

Philanthropy for Forests

A Brief Guide

Prepared by the World Resources Institute

What's Happening to Forests?

There is a lot less forest around than there used to be, and much of what remains has been harmed by human activity. Some key trends include the following:

- The world has completely lost almost half of its original forest cover.
- Nearly all of the original wild forests of Europe, the United States, and Japan (the G7) have been lost or dramatically modified.
- Fully 67 countries have lost all of their remaining large areas of intact forest, and 11 more are on the verge of losing it all.
- Tropical forests continue to be cleared at a rate of almost 16 million hectares a year. Preliminary estimates indicate loss of natural forests in the tropics increased over the past decade, as compared to rates in the 1980s.
- Illegal logging is a widespread problem in many countries. It accounts for 50-70% of total wood production in Indonesia, 80% of that in the Brazilian Amazon, and perhaps a fifth of wood harvest in Russia.

Pressure on remaining forests continues. Witness the following:

- Industrial wood and fiber use has grown by 50 percent since 1960 and now totals 1.5 billion cubic meters annually. It is set to grow 20-50 percent by 2020.
- Only the United States and Western Europe harvest less from forest land today than the amount that regrows.
- Only 20 percent of wood used comes from plantations. The rest is cut from natural forests.
- A further 1-2 billion cubic meters of wood are cut each year to be used as fuel for heating and cooking.
- Less than 8 percent of global forest area is legally protected, and nearly one in ten tree species is at risk of extinction in the near term.

Why Should We Care About Forests?

Forests have many different values including the following:

- Home to at least half of all species on earth. When forests are lost, those species go extinct, and in turn we lose future raw material for agriculture, pharmaceutical research, and new materials.
- Storage of about 40 percent of all carbon in the terrestrial biosphere, carbon that's released into the atmosphere when forests are cleared and burned, further adding to climate change.
- Protection of soils and watersheds. One-third of the world's largest watersheds have lost more than 75 percent of their original forest cover.
- Home and sustenance to many millions of people, many of whom are very poor and leading traditional forest-based lives. This includes the majority of remaining distinct human cultures and languages, and with it unique assemblages of knowledge and viewpoints.

Who Can Do Something to Help Protect Forests?

Governments, businesses, communities, churches, non-profit groups, and individuals all over the world own, manage, and control the fate of forests. Some of these have taken innovative, creative, and effective steps to protect forests and manage them carefully. With growing public awareness, some businesses have also shown leadership in encouraging forest conservation. Perhaps the most innovative actions that have had the greatest impact have been those that involve partnerships among businesses, environmental groups, communities, and governments.

What Should the Goals Be?

- Reverse the loss of forests by helping poorer countries manage these resources more responsibly and urging richer countries to set a better example.
- Enhance public awareness of forest loss and its consequences.
- Work with governments to implement existing forest management laws.
- Increase the area of forest protected in each country based upon sound science and knowledge of where the most valuable forests are.
- Help corporate and individual wood consumers to buy wood from well-managed forests.
- Reduce wasteful use of wood.

How Can Private Philanthropists Help?

Financial support for ongoing and new, innovative efforts is a critical component of any strategy to protect and manage forests. Key categories for funding include the following:

- Local, national, and international advocacy and public education about consumption of forests, forest loss, the importance of forests, and the need to improve forest protection in rich and poor countries alike.
- Research and information gathering and sharing to help inform advocacy efforts, reform processes, and to develop tools to help corporate and individual consumers ensure that they are buying “good” wood (and other materials).
- Community development programs in forest-rich but cash-poor countries that help to reduce pressure from local communities on dwindling forest areas. Innovation in finance, taxation, and policy that make forest conservation more profitable than forest destruction.
- Reduction in wood use through increased recycling, re-use, and waste reduction.

Where Can You Go to Learn More?

There are many thousands of local organizations doing very important work to protect forests. Although all of these groups are too many to list, the following organizations are doing work in advocacy and research and have a good record of impact:

Forest Stewardship Council

Leader in independent certification of good forest management, supported by all leading environmental groups.
www.fscoax.org

Global Forest Watch

A network of 75 local mapping organizations tracking logging, mining, and other development to promote transparency and accountability in the forest sector.
www.GlobalForestWatch.org

Greenpeace

The largest environmental advocacy and campaigning group with some key forest projects in regions including Amazonia, Russia, and Canada.
www.greenpeace.org/campaigns

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

A leading foundation supporting conservation efforts.
www.packard.org

Rainforest Action Network

Very effective campaigners responsible for changes in wood buying policy for a growing number of major companies.
www.ran.org

World Business Council for Sustainable Development

Coalition of some 150 international companies who share a commitment to sustainable development.
www.wbcsd.org

The World Conservation Union (known as IUCN)

Works in partnerships with governments, NGOs, and scientists to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature.
www.iucn.org/themes/fcp/

World Resources Institute

Specialists in forest policy and policy reform.
www.wri.org/forests

World Wildlife Fund

Owner of the much-loved panda logo.
www.WorldWildlife.org/forests