

## Protecting Trees, Protecting Our Climate

### Ten Reasons to Invest in Reducing Tropical Deforestation

**W**e already know we are putting too much heat-trapping carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the air when we burn fossil fuels to generate electricity, fuel our cars, and heat our homes. But cutting down and burning trees, and disrupting forest soils, also accounts for an astounding amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions—about 15 percent of the world total.

Congress and President Obama are moving to address this carbon overload by limiting carbon emissions here at home. This is a necessary first step, but to successfully and cost-effectively address global warming, the United States also must get serious about stopping tropical deforestation outside our borders. Indeed, we should play a role in these efforts because we play a role in the problem itself—tropical forests are cut down to make room for grazing land and crops to meet U.S. agriculture demand and other needs.

Here are just 10 reasons why investing in forest protection initiatives is in the nation's best interest:

#### 1. Global warming is global.

Every molecule of CO<sub>2</sub> traps heat in Earth's atmosphere, regardless of whether the CO<sub>2</sub> comes from the tailpipe of a car, the smokestack of a coal-fired power plant, or the burning of a tropical tree. Thus, to address global warming, we need to reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> produced everywhere on Earth, not just in the United States.

#### 2. Tropical forest emissions are significant.

About 15 percent of carbon emissions come from tropical deforestation—more than every car, truck, plane, train, and ship on the planet combined. Deforestation is happening at an alarming rate—an acre of tropical forest every second. We cannot address global warming effectively if we ignore 15 percent of the problem.

#### 3. Global warming solutions protect our citizens.

We pay for climate disruption every day in the form of hurricanes, droughts, floods, heat waves, and other dangerous weather events that pose significant health and economic risks. These risks



"[It's] probably the most cost-effective way for us to address the issue of climate change—having an effective set of mechanisms in place to avoid further deforestation and hopefully to plant new trees."

— President Barack Obama, speaking with Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of Norway  
December 10, 2009

will grow more severe if CO<sub>2</sub> emissions continue to increase. Addressing global warming today will save lives and money for years to come.

#### 4. Tropical forests are necessary for stabilizing our climate.

Tropical forests not only provide oxygen for us to breathe, but also take CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere and store much more carbon than forests in temperate regions (like those in the United States). Losing such forests greatly hampers Earth's ability to remove carbon from the atmosphere



and avoid the worst effects of global warming.

### **5. Reducing deforestation is cost-effective.**

There is little economic value in clearing tropical forests, so the cost of stopping it is small. Economic analyses have shown conclusively that reducing emissions from deforestation is considerably less expensive than reducing emissions from fossil fuel combustion and other industrial sources.

### **6. Ignoring deforestation is unfair for good businesses.**

Timber from tropical deforestation, and particularly illegal deforestation, undercuts landowners who are managing their forests sustainably. By reducing tropical deforestation, we reduce unfair competition with ecologically sound forestry, both in the United States and in tropical countries.

### **7. Reducing deforestation is inexpensive for the United States.**

Analyses from the Union of Concerned Scientists, the European Commission, and the government of Great Britain all agree that for about \$20 billion per year, deforestation-related emissions can be cut in half by 2020. The United States would need to contribute only \$5 billion—about 25 percent of the total global investment or just 0.1 percent of the annual U.S. budget—to help get the job done.

### **8. Solutions exist today for reducing deforestation.**

Tropical countries are not waiting to reduce deforestation. Brazil, for example, has passed national climate legislation that will reduce the country's deforestation-related emissions 80 percent by 2020, while Indonesia, the third-largest emitter of global warming pollution because of high rates of deforestation, has pledged to cut overall emissions by more than 25 percent by 2020. Other tropical countries have proposed a “pay



Tropical forests provide a livelihood for many indigenous peoples. Here, Nicaraguan villagers use local Almendro (*Dipteryx oleifera*) wood to build a boat for use by the village.

for performance” system in which they only receive compensation after they reduce their emissions. Increased investment in forest protection measures can help ensure there are many more success stories like these.

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### **9. Stopping deforestation addresses multiple challenges.**

Preserving tropical forests helps protect the millions of plant and animal species—many of which have been

invaluable to human medicine—that are indigenous to tropical forests and in danger of extinction. Keeping forests intact also helps prevent floods and drought by regulating regional rainfall. And because many indigenous and forest peoples rely on tropical forests for their livelihoods, investments in reducing deforestation provide them with the resources they need for sustainable development without deforestation.

### **10. Addressing deforestation shows we are serious about our future.**

To protect the world that our children will inherit from us, we must act swiftly to reduce global warming emissions both here and abroad, and from all sources. By contributing to reduced tropical deforestation, the United States can reestablish itself as a global leader on a critical international issue and affirm its commitment to preserving Earth's resources for generations to come.



Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions

Doug Boucher, Katherine Lininger, Estrellita Fitzhugh, Sarah Roquemore, and Patricia Elias (Tropical Forest and Climate Initiative, Union of Concerned Scientists) prepared this summary. © January 2010 Union of Concerned Scientists.



Printed on recycled paper with vegetable-based inks

Two Brattle Square, Cambridge, MA 02238-9105. Main Office (617) 547-5552 • Washington, DC (202) 223-6133  
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