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## FORESTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### *Building resilience to climate change through forest conservation, restoration and sustainable use*

- **Forests help stabilise the climate.** They regulate ecosystems, play an integral part in the carbon cycle, support livelihoods, and can help drive sustainable growth.
- To maximise the climate benefits of forests, we must **keep intact more** of the forest landscapes we have, **manage more sustainably** those we use, and **restore more** of those we have lost.
- Halting the loss and degradation of natural systems and promoting their restoration have the **potential to contribute over one-third of the total climate change mitigation** scientists say is required by 2030.
- **Restoring 150 million hectares** of degraded land in line with the Bonn Challenge **would capture about a sixth of the carbon necessary** to close the emissions gap.
- **The success of forest climate actions** and the **permanence of emissions reductions** from them largely depend on how well they **recognise the rights and interests of forest communities**.

### What is the issue?

Forests are a stabilising force for the climate. They regulate ecosystems, play an integral part in the carbon cycle, support livelihoods, and supply goods and services that can drive sustainable growth.

But today, around 30% of global forest cover has been completely cleared and a further 20% has been degraded. Deforestation, forest degradation and land use now account for around 24% of total global emissions, more than the entire global transportation sector.

In this light, land use is a significant part of the problem contributing to climate change, but forests and forest landscapes can also be some of our best solutions. For example, the opportunity for restoration is tremendous. The Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration has estimated that around two billion hectares of degraded land across the world – an area the size of South America – may offer opportunities for landscape restoration.

### Why is this important?

To maximise climate benefits we need to keep intact more of the forest landscapes we have, manage more sustainably those we use, and restore more of those we have lost.

Halting the loss and degradation of natural systems and promoting their restoration have the potential to contribute over one-third of the total climate change mitigation that scientists say is required by 2030. Restoring 150 million hectares in line with the Bonn Challenge would capture about a sixth of the carbon

necessary to close the emissions gap. And the co-benefits are considerable:

- The **livelihoods of 1.6 billion people** depend on forests.
- Forests provide **US\$ 75–100 billion per year in goods and services**.
- Forests are home to **80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity**.

### What can be done?

Today, more and more consumers are demanding forest products from sustainable sources, and an increasing number of major palm oil, timber, paper and other forest product corporations are beginning the conversion to deforestation-free supply chains.

In addition to creating and maintaining protected areas and launching initiatives towards more sustainable management, many countries, subnational governments and private landowners are restoring degraded and deforested land. This helps to take pressure off healthy, intact forests and reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

But the success of any forest climate actions and the permanence of any emissions reductions that come from them are largely dependent on the extent to which they recognise the rights and interests of forest communities and help to improve or sustain their livelihoods.

Against this backdrop, IUCN's Global Forest and Climate Change Programme (GFCCP) tackles the role of trees and forests in building resilience to climate change in several ways:

- **Combatting the rate of deforestation and forest degradation** helps conserve the benefits that people and societies get from forests, including forest carbon stocks and livelihoods. IUCN does this by accelerating action that puts priority attention on areas of high biodiversity value and of cultural significance, such as primary forests and heritage sites.
- **Restoring forest landscapes** helps enhance climate change mitigation and adaptation. Under the Bonn Challenge, IUCN supports national and subnational decision makers in reaching the goal of having 150 million hectares of deforested and degraded land under restoration by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030.
- **Enabling rights-based land use** ensures community involvement in land-use outcomes. IUCN produces results on the ground through partners and projects worldwide to help strengthen community control over forests, alleviate poverty, empower women and men, enhance biodiversity, and sustainably manage forests.
- **Unlocking forest benefits** is key to a sustainable and equitable supply of forest goods and services. IUCN builds capacity for implementing restoration, engaging the private sector and striving to make sure benefits – such as those from Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) – are equitably shared with local landowners and forest communities.

## Where do we go from here?

As the world moves towards a climate agreement in Paris in December 2015 and beyond, it is imperative that national leaders subscribe to and work to implement the New York Declaration on Forests, sustain forest climate financing, and include forest and land use in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

In doing so, these leaders will show the way that nature – and, in particular, trees and forests – can and must be part of the solution to keeping the climate within the globally accepted two-degree temperature increase.

## GFCCP's direct responses to climate change at COP21 and beyond include:

**Ensuring that the 2015 agreement is comprehensive** in its coverage of GHG sources and sinks, includes all major economic sectors, prevents double counting of emission reductions, and clearly recognises and supports the current role and future potential of the land sector and all terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems as effective natural sinks and reservoirs of GHGs

**Joining international efforts to combat forest loss and degradation**, including those launched under the New York Declaration on Forests to halve global natural forest loss by 2020, and end it by 2030

**Contributing towards the restoration of 150 million hectares of degraded landscapes and forest lands** by 2020 through the Bonn Challenge and its New York Declaration extension calling for the restoration of at least an additional 200 million hectares by 2030

**Expanding protected areas**, including Indigenous, privately owned and community conservation areas, in ways that enhance the landscape's resilience and stabilise and store carbon

IUCN supports and assists climate change mitigation and adaptation through its global network of thousands of members and partners in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania. As a Union of State and Non-State members, IUCN is able to support climate change action from setting goals and generating new knowledge, to reinforcing enabling conditions and unblocking obstacles, through to implementation on the ground.

## Where can I get more information?

[iucn.org/forest](http://iucn.org/forest)  
[forests@iucn.org](mailto:forests@iucn.org)



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