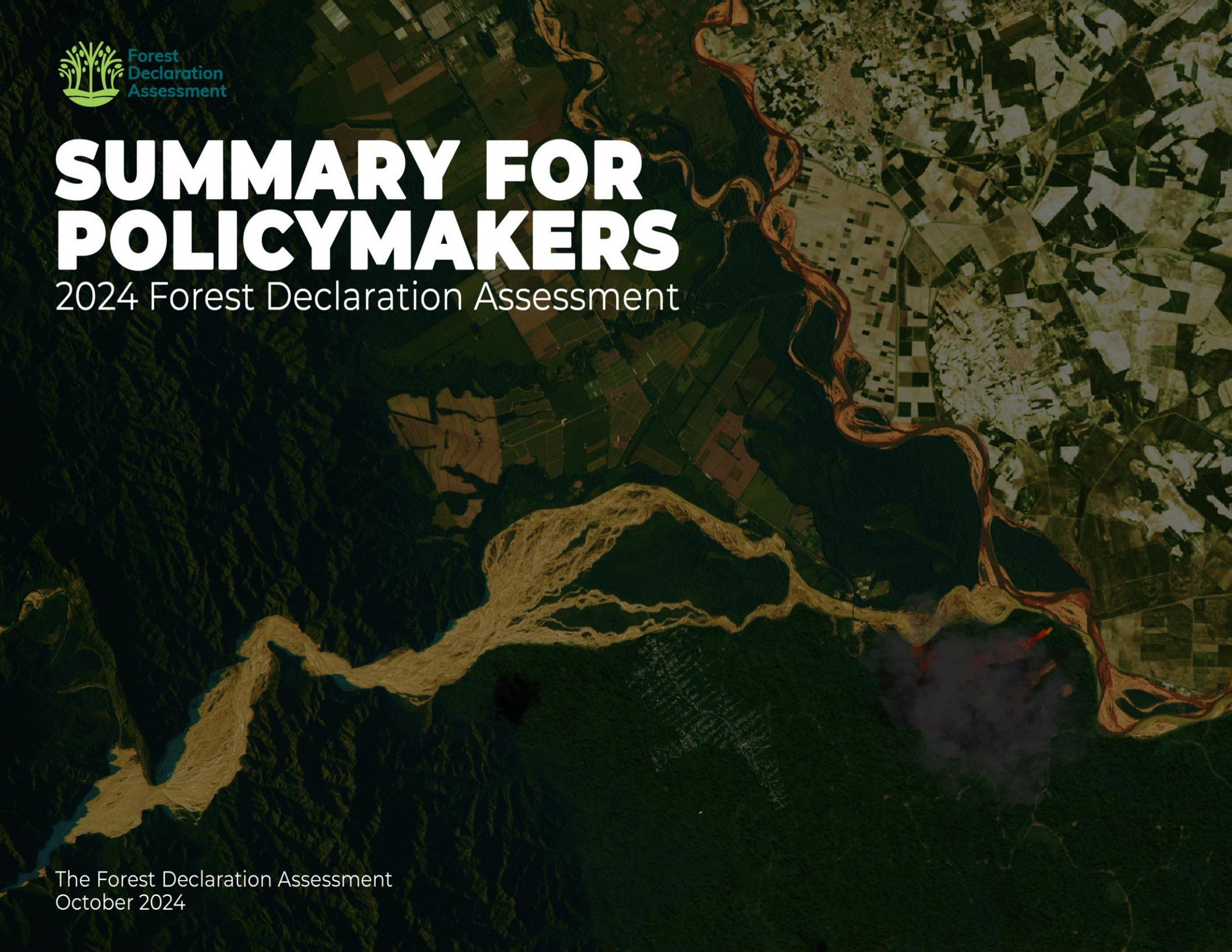

Forest Declaration Assessment

SUMMARY FOR POLICYMAKERS

2024 Forest Declaration Assessment

The Forest Declaration Assessment
October 2024

ABOUT THE FOREST DECLARATION ASSESSMENT

The Forest Declaration Assessment is an independent, civil society accountability effort to track progress towards global forest goals. Started in 2015 as an initiative to track progress toward the New York Declaration on Forests, this effort now engages a diverse group of over two dozen research organizations, think tanks, NGOs, and advocacy groups from around the world.

