

Man and the Environment Today

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READ IMAGES AND TEXT Read about an important environmental issue today – deforestation.

- A. First look at the logo below. What does it show? What do the letters stand for? What kind of work does the organisation do?
- B. Read through the text quickly. How is the information organised?

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Deforestation



Mp3 057

Forests cover 31% of the land area on our planet. They produce vital oxygen and provide homes for people and wildlife. Many of the world's most threatened and endangered animals live in forests, and 1.6 billion people rely on benefits forests offer, including food, fresh water, clothing, traditional medicine and shelter.

But forests around the world are under threat from deforestation, jeopardizing these benefits. Deforestation comes in many forms, including fires, clear-cutting for agriculture, ranching and development, unsustainable logging for timber, and degradation due to climate change. This impacts people's livelihoods and threatens a wide range of plant and animal species. Some 46-58 thousand square miles of forest are lost each year – equivalent to 48 football fields every minute.

Forests play a critical role in mitigating climate change because they act as a carbon sink – soaking up carbon dioxide that would otherwise be free in the atmosphere and contribute to ongoing changes in climate patterns. Deforestation undermines this important carbon sink function. It is estimated that 15% of all greenhouse gas emissions are the result of deforestation. Deforestation is a particular concern in tropical rainforests because these forests are home to much of the world's biodiversity. For example, in the Amazon around 17% of the forest has been lost in the last 50 years, mostly due to forest conversion for cattle ranching. Deforestation in this region is particularly rampant near more populated areas, roads and rivers, but even remote areas have been encroached upon when valuable mahogany, gold and oil are discovered. WWF has been working to protect forests for more than 50 years. With a focus on protected areas management and sustainable forestry, WWF works with governments, companies, communities and other stakeholders to promote certification for responsible forest management practices, combat illegal logging, reform trade policies and protect forested areas.

Deforestation can happen quickly, such as when a fire sweeps through the landscape or the forest is clear-cut to make way for an oil palm plantation. It can also happen gradually as a result of ongoing forest degradation as temperatures rise due to climate change caused by human activity. While deforestation appears to be on the decline in some countries, it remains disturbingly high in others – including Brazil and Indonesia – and a grave threat to our world's most valuable forests still remains.



About 80% of the world's documented species can be found in tropical rainforests — some of the forests most vulnerable to deforestation. When species lose their forest homes, they are often unable to subsist in the small fragments of forested land left behind. They become more accessible to hunters and poachers, their numbers begin to dwindle and some eventually go extinct. Even localized deforestation can result in extinctions as many unique species exist in small isolated geographic locations in the world.

Forests help to mitigate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions, but they become carbon sources when they are cut, burned or otherwise removed. Tropical forests hold more than 210 gigatons of carbon, and deforestation represents around 15% of greenhouse gas emissions. These greenhouse gas emissions contribute to rising temperatures, changes in patterns of weather and water and an increased frequency of extreme weather events. For example, in Sumatra, rainforests on deep peatlands are being cleared, drained and converted to pulp plantations, contributing to Indonesia's high greenhouse gas emissions. Changes in climate can affect forest-dwelling creatures by altering their habitats and decreasing availability of food and water. Some will be able to adapt by moving to higher elevations or latitudes, but species losses may occur.

Trees play a key role in the local water cycle by helping to keep a balance between the water on land and water in the atmosphere. But when deforestation or degradation occurs, that balance can be thrown off, resulting in changes in precipitation and river flow.

Without trees to anchor fertile soil, erosion can occur and sweep the land into rivers. The agricultural plants that often replace the trees cannot hold onto the soil. Many of these plants — such as coffee, cotton, palm oil, soybean and wheat — can actually exacerbate soil erosion. Scientists have estimated that a third of the world's arable land has been lost through soil erosion and other types of degradation since 1960. And as fertile soil washes away, agricultural producers move on, clearing more forest and continuing the cycle of soil loss.

from www.worldwildlife.org





UNDERSTAND CONTENT What does the data refer to? Complete the table, as in the example.

31%	The land area covered by forests on our planet.
1.6 billion	
46-58	
48	
15%	
17%	
more than 50 years	
80%	
210 gigatons	
a third	

