



INTACT

International Action for Primary Forests

Statement of Principles

Earth's remaining primary forests¹ are unique and irreplaceable natural life-support systems, critical to sustain forest dependent communities, indigenous peoples and cultures^{i, ii}, biological diversityⁱⁱⁱ and vital ecosystem services^{i, ii, iv}, such as climate stabilization^v and clean water^{i, vi, vii}. Primary forests are fundamental to the good ecological functioning of the planet and to human wellbeing.

Despite their global importance, Earth's primary forests are in crisis^{x, viii, ix}. Over a third of the planet's original forest cover has been cleared, much of it in the last sixty years, and between 2000 and 2012 we destroyed over 230 million hectares of forest, an area larger than Greenland^x. Of our remaining forests, only about a third qualifies as primary forests and we lose at least 4 million hectares of primary forest each year^{xi}. Only about a fifth of our remaining primary forests are protected, just 5% of their original extent^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}. By comparison, about a third of the planet's forests overall are primarily used for the production of wood and non-wood products^{xi}.

A convergence of recent findings creates a powerful impetus for a new global consensus to respond to this crisis and protect our remaining primary forests:

- **Primary forest degradation and destruction continues at very high rates and significantly contributes to the global biodiversity and climate change crises.** Primary forests contain a disproportionately large share of the planet's terrestrial speciesⁱ, and their degradation and loss is pushing us towards Earth's sixth extinction crisis^{xii}. Primary forest degradation and

¹ Consistent with FAO 2010, we recognize three categories of forest: (i) primary forests—naturally regenerated forest of native species, where there are no clearly visible indications of human activities and ecological processes are not significantly disrupted; (ii) forests used for industrial logging and where there are clearly visible signs of human activities but where forests are reliant on natural regeneration processes (“production forests”); and (iii) planted forests predominantly composed of trees established through planting and/or deliberate seeding of commercial varieties (“plantation forests”) (Mackey et al. 2014).

destruction also generates substantial carbon dioxide emissions^{xiii, xiv, xv} and protecting primary forests is therefore an essential part of a comprehensive approach to stabilizing atmospheric carbon at safe levels. The conversion and degradation of primary forests is thus threatening global life support systems and critical planetary boundaries^{xvi}.

- **Primary forest degradation and destruction has profound social and cultural impacts.** Primary forests are vital to the cultures, livelihoods, health and wellbeing of hundreds of millions of people, including indigenous peoples, and are often critical to freshwater quality and supply, and for food security^{xvii, xviii}. Degradation and destruction of primary forests can therefore cause serious social, cultural and economic dislocation.
- **Current best practices and certification schemes have not reconciled industrial activity with primary forest conservation at large scales.**
 - **Industrial logging has not proven sustainable in primary forests and in the tropics frequently leads to conversion of forests to agriculture.** Even with current best practices, industrial logging is not sustainable in primary forests^{xix, xx, xxi, xxii} causes extensive carbon emissions, significantly reduces biodiversity, decreases ecosystem resilience, degrades water quality and increases risk of fire. In many countries primary forests are illegally logged, poor governance is a serious concern and logging in primary forests provides few local economic benefits^{xxiii}. Sustaining timber yields at economically viable extraction rates is likely not possible in primary tropical forests^{xix} and the ability to do so in other types of primary forests is unproven. While best practice logging is preferable to conventional logging, and some logged forests retain important conservation values, industrial logging is not a conservation strategy for primary forests.
 - **Industrial agriculture, extractive industries and other industrial activities are having a devastating impact on primary forests.** Industrial agriculture and in particular “forest risk commodities” including palm oil, soy, cocoa, cattle and raw materials for bio-energy are expanding extremely rapidly and are responsible for the majority of global deforestation over the last several decades^{xxiv}. Mining, oil and gas and hydroelectric projects are also proliferating rapidly and are increasingly a threat to primary forests around the world^{xxiv}.
 - **Roads, rights of way and other forms of transportation infrastructure have major impacts on primary forests.** Hundreds of thousands of kilometers of roads are being built in tropical, temperate, and boreal regions for logging and other industrial activities.^{xxv} Beyond the direct degradation and deforestation resulting from road building itself, significant indirect ecological impacts are associated with the spread of roads through intact primary forest landscapes^{xxvi}. For example, in the Amazon region, 95% of tropical deforestation occurs within 5 kilometers of a road or a river^{xxvii}.
- **Excluding industrial activities from primary forests is the most effective way to keep primary forests intact.** Properly enforced government protected areas, private protected areas, indigenous and community conservation areas and other conservation mechanisms

such as payments for ecosystem service schemes have proven capacity when implemented consistent with rights-based approaches to maintain primary forests and their values intact, thereby maximizing biodiversity, ecosystem service and social and cultural benefits^{xxviii, xxix, xxx, xxxi, xxxii}.