Each year, the Forest Declaration Assessment Partners draw on their collective expertise to provide scientific, independent, and peer-reviewed analysis that provides a comprehensive picture of the state of forest pledges.

ABOUT THE SUMMARY FOR POLICYMAKERS

The Summary for Policymakers provides an overview of key findings from the 2024 Forest Declaration Assessment and additional insights on sustainable production & development, forest finance, and forest rights & governance. It also provides high-level recommendations to help drive meaningful, accelerated action on forest protection, conservation, and restoration.

For more in-depth analysis on progress towards 2030 forest goals, see the full 2024 Forest Declaration Assessment report, "Forests under fire: Tracking progress on 2030 forest goals."

CITATION

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Forest Declaration Assessment

1. Introduction

Forests are indispensable. They provide livelihoods for more than one billion people, shelter 80 percent of terrestrial plant and animal species, and are irreplaceable for stabilizing the global climate by helping to limit global warming to 1.5°C as outlined in the Paris Agreement. Forests are central for addressing the interlinked climate, biodiversity, and nature crises, yet they continue to be destroyed at alarming rates – threatening planetary health and the well-being of future generations.

Global commitments like the New York Declaration on Forests (2014), the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration (2021), and the First UNFCCC Global Stocktake (2023), have been adopted by nearly all countries and hundreds of companies, civil society organizations, and Indigenous Peoples' (IPs') organizations. The pledges have set a shared intention to halt and reverse deforestation and ecosystem degradation by 2030. However, a third of the way into this critical decade, deforestation, degradation, and restoration targets appear increasingly out of reach.

The drivers of forest loss are rooted in unsustainable models of production and consumption. The global demand for commodities like agricultural products, fossil fuels, minerals, and even sustainable alternatives – such as renewable energy – continues to intensify pressure on forest ecosystems. Even as demands shift between regions and commodities, other drivers emerge or intensify, creating a compounding set of challenges that exacerbate deforestation and forest degradation.

The harmful impacts of unsustainable production and consumption primarily affect the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) face violence from land use conflicts and are often dispossessed of their land. They experience negative health and livelihood outcomes from ecosystem disruption and degradation while receiving little to no benefits from the production and development projects that cause this harm. Developing and forest-rich countries largely bear the burden of meeting global demand – both domestic and international – with ever-greater volumes of forest-risk products, while facing increasing calls to solve the deforestation and ecosystem degradation crises.

There is no single solution for protecting and restoring forests, but the diversity of existing efforts offers hope. Each effort – whether demand-side measures, sustainability standards, or financial mechanisms – has its own successes and limitations. Where policies have been deployed cohesively alongside adequate funding and political will, they have often proven effective. While progress is not always linear, and never simple, recent trends in some of the largest forest countries like Brazil and Indonesia show that it is indeed possible.

Meanwhile, political transitions present both risks and opportunities for forest conservation. Strong leadership can yield rapid progress, as seen recently in Brazil, while shifts in political will and priorities can easily reverse gains. Harnessing moments of political change to build momentum and consensus can elevate forests on the political agenda. It is crucial to remain vigilant so that shifting political winds do not fan the flame of forest destruction.

2. Key findings

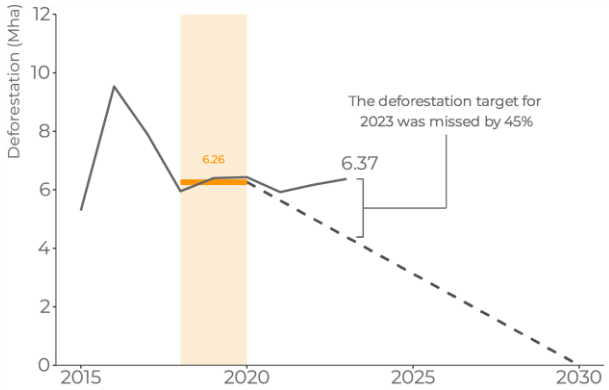
2.1. Progress toward overarching forest goals

In 2023, forests remained under massive pressure, which puts the world's climate, biodiversity, and forest goals under threat.

