



Forests - The Global Scene

On a global scale, deforestation is a key environmental issue. Deforestation is best described as a situation where trees are removed and not replaced, or are harvested faster than the forest can recover through natural regeneration.

World Forest Harvesting in Perspective

Over the period 1950 to 1995, the world's timber harvest increased from 1.5 billion cubic metres per annum to nearly 3.5 billion cubic metres. In the same period, the world's population almost doubled in size, increasing from 2.6 to 5 billion people. The rate of timber harvesting was therefore greater than the rate of population growth for the same period.

World Timber Production

We harvest timber for two main purposes - fuel and industrial use. Timber harvested for fuel is generally used to generate heat for cooking, warmth and light and, in some countries, to generate electric power. Timber harvested for industrial purposes includes timber used in the manufacture of paper products and for building and construction.

The continued growth of the world's population, and the high levels of poverty in some nations, lead to much greater destruction of natural forests for farming and fuel than for harvesting for timber. In some countries, and especially in the tropics, forests are being logged so that people can sell the timber, or use the cleared land to graze animals or grow crops for use overseas. This can result in the loss of precious environmental resources, as well as other problems such as increased erosion, pollution of water supplies and disruption to the local people's incomes and ways of life.

Around six billion hectares of forest have disappeared during the past three centuries. Only one-third of the world's land area is still covered by forests, but the proportion of forest land differs considerably from country to country. The most rapid loss of forest is occurring in the tropics. It is estimated that about 25,000 square kilometres of rainforest is cleared per year in Central America and the Amazon. On a world scale, approximately 200,000 square kilometres of rainforest is cleared each year - almost 40 football ovals every minute!

About a third of timber harvested from rainforests is used for making paper. The average person in an industrialised nation uses 150 kg of paper each year, which is equivalent to the weight of three small adults!

Sustainable forestry programs are being sponsored in the 'developing nations' of the world by organisations such as the World Bank and the International Forestry Federation.

Plantation forestry has a role to play in supplying our timber needs, while at the same time helping to protect our natural forests.

The Kyoto Protocol

This is an agreement made under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (*UNFCCC*). Countries that ratify this protocol commit to reduce their emissions



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of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride, or engage in emissions trading if they maintain or increase emissions of these gases.

The Kyoto Protocol now covers more than 160 countries and over 55% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

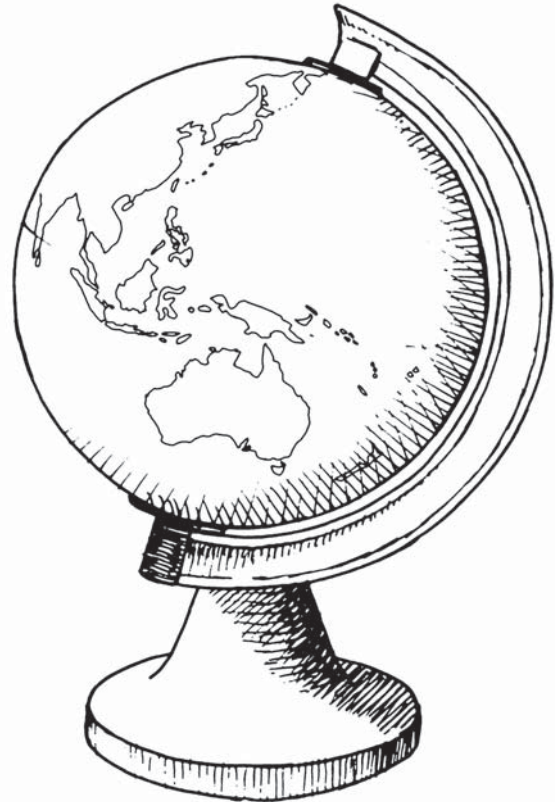
The amounts of clearing or planting of forests since 1990 are important factors that influence a country's ability to meet their greenhouse gas emissions target.

The Montreal Process

This began as an initiative of the Government of Canada, which hosted a meeting in Montreal in September 1993. The goal of the Montreal meeting was to develop a scientifically rigorous set of criteria and indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests.

Six of the criteria deal with forest conditions, attributes or functions, and the values or benefits associated with the environmental, social and economic goods and services that forests provide:

1. conservation of biological diversity;
2. maintenance of productive capacity of forest ecosystems;
3. maintenance of forest ecosystem health and vitality;
4. conservation and maintenance of soil and water resources;
5. maintenance of forest contribution to global carbon cycles; and
6. maintenance and enhancement of long-term multiple socio-economic benefits to meet the needs of societies.



Twelve countries in the world now participate. These countries are: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia, USA and Uruguay.

These countries represent 90% of the world's temperate and boreal forests, and 60% of all the world's forests.

Find Out More

The Kyoto Protocol - www.climatechange.gov.au/international/kyoto
The Montreal Process - www.rinya.maff.go.jp/mpci