

Deforestation Continues At an Alarming Rate

But net forest loss slowing down – FAO presents new global forest figures **14 November 2005, Rome** – Each year about 13 million hectares of the world's forests are lost due to deforestation, but the rate of net forest loss is slowing down, thanks to new planting and natural expansion of existing forests, FAO announced today.

The annual net loss of forest area between 2000 and 2005 was 7.3 million hectares/year — an area about the size of Sierra Leone or Panama – down from an estimated 8.9 million ha/yr between 1990 and 2000. This is equivalent to a net loss of 0.18 percent of the world's forests annually.



These are some of the key findings of *The Global Forest Resources Assessment 2005* (FRA 2005), the most comprehensive assessment to date of forest resources, their uses and value, covering 229 countries and territories between 1990 and 2005.

“This assessment allows us to gauge the important role of the world's forest resources in fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals, in particular in meeting the targets set for reducing poverty and ensuring a sustainable global environment,” said Hosny El-Lakany, Assistant Director-General of the FAO Forestry Department.

“It provides a comprehensive update on how we manage and use our forests, and shows that while good progress is being made in many places, unfortunately forest resources are still being lost or degraded at an alarmingly high rate,” he added.

The changing profile of world forests

Forests now cover nearly 4 billion hectares or 30 percent of the world's land area, however 10 countries account for two-thirds of all forest area: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Indonesia, Peru, the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

South America suffered the largest net loss of forests between 2000 and 2005 - around 4.3 million hectares per year - followed by Africa, which lost 4.0 million hectares annually.

Oceania had a net loss of 356 000 ha/year in 2000-2005, while **North and Central America** together had a net loss of 333 000 ha/yr. **Asia** moved from a net loss of around 800 000 ha per year in the 1990s to a net gain of one million hectares per year between 2000 and 2005, primarily as a result of large-scale afforestation reported by China. Forest areas in **Europe** continued to expand, although at a slower rate than in the 1990s.

Primary forests — that is forests with no visible signs of past or present human activities — account for 36 percent of total forest area, but are being lost or modified at a rate of 6 million hectares a year through deforestation or selective logging.

FRA 2005 also found that new forests and trees are being planted at increasing rates, but plantations still account for less than 5 percent of forest area, it notes.

From biological diversity to carbon sequestration

Forests have multiple functions, including conservation of biological diversity, soil and water, supplying wood and non-wood products, providing recreation opportunities and serving as carbon sinks.

While most forests are managed for multiple uses, FRA 2005 found that 11 percent are designated principally for the conservation of biological diversity — and such areas have increased by an estimated 96 million hectares since 1990.

Around 348 million hectares of forests are used to conserve soil and water, control avalanches and desertification, stabilize sand dunes and protect coastal areas.

One-third of the world's forests are mainly used for production of wood, fibre and non-wood products, and more than half have production of these products as one of their management objectives, indicating the importance of forest products at the local, national and international levels.

Forests are particularly important as carbon sinks: the amount of carbon stored in forest biomass alone is about 283 Gigatonnes (Gt) of carbon, though it decreased globally by 1.1 Gt annually between 1990 and 2005. Carbon stored in forest biomass, deadwood, litter and soil together is roughly 50 percent more than the amount of carbon in the atmosphere.

A global effort

The data for FRA 2005 was provided to FAO by national governments and resource assessment specialists, with more than 800 people involved in the entire process, including 172 national assessment teams, according to Mette Løyche Wilkie, who coordinated the effort.



“The outcome of this global partnership is better data, a more transparent reporting process and enhanced capacity to analyse and report on forests and forest resources,” she said. “The findings of FRA 2005 will support decision-making for policies, programmes and outlook studies in forestry and sustainable development at all levels - local, national and international,” Ms Wilkie added.

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/fra2005>

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