The world remains off track to reach the goals of halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030. Globally, 6.37 million hectares of forest were permanently lost in 2023 (**Figure 1**). Regional deforestation targets were missed in almost all tropical regions (**Figure 2**). Tropical Asia nearly met its interim target in 2022, but in 2023, deforestation in the region spiked again to 1.83 million hectares. The extent of progress to eliminate deforestation in the world's temperate and boreal regions varied in 2023 – but each of these regions was off track to meet its 2030 targets. Outside the tropics, temperate Latin America and North America had the greatest absolute levels of deforestation. Temperate Africa experienced a nearly six-fold increase in deforestation from 2018-20 baseline levels. Gross emissions from deforestation, resulting from permanent tree cover loss, totaled 3.8 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Primary forests are the most critical forest ecosystems to safeguard, yet they were destroyed at shocking rates last year. The loss of the carbon stored in primary forests is irreversible in relevant time scales, as is the biodiversity they harbor. It can take hundreds or even thousands of years to re-establish the structures and the ecological functions that characterize a primary forest. In 2023, the global rate of loss for humid tropical primary forest loss was 38 percent higher than necessary to be on track. However, some tropical countries advanced toward the goal of halting primary forest loss by 2030. Still, the world's progress in stopping the loss of these irreplaceable forests is vastly insufficient.

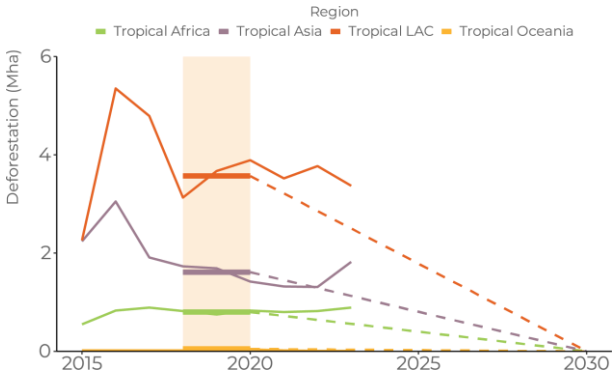
Figure 1. Global deforestation from 2015-23 in million hectares (Mha)



Key metrics on global deforestation in million hectares (Mha)

Region	Baseline deforestation (Mha)	Deforestation target for 2023 (Mha)	Deforestation in 2023 (Mha)	Change from Baseline (%)	Deviation from 2023 target (%)
Global	6.26	4.38	6.37	+2%	+45%

Figure 2. Tropical regional deforestation from 2015-23 in million hectares (Mha)



Key metrics on tropical regional deforestation in million hectares (Mha)

Region	Baseline deforestation (Mha)	Deforestation target for 2023 (Mha)	Deforestation in 2023 (Mha)	Change from Baseline (%)	Deviation from 2023 target (%)
Tropical Africa	0.80	0.56	0.89	+12%	+60%
Tropical Asia	1.61	1.13	1.82	+13%	+62%
Tropical LAC	3.57	2.50	3.37	-5%	+35%
Tropical Oceania	0.05	0.03	0.01	-74%	-62%

The total area of global forests affected by degradation is huge. The area of forest that fell to a lower ecological integrity category in 2022[a] – 62.6 million hectares – is 10 times greater than the area that was deforested and twice the total area of the country of Germany. This figure doesn't even account for forests that became more degraded but stayed within the same integrity category. Degradation within tropical moist forests in 2023 was 20 percent off track to meet the goal of eliminating degradation by 2030 (Figure 4). Forests are also becoming more fragmented – 18 percent of tropical forests are now affected by edge effects. However, human-induced pressures that lead to degradation seem to be decreasing. The Forest Landscape Integrity Index (FLII) shows that the rate of loss of ecological integrity is slowing globally, with notable exceptions in temperate Asia and temperate Europe. This could signal that future rates of degradation will decline; however, the FLII does not account for the impact of intensifying forest fires, which could derail progress on reducing other degradation drivers.

