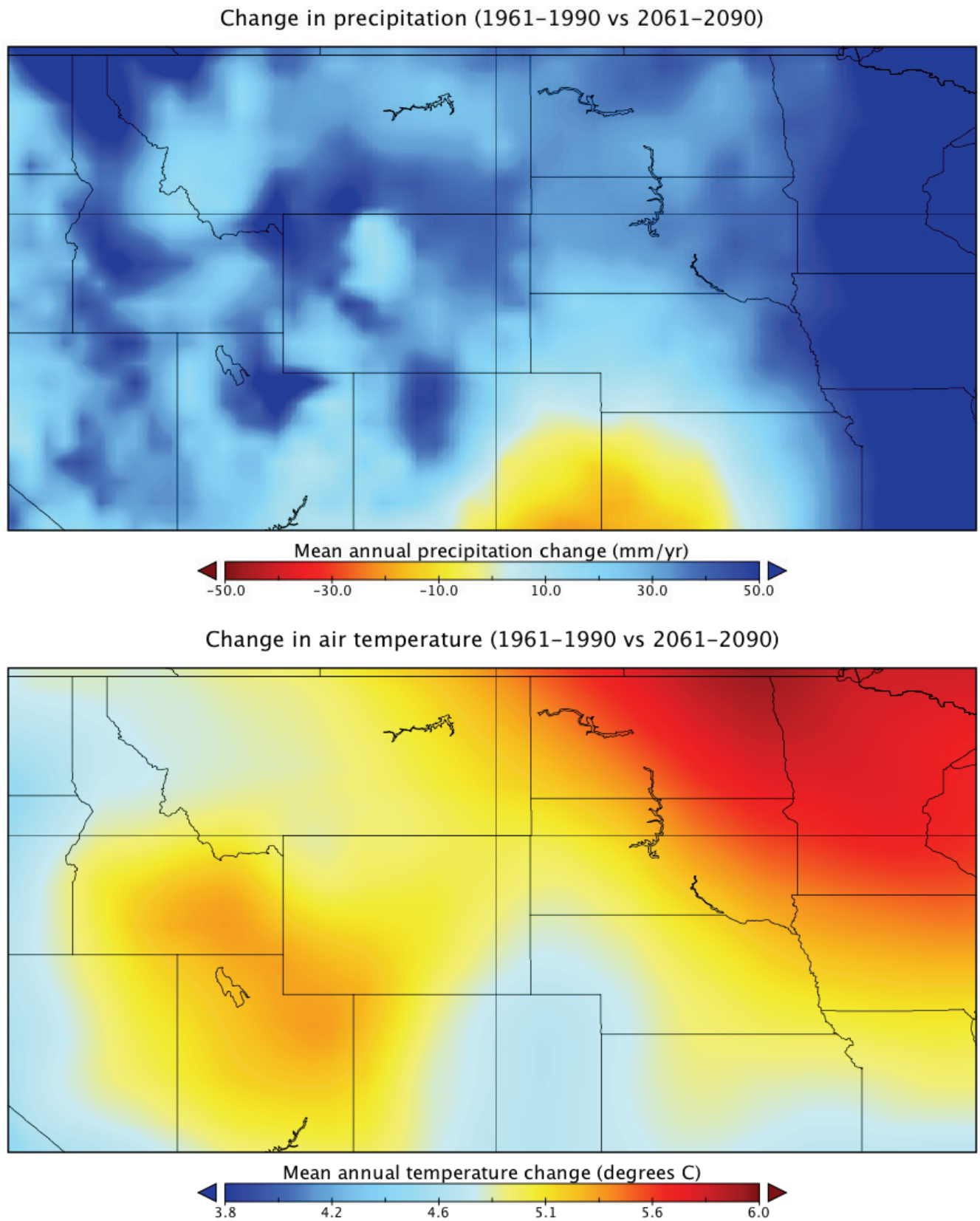


Figure 7. Future climate under full Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 8.5 ensemble bias corrected using CRU and downscaled to 0.5 degrees resolution, following Poulter and colleagues (2010).

