



GLOBAL FOREST WATCH

Who we are: Global Forest Watch (GFW)---a project of the World Resources Institute---is the first-ever monitoring network to map out where logging, mining and other development threatens our last primary and old-growth forests. As part of this work, we track: which governments and companies are behind forest development; where these activities are in violation of environmental laws and regulations; and how logging and other activities impacts forests and local people dependent on them.

Why monitor development? Recent WRI mapping indicates that the world is on the verge of losing its last large tracts of primary ("frontier") forest. Half of all forests have been cleared to date, with only 20% of original forest cover remaining as frontier forest, and much of these forests are threatened today. These remaining areas are vital to the planet's life support system--they store vast amounts of carbon (offsetting global warming), provide a home to at least 50 million indigenous people and most of our land-based wild species, while protecting watersheds that maintain drinking water quality and prevent erosion. Frontier forests, because of their size and pristine condition, offer the islands of habitat which will support much of our biodiversity in the future. At current rates of deforestation, half of all forest species may be doomed to extinction by the end of this century.

Today, forests face unprecedented threats, often as a result of shortsighted planning decisions and poor management. More forest has been lost since 1950 than in the past 8,000 years (since the time when humans first began clearing trees for agricultural use). What lies ahead? Outside of the far north, WRI estimates that given current trends, three-quarters of remaining frontier forest will be cleared or degraded within two decades. We have documented that logging, mining, road building and other large-scale development are the primary threats to these forests. In Canada, Asia, the Congo Basin and other regions, logging companies are rapidly opening up remaining frontier forests, to liquidate high-value old-growth timber species, in the interest of short-term profits. Illegal logging is rampant in many of these regions, threatening the integrity of the few existing parks and reserves. Less than 8% of all forests are currently protected, far too small an area to preserve the planet's terrestrial biodiversity. Careful monitoring of development--where it is occurring, who is behind it, what is at stake--can help keep parks protected while minimizing the environmental impacts of logging and other activities within the majority of the planet's forests which remain unprotected today.

How we operate: Global Forest Watch is a network of 75 local environmental groups and universities, monitoring forest development within eight countries which encompass over 60% of the world's remaining frontier forest. We equip partners with new information technologies--geographic information systems, satellite imagery, geographic positioning systems--allowing them to track and map logging, mining and other activities within their forests. Local partners serve as the 'foot soldiers' ferreting out data only available on the ground, such as sensitive information on company ownership and illegal logging, while field-checking information garnered from satellites.

In many of the countries where we operate, data on the location and ownership of companies is considered classified, and never reaches the public domain. By maintaining careful relationships with governments, reaching out to industry, and assuring our results are objective and carefully reviewed, we assure partner credibility, and provide them with the political space in which to operate. We rely heavily on the Internet, both to share and review data and to reach a worldwide audience.

GFW's mandate is strictly limited to providing quality data. Our partners are prohibited from doing advocacy work under our name. However, they are well networked with other national and international environmental groups who use these results to push for forest reform. Corporations and governments also constitute an important audience. We provide them with the information essential for informed decision-making, in an easy-to-use format for non-technical audiences.

Our impacts:

- *Making local voices heard through network participation:* In many of the countries where GFW operates, civil society organizations have minimal input into national political processes due to lack of resources and training. GFW aims to build partners' capacities to use advanced technologies, to operate in political situations, and to communicate their findings effectively. By providing an outlet for their work, as well as the accompanying technical support, these partners find that their credibility with government agencies improves, along with their economic viability.
- *Corporate environmental leadership:* In this global economy, the private sector has a powerful leverage in determining how forests are managed. Investment and consumer purchasing decisions made in North America, Europe and Japan can drive reform in distant forest regions, by influencing markets and the flow of capital. Recently, over 70 major wood retailers--including IKEA, Home Depot, Lowes and others--committed to avoid buying supplies from endangered and/or old-growth forests (several of these agreements include provisions to avoid illegally harvested wood). Together, these companies account for 25-40% of North American wood consumption alone. To implement these commitments, wood retailers need a system for tracking where their wood comes from, to assure it is not from endangered forests, or harvested in violation of local laws. With a \$2.5 million grant from IKEA, we are currently mapping intact forests (ancient forests with little or no disturbance) at detailed scales, to overlay them with maps of mills and logging company leases. Since these are forests companies have pledged to avoid, this work will provide a system that companies can use to implement their commitments, and that consumers and environmental groups can use to verify corporate commitment implementation. If successfully implemented, these purchasing commitments could lead to voluntary, global standards replicated by others, such as the mining and oil and gas industries, to minimize their impacts on the forests in which they operate. If this is to happen, GFW tracking tools will be required by these other sectors.
- *Promoting local accountability:* As totalitarian regimes are increasingly replaced by democratic governments, local citizen groups are finding the political space needed to advocate for better forest management, and to fight the corruption plaguing the forest sector. GFW seeks to empower these groups with the hard evidence they need to push for change. Our assumption is that transparency and accountability leads to public scrutiny, and thus better forest management. New, low-cost information technologies now allows environmental groups to monitor forests and publicize their findings, in regions where information flow was previously tightly controlled by governments.

Our experience to date has proven that access to information improves the sustainable management of the world's forests, and thus the welfare of local communities. We have succeeded in establishing monitoring networks in the U.S., Canada, Venezuela, Chile, Cameroon, Gabon, Indonesia and Russia. To replicate this success widely, we seek to expand monitoring to 21 countries, covering 3/4 of the world's forests, within three to five years.

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