Forest fires are intricately tied to deforestation and forest degradation. Increasingly, severe fire patterns are man-made disasters, not natural phenomena. Worsening fires create a vicious cycle: more intense fires lead to greater degradation, reducing forest resilience and increasing vulnerability to future fires. This dynamic makes it even harder to halt deforestation and degradation by 2030. This is particularly true in ecosystems that have no co-evolved with natural fire patterns, like tropical moist forests, where fire impacts are particularly damaging.

Additionally, in 2023, over 1.4 million hectares of forests were lost within forested Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)[b] which is 19 percent higher than it should have been to be on track to eliminate tree cover loss in forested KBAs by 2030. The loss of forest cover in these areas destroys the habitats of species that depend on forest habitats for their survival or reproduction.

2.2. Progress on sustainable production & development

With one year remaining to meet the private sector goal to eliminate deforestation from agricultural supply chains,[1] the world is still far from meeting this target.

Commodity production – including crops and livestock as well as mined commodities like coal, metals, and minerals – remains the predominant driver of deforestation and ecosystem conversion worldwide (**Figure 3**).[2]

Seven agricultural commodities alone caused 57 percent of all deforestation from 2001-18.[3] Mining volumes from tropical moist forests doubled from 2000-19,[4] with coal driving 34 percent of mining-induced deforestation that could be allocated to specific commodities from 2001-19.[5] The demand for many of these commodities – and, as a result, pressure on forests – remains high or continues to increase. Much of this demand is driven by industrialized countries. From 2020-22, the EU and China – the top importing markets for forest-risk commodities – were responsible for approximately 40 percent of all deforestation embodied in the direct trade of agricultural commodities.[6] And despite the Paris Agreement's goals to phase out coal-fired power generation by 2040[7], global coal production reached a record high in 2023.[8] Industrialized countries – like China, the EU, and the U.S. – drive nearly half of the rising global demand for metals and minerals.[9]

Small-scale activities also have significant impacts on forests. Shifting agriculture caused 15.9 million hectares of primary forest loss from 2015-23. Though shifting agriculture can be practiced sustainably as part of traditional, rotational land management systems, its impacts are detrimental when they lead to the clearing of primary forests.[10] Artisanal and small-scale mining remains a significant and growing threat to forests, especially in the Amazon[11] and the Congo Basin.[12]

IPs and LCs are at the forefront of grassroots efforts to combat destructive production and development practices, protecting their lands against unjust incursions. In 2023, 196 land and environmental defenders were killed,

[a] This includes areas that moved from a higher to a lower integrity category, as defined by thresholds set based on Forest Landscape Integrity index (FLII) scores, net of any areas with increased FLII score. Such increases may result from the removal of observed and/or inferred anthropogenic pressure, anticipating the regeneration of forests that may occur in the future. Moreover, this estimate excludes areas that were permanently deforested.

[b] KBAs are sites that contribute significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity and are identified based on a set of criteria relating to threatened or geographically restricted species or ecosystems, biological processes, ecological integrity, and irreplaceability (IUCN, 2022). Forested KBAs are a subset of all KBAs that are characterized by forest coverage and by the presence of at least one forest specialist that triggered KBA criteria at the site (Crowe, O. et al., 2023).

