



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FORESTS • 2011

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests to raise awareness on sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

Forests cover 31% of total land area while at the same time supporting 80% of terrestrial biodiversity that live in them. Many of the world's most threatened and endangered animals live in these forests, making them crucial to sustaining ecosystems. Not only animals live in the forests, as they also provide a home to more than 300 million people worldwide.

Forests play multiple roles in our lives, including providing a source of livelihood, refuge for many species, and clean air for all.

Benefits of forests

As a resource, forests provide many important natural resources, such as timber, fuel, rubber, paper and medicinal plants. Forests also help sustain the quality and availability of freshwater supplies. More than three quarters of the world's accessible freshwater comes from forested catchments. Water quality declines with decreases in forest condition and cover, and natural hazards such as floods, landslides, and soil erosion have larger impacts

Climate change Mitigation

It's well known that forests play a key role in our battle against climate change; storing carbon and sucking in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking it into their biomass.

Products / Benefits (water)

But what's less well known is that the products and services they provide are essential to every aspect of life. By regulating water for many of the world's rivers, they help secure water quality, and supply nearly half of the world's largest cities from Caracas to New York. They also help decrease the impacts of storms and floods, whilst helping control erosion.

Biodiversity

As the most biologically diverse ecosystems on land, forests are home to more than half of terrestrial species, from the great apes to the smallest of creatures.

Economics and Livelihoods

They also provide homes, security and livelihoods for 60 million Indigenous peoples, whilst contributing to the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people worldwide.

Products & Biodiversity

The impact of forests reaches even further. In many developing countries more than 80% of total energy consumed by people and industry derives from forests. Such as fuel wood and charcoal. Trade in timber and other forest products, is estimated at almost 330 billion US Dollars /year. Its value multiplies as its processed into a myriad of products used globally every day. Use of the genetic diversity within forests enables the development of new medicines; progress in healthcare and science.

The threats to forests

As a result of the growing global pollution levels forests have often come to be referred to as the 'lungs of the earth'. This is particularly because deforestation and forest degradation account for nearly 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions, which forests would absorb if carefully managed.

Broadly, there are three main sources of forest degradation: commercial logging, fires, and gathering wood for fuel. Insects and pests also cause considerable forest degradation.

Deforestation is the reduction of forest cover, notably viewed by the loss of trees. Commercial logging and fires are examples of causes of deforestation. It is however possible to use forests

in a properly managed way that maintains their existence. There is therefore no deforestation if there is a guarantee of continuity in maintaining the forest cover.

Degradation refers to the loss of quality of the forests, rather than coverage. The quality of a forest can be observed through monitoring the survival rates of its ecosystem, for example vegetation layers, soil, flora and fauna. Some of the causes of forest degradation are the gathering of wood for fuel, and insects and pests.

Source: www.UNEP.org