economics and overall livelihoods, competition for land and labor, working conditions and remuneration for workers, governmental policies, cultural ecosystem services, and food security. Some social systems, such as regional economics, are readily quantifiable and can be directly compared. Other social systems, such as values and traditions, are often less meaningful when expressed in monetary terms (Daily et al. 2009), but they have important social value (Bagstad et al. 2015) and play an important role in decision-making (Wainger et al. 2010). For example, Native American and rural communities in Montana rely on hunting and harvesting of wild edible plants for cultural identity, food sovereignty, family ties to previous generation, and health benefits (Byker Shanks et al. 2015). Considering diverse stakeholder perspectives, attitudes, and decisions in response to the potential expansion of BECCS in the UMRB will allow us to elucidate barriers and opportunities for BECCS implementation. For example, meat production, including rangeland and cropland for growing animal feed, is the largest land use in the eastern UMRB, and much of this land could be used for bioenergy production (Langholtz et al. 2016), but there are strongly held values toward animal agriculture and meat consumption that make such land-use changes more difficult (Foley et al. 2011, Turner et al. 2014, Langholtz et al. 2016). Previous research suggests that bioenergy expansion can compete for land and labor resources and result in increased food prices that ultimately lead to higher food insecurity, particularly for low-income and landless populations as affordable food becomes less accessible (Müller et al. 2008, Ewing and Msangi 2009). On the other hand, higher food prices can stimulate the agricultural sector and create new opportunities for rural communities (Müller et al. 2008), including increased purchasing power and enhanced resilience to market instability (Ewing and Msangi 2009).

In summary, all elements of the FWEBS nexus interact with BECCS strategies in the UMRB and elsewhere, and understanding the complex trade-offs, as well as opportunities, of multiple BECCS approaches across different spatial and temporal scales requires careful attention to each attribute as well as their interactions.

Developing regional bioenergy with carbon capture and storage scenarios for assessing ecological and socioeconomic interactions

To examine the critical trade-offs and opportunities of alternative BECCS strategies within the FWEBS nexus at regional scales such as the UMRB, researchers must define a set of plausible scenarios for achieving negative CO₂ emissions. The definition of scenarios has itself become a complex area of study, with varying definitions of what constitutes a scenario across different disciplines and applications (van Vuuren et al. 2012). The general strategy for developing scenarios for global-change assessment typically involves using qualitative descriptions, such as narratives or storylines, that characterize a broad array of possible futures and then developing increasingly quantitative assumptions

consistent with the broad narratives to inform specific modeling exercises (Moss et al. 2010, Rounsevell and Metzger 2010). Increasingly, interdisciplinary processes are being used to develop scenarios with more robust qualitative and quantitative assumptions and better recognition of feedback processes in human and ecological systems, such as the latest SSPs for assessing climate mitigation and adaptation (O'Neill et al. 2017). Despite substantial efforts in scenario development, “downscaling” broad narratives to regional scales remains a challenge, because broad narratives do not easily align with local contexts (Kriegler et al. 2012).

Rather than propose specific quantitative scenarios here, we discuss general narratives for developing scenarios that can inform a regional analysis of BECCS impacts on FWEBS in the UMRB. Achieving net negative CO₂ emissions in the UMRB could conceivably be achieved by implementing a wide range of mitigation and adaptation measures, although as we have noted, these may conflict with other management goals (figure 2). We propose, as a starting point, two general narratives that capture the extremes of a continuum of BECCS-related strategies. At one extreme, an *aggressive BECCS approach* would emphasize technological and land-intensive approaches, including geological CCS, producing bioenergy crops for electricity and fuel (to displace fossil sources) and increasing electricity production from renewable sources as part of a broader energy transition (figure 2). At the other extreme, a *conservation BECCS approach* would emphasize more land-extensive approaches, including biological and geological carbon sequestration through soil-management practices and CCS (Chabbi et al. 2017), afforestation and avoided land conversion, and the production of perennial cellulosic bioenergy crops. Whereas the conservation BECCS approach may miss some opportunities to sequester C, such a strategy may align BECCS with other ecosystem services and cultural values, including biodiversity conservation. These general narratives provide a framework for assessing FWEBS trade-offs and opportunities along a continuum of quantitative scenarios between aggressive and conservation, all of which can be compared to business-as-usual or status-quo alternatives. The general narratives also fit within, and must ultimately be consistent with, existing broader global-change storylines, such as the latest RCP and SSP storylines (O'Neill et al. 2017).