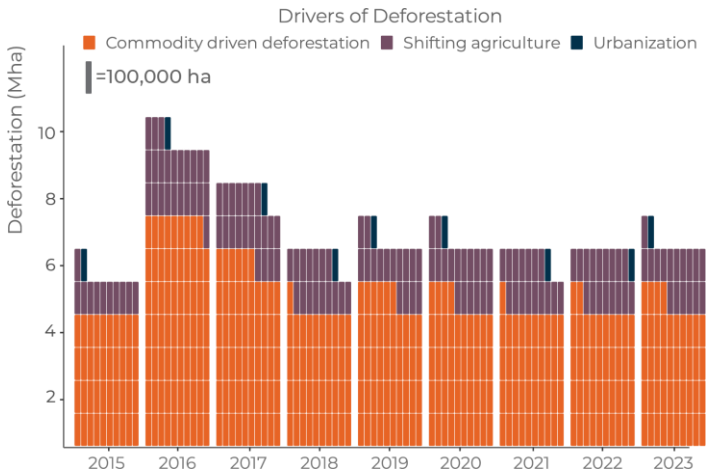
bringing the total killings tracked by Global Witness since 2012 to 2,106.[13] Mining remains the most dangerous sector for defenders. A review of cases of environmental conflict found that 34 percent of all conflicts involve IPs, while three-fourths of conflicts are caused by forest-risk sectors – agriculture and forestry, mining, fossil fuels, and dam projects.[14] Mining-induced conflict and displacement are expected to increase as demand for minerals and subsequent mining waste grows.[15]

Company efforts to end deforestation and conversion in agricultural supply chains have been insufficient. Nearly a quarter of high-risk companies and financial institutions (those assessed by Forest 500 in each of their ten annual assessments) have made no commitments to address deforestation.[16] Even those who have set commitments are largely failing to meet them.[17] Transparency remains a real hindrance to progress – only 21 percent of companies who reported on deforestation efforts to CDP in 2023 provided high-quality and comprehensive information.[18]

Yet, the small share of companies who are at the vanguard of agricultural supply chain action are making real headway. These efforts will be crucial as the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) goes into effect in December 2024.[c][19] This landmark policy could be transformative in reducing deforestation by leveling the playing field and applying due diligence requirements across market actors. With major companies seeking access to the world's biggest single market,[20] the moment is ripe to harness their motivation and drive sweeping innovations in traceability technologies and sustainability practices, while ensuring that small-scale producers are not disadvantaged and excluded from European supply chains.

In contrast, the extractive sector lags on forest action. Mining's risks to forests and biodiversity are underrecognized, rarely granted specific mention in national biodiversity targets[21] or risk assessments, even when mining occurs within protected areas.[22] However, some first steps in the right direction have been made. For example, among mining companies disclosing to CDP, the share with company-wide biodiversity commitments rose from 53 percent in 2021 to 77 percent in 2023.[23]

Figure 3. Drivers of deforestation from 2015-23 in million hectares (Mha)



2.3. Progress on increasing and greening finance for forests

Achieving international forest goals requires substantial investment in protecting, sustainably managing, and restoring forests.

This so-called "green" finance must be mobilized through both public and private sources. Current international forest finance commitments amount to USD 30.03 billion between the years 2021-25. As of August 2024, just over one third had been disbursed.[d] The achievement of forest goals also requires a shift away from so-called 'gray' finance or investments in potentially harmful activities.

[c] On October 2, 2024, the European Commission published a proposal to delay implementation of the EUDR by 12 months. As of the time of writing, it is unclear whether the proposal will be adopted by the European Parliament and EU member states. For more information see https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_5009

[d] Original analysis by Climate Focus of published pledge progress reports. Pledges included in this total include the Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest (LEAF) Coalition (2021); The Congo Basin Pledge (2021); Finance Sector Deforestation Action (FSDA) initiative (2021); Global Forest Finance Pledge (2021); IPLC Forest Tenure Pledge (2021); Innovative Finance for the Amazon, Cerrado, and Chaco (IFACC)(2021); Forest, People, Climate (FPC) (2022); and The Libreville Plan (2023).

However, governments spent just USD 2.4 billion per year on green forest finance since 2010,[e] compared to up to USD 1 trillion per year in gray finance during the same period.[f,24] In 2024, an estimated USD 2.6 trillion per year in environmentally harmful subsidies encourage unsustainable production or carbon-intensive consumption, the depletion of natural resources, or the degradation of global ecosystems.[25] It's not just governments; private sector flows of grey finance to forest-risk activities remain significant. Forests & Finance data shows that between January 2016 and September 2023, over USD 307 billion in financial credit was provided by banks to the largest companies involved in forest-risk commodity supply chains and mining.[26] Green investments by the private sector remain poorly tracked and difficult to measure.