- **We can develop solutions to meet global wood demand that do not involve resorting to exploiting primary forests.** A much larger proportion of global timber demand can be met through using existing plantations on previously cleared land or degraded forests with low biodiversity value, or alternative fibers, alongside a reduction in wasteful consumption^{xxxiii}. Industrial logging of primary forests in developing countries often targets niche luxury markets, or markets for products that could be substituted from plantations, such as decking or plywood. Industrial logging in primary forests is also often heavily subsidized.

Although forest conservation has been a longstanding international goal, the protection of primary forests in particular has not been an explicit objective in international agreements. However, several international policy processes relevant to forest conservation will culminate in the next few years, including the 11th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, development of the United Nations' Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a new agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and revision of World Bank safeguard policies, providing a valuable window of opportunity to prioritize the protection of primary forests in national and multilateral policies. We must seize this opportunity.

We therefore call upon governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, corporations and financiers around the world to recognize as a matter of principle that the planet's primary forests should be set aside as "No-Go Areas" for industrial activities. We further call upon these actors to apply this principle as a matter of urgency, by integrating it into laws and policies and taking actions to protect primary forests by supporting the full range of available conservation mechanisms. These include government protected areas, indigenous and community conserved areas and other traditional forest use models, private protected areas, conservation concessions and/or areas protected to maintain ecosystem services and biodiversity values. To support this call, we recommend the following actions:

- Defining, mapping and monitoring remaining primary forests for exclusion from timber extraction and other industrial activities.
- Adopting science-based definitions within multilateral environmental agreements that distinguish between primary forests and other forest categories and that can be used for monitoring purposes.
- Strengthening legal and governance frameworks, transparency and law enforcement to protect primary forests.
- Recognizing the following hierarchy of actions related to forest management worldwide needed to maximize climate, biodiversity and social outcomes: (1) protection of primary forests; (2) restoration of degraded natural forests; and (3) improving management of production forests and plantations.

- Implementing landscape-level land use spatial planning, ideally at national levels, to ensure connectivity between, and buffering of, primary forests.
- Prioritizing conservation activities that provide long-term protection of primary forests in International funds and mechanisms such as REDD+. There should be no financial incentives for activities that degrade primary forests, such as industrial logging in such forests.
- Encouraging restoration activities that enhance primary forest protection, for example by buffering primary forests and enhancing ecological connectivity.
- Ensuring policy, financial and market mechanisms discourage conversion of natural forests to agricultural crops including tree crops.
- Recognizing that improved management of secondary forests and plantations has a role to play in reducing land-use pressure on primary forests.
- Protecting, upholding and strengthening the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as expressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and providing funding to indigenous and traditional communities that choose to prioritize the protection of primary forests.
- Ensuring more effective linkages between the Convention on Biological Diversity and other relevant international and regional conventions to ensure they reinforce each other's objectives and support conservation of primary forests.
- Removing perverse incentives in international instruments leading to degradation or conversion of primary forests. For example, plantations and production forests must not be treated as equivalent to primary forests under the UNFCCC; burning forest biomass for large-scale energy production should moreover be discouraged in a new UNFCCC agreement.
- Recognizing through environmental accounting systems the unique and essential contributions of primary forests in maximizing biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services.
- Conducting analyses of market dynamics and pricing levers to facilitate primary forest protection.
- Educating key markets, media and business associations about the consequences of primary forest loss and the availability of alternative sources of timber supply, and establishing a "primary forest-free" certification for wood products in existing certification mechanisms.

A new policy consensus is needed on the protection of Earth's remaining primary forests to secure the ecological health of our planet and the wellbeing of people everywhere. We will not achieve the objectives of key social and environmental agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Sustainable Development Goals, unless we move quickly to protect Earth's remaining primary forests.

For more information please see www.primaryforest.org

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