Crucial to refining quantitative BECCS scenarios for analyzing potential future conditions in the UMRB is an appreciation for local context—local socioeconomic conditions, technologies, and institutions—which ultimately determines the feasibility and impacts of alternative BECCS strategies. Incorporating such local context will ultimately require an iterative process, including interdisciplinary scientists and local stakeholder experts, whereby scenario assumptions are tested and refined both through modeling exercises and stakeholder feedback (Sleeter et al. 2012). The interactions between local attributes of the FWEBS nexus and human response will determine the extent to which aggressive, conservation, or other BECCS strategies are technically

feasible, socially acceptable, and economically sustainable. By working with local experts and stakeholders in an iterative process, researchers can define a limited set of alternative quantitative scenarios that can achieve net negative CO₂ emissions (if technically possible) and, given those scenarios, determine the key FWEBS trade-offs needed to guide regional-scale policymaking. Such an effort must also point to synergistic interactions that may provide opportunities to improve multiple factors in the FWEBS nexus (figure 2).

How will different elements of the FWEBS nexus change as BECCS development becomes more prominent, and, as has been demonstrated by the case study of biodiversity (appendix S1), could “conservation” BECCS scenarios be developed that satisfy multiple societal objectives (figure 2)? Alternatively, are aggressive BECCS strategies necessary to mitigate climate warming such that hard compromises will have to be made regarding FWEBS and other ecosystem and Earth-system services (Boysen et al. 2017, Rockström et al. 2017)? We hypothesize that business-as-usual strategies provide insufficient atmospheric C removal and aggressive BECCS strategies may present too many conflicts with the FWEBS nexus to become adopted. Thus, a conservation BECCS strategy that relies on a balanced array of BECCS activities (from geological and biological CSS to cellulosic ethanol and non-BECCS renewable energy) designed to minimize socioeconomic trade-offs while simultaneously benefitting biodiversity conservation may be the only realistic approach to serve multiple societal objectives in the UMRB and likely other global regions. Testing such a hypothesis requires a highly multidisciplinary approach that combines surveys and interviews of perceptions to BECCS and data-informed models of economic, biogeochemical, hydrological, biodiversity, and climate systems that capture the feedback loops and interrelationships between system drivers and outcomes (figure 3). New regulatory and incentivization approaches to guide multiple actors, including industry, governments, and individuals, toward behaviors that help us become positive actors in the climate system are ultimately needed. To do so, we must design BECCS strategies and contrast them against alternate strategies to find the correct balance among atmospheric C removal, likelihood of adoption, and ecological and socioeconomic sustainability.

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Supplemental material

Supplementary data are available at *BIOSCI* online.

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Paul C. Stoy (paul.stoy@gmail.com), Selena Ahmed, Gabriel Bromley, E. N. J. Brookshire, Julia Haggerty, Perry Miller, Brent Peyton, Alisa Royem, and Lee Spangler are affiliated with Montana State University. Meghan Jarchow, David Swanson, and Mark D. Dixon are affiliated with the University of South Dakota. Benjamin Rashford, Shannon Albeke, and Crista Straub are with the University of Wyoming. Benjamin Poulter is affiliated with NASA Goddard.