When it comes to public finance for forests, REDD+ remains an important lever for mobilizing funding. In 2024, the FCPF Carbon Fund made disbursements to Vietnam,[27] Côte d'Ivoire,[28] and Lao PDR[29] for achieving Emission Reductions (ERs) through jurisdictional REDD+ programs. The Fund has so far issued USD 94 million in ER payments to six countries, with a total of USD 327.7 million worth of payments in the pipeline.[30]

Finance to support IPs, LCs, and Afro-descendant peoples (ADPs) has increased in recent years. From 2020-23, disbursements averaged USD 517 million per year, an increase of 36 percent above the previous four-year average,[31]but this funding remains vastly insufficient. The majority (72%) of this increase is attributed to the Forest Tenure Funders Group – the group of 25 donors that made the COP26 IPLC Forest Tenure Joint Donor Statement and pledged USD 1.7 billion in support from 2021-25.[3233] Despite these increases, direct access of IPs, LCs, and ADPs to finance remains limited – even though direct funding is essential for addressing historic funding inequities and allowing these groups to use funding in alignment with their priorities. In a 2024 analysis of philanthropic grants found that, from 2016-20, only 0.6 percent of giving benefited IPs and only 0.3 percent went to Indigenous governments, Autonomous Regions, and Indigenous Peoples' organizations.[3435] Traditional, top-down forest financing models driven by governments or private actors often restrict the ability of IPs and LCs to access funding or use it in alignment with their priorities. New IP- and LC-driven funding mechanisms are emerging which make these stakeholders partners rather than simply beneficiaries in the implementation of forest finance.[36]

Within the private sector, progress on safeguarding against investments' negative consequences for forests remains inadequate. A 2023 assessment by Global Canopy found that almost a quarter of the companies and financial institutions most exposed to deforestation risk in their supply chains and investments do not have a single commitment to addressing deforestation.[g,37] While this is a marked decrease from the previous year's assessment,[h,38] the list of companies and financial institutions which still have no such commitment includes some of the world's biggest food, beverage, apparel, and investment companies.

Market-based finance – such as forest-based carbon projects – continues to attract controversy. Scrutiny over the quality of forest-based carbon credits is shaping demand[i]: between 2023 and 2024, REDD+ credits lost 62 percent of their value, with transaction volumes falling by 51 percent and prices falling by 23 percent.[39,40] New markets for jurisdictional REDD+ (JREDD+) are emerging. For example, Costa Rica and Ghana signed agreements to deliver ART-TREES verified credits to LEAF Coalition buyers.[41] Suriname, Honduras, and Belize have recently made sovereign JREDD+ credits available as ITMOs under Article 6.[42]

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[e] This total includes international climate-related development finance, and international REDD+ and domestic REDD+ finance. Note that finance estimates cover different timeframes. International development finance includes bilateral and multilateral finance commitments made during the period 2010- 2022, as recorded in the OECD DAC External Development Finance Statistics database. International REDD+ includes REDD+ readiness and implementation finance commitments by FCPF, GCF, FIP, BioCF, CAFI, UN-REDD, CBFF and the Amazon Fund between 2008-2022. Data obtained from fund websites and from Climate Funds Update. Domestic REDD+ includes government REDD+ finance commitments made by 16 REDD+ countries that budgeted for government contributions. Data obtained from EPRDs available on the FCPF website. Note that investment plans cover different timeframes and information on implementation and progress since publication is not available.

[f] The upper bound is an estimated value if data for all countries were available. See Damania, Richard et. al (2023).

[g] Global Canopy's Forest 500 tracks the policies and performance of the 350 most influential companies and 150 financial institutions most exposed to deforestation risk in their supply chains and investments.

[h] Global Canopy found 40 percent of companies and financial institutions assessed under its 2023 Forest 500 assessment to have made no commitment relating to deforestation.

[i] This decline has largely been attributed to a wave of negative media coverage of REDD+ in 2023, following the widely publicized results of some research into a selection of REDD+ projects. See, for example, Greenfield, P. (2023, January 18).

2.4. Progress on improving forest rights & governance

Effective forest governance requires clear and enforceable policies and legal frameworks that ensure inclusive participation, hold governments accountable, and promote shared goals like forest protection and land tenure security. Despite progress in some regions, ongoing rights violations and poor governance persist in many areas.

On one hand, the past year has seen several positive advancements in forest governance. The number of protected areas has increased, reaching 302,934 globally by August 2024,[43] with new areas established in countries like Japan,[44] Bhutan,[45] and Brazil.[46] Efforts to strengthen forest protection laws are progressing in regions such as the EU, with the Nature Restoration Law in June 2024[47] and the DRC's first land-use planning legislation passed in December 2023.[48,49] Demand-side measures, particularly in the EU, are also advancing with the implementation of the EUDR and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). The regulation to implement the United Kingdom's Forest Risk Commodity (UKFRC) regime is under consideration. Forest law enforcement improved in several countries, including Brazil,[50] Colombia,[51] the U.S.,[52] Australia,[53] and Portugal,[54] while international cooperation has progressed with, for example, the expansion of the Nature Crime Alliance.[55,56,57,58] Furthermore, funding for IP and LC land tenure rights has risen, and recent legal rulings in Ecuador,[59,60] Indonesia,[61] and Canada[62] have provided some positive strides toward securing land rights for these groups.

However, significant challenges remain in global forest governance. For instance, criticisms have been leveled against demand-side regulations, which some argue are overly punitive and disregard local factors.[63,64] Setbacks in forest protection laws are also evident, with weakened regulations in India, [65] a diluted definition of forest degradation in Canada, [66,67] and forest governance implementation challenges in Europe. Recognition of IP and LC land tenure remains far too slow in the face of ongoing territorial infringement by infrastructure, agriculture, and extractive activities as well as by conservation and climate change mitigation projects.[68] Even where countries have processes in place for communities to claim land titles, the processes are often cumbersome and limited – as demonstrated by recent examples from Cambodia, India, Nepal, the Philippines, and Guyana.[69] Recent evictions in Tanzania,[70,71] planned encroachment on IP territories in Cambodia,[72] and weakened free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) rights in Nepal and India[73] further illustrate the difficulties in achieving equitable forest governance.

With major political transitions on the horizon around the world, the potential for either advancing or jeopardizing global forest goals is immense. Two of the countries with the highest levels of primary forest loss will see political transitions in the next year. Indonesia will swear in a new president in October 2024, and Bolivia will hold national elections in 2025. For the EU and the United States – two of the largest consumers of forest-risk products – 2024 is also a year of major political shifts. The results of European elections in June 2024 could affect the implementation of the European Green New Deal. The United States' November 2024 federal elections will likely yield global consequences for the climate, beyond just determining the fate of proposed deforestation due diligence legislation, the U.S. Forest Act.[74]

3. Recommendations

Prosperity and forest conservation are not mutually exclusive. There is an alternative path – and the choice is ours to make. We have the capacity to sustain human life and promote its flourishing without destroying and degrading natural ecosystems.

On a global level, we do not need to expand agricultural land into natural ecosystems to meet humanity's nutritional needs. From 2000-21, crop and meat production both increased by over 50 percent.[75]Over the same period, the world population increased by only 29 percent.[76] We already have more than enough food to supply the world's calorie needs. Acute hunger is a distribution, not a production, issue.[77]

While some forest impacts may be unavoidable, we don't need to destroy them recklessly or jeopardize community safety to meet the demand for mined commodities. The renewable energy transition offers an opportunity to reduce our reliance on coal-fired power and, in turn, decrease coal mining – one of the major drivers of mining-related deforestation. That said, the shift to renewable energy also carries significant impacts on forests through the mining of critical minerals, and these impacts must be recognized and mitigated. However, unlike coal, once mined, critical minerals can be re-used for a dozen years or more,[78] as long as we set up the systems for their

recovery and recycling.[79] The harmful impacts of mining itself can be significantly reduced with the right approaches – from avoiding high-conservation value areas, to reducing the footprint of mining operations and restoring affected areas, to respecting the rights and territories of the Indigenous Peoples and local communities within whose lands most of these critical mineral deposits lie.[80]

Ultimately, we must rethink our fundamental relationship with consumption. Swapping resource-intensive systems with more efficient and sustainable ones – such as replacing fossil fuel power with renewable energy, gas-powered vehicles with EVs, and inefficient buildings with sustainable ones – must be done with the utmost urgency but will not be enough on its own. In addition to new, more sustainable methods of resource use, we need to consider and rapidly adopt alternative models of consumption itself, such as circularity (rather than linear production-to-waste pipelines), shared and public transport solutions (rather than individual vehicles), and mindful reductions in overall demand, aligned with a just and equitable transition.

With the world off track to halt and reverse forest loss and degradation by 2030, all actors and sectors must work to make up lost ground, and more, in the coming years. Fewer than six years remain until the end of this critical decade. Therefore, immediate action to protect forests is essential. World leaders **can and must** meet their ambitious 2030 goals, as long as they:

- **Recognize the true value of forests and other ecosystems and restructure their economic planning accordingly.** Leaders must carefully weigh the tradeoffs between forest and sustainable development goals and wrestle with tough questions. Who is really benefiting from forest clearing and exploitation? Is deforestation for agriculture, mining, or other exploitation the best course of action for sustainable development in the long term, or is it only contributing to the superficial and short-term gain of a few? How can risks to forests and other ecosystems be avoided and mitigated, even if it means a reduction in profits?
- **Embrace a radical shift from the paradigm of unsustainable exploitation and inequality that is so deeply entrenched in our society.** The world cannot sustain its “business-as-usual” exploitation and destruction of forests. A radical transformation of development pathways, finance flows, and governance effectiveness and enforcement are required to shift the world’s trajectory to achieve the 2030 forest goals. Leaders should harness the power of human innovation in landscapes to collectively develop alternative models for the benefit of all.
- **Build a regulatory and fiscal environment that mandates private sector action, disclosure, and accountability for forests and other ecosystems that simultaneously incentivizes the protection, sustainable management, and restoration of forests.** It is also past time to move beyond reliance solely on voluntary initiatives to lead the way. Government mandates, alongside investments the enabling environment to ensure corporate compliance, should create the necessary incentives for the private sector to adopt best practices. Governments must repurpose harmful subsidies in an effective, just, and equitable manner,[81] regulate the financial sector, and significantly ramp up finance for forests. In particular, they must prioritize building capacities and channeling finance to mechanisms that are directly funding IPs, LCs, and other local actors.
- **Adopt a rights-based, comprehensive, and resilient approach to forest protection, conservation, and restoration that prioritizes inclusive and participatory governance to endure through political shifts.** Governments must recognize and uphold human rights, specifically the rights of IPs to their land, territories, and resources. They must support IP and community-led solutions for sustainable land management while addressing historical injustices.
- **Step up to address deforestation and conversion as a shared, global problem.** All countries that import forest-risk commodities need to take responsibility commensurate to their footprint, including in their national climate plans.[82] Governments must embrace a spirit of partnership, ensuring that technical and financial assistance is conducted on equal footing, tailored to the recipient country's needs and priorities. Industrialized countries must increase finance for developing countries, recognizing their common but differentiated responsibilities. At the same time, all actors must recognize that halting deforestation and degradation is closely intertwined with the fate of other terrestrial ecosystems. The conversion of natural grasslands, for example, is accelerating in areas like the Cerrado, the Pampas, and the North American Great Plains to accommodate the expansion of agriculture and livestock production. Efforts to avert all conversion of natural ecosystems must be addressed holistically.
- **Act according to the new reality of climate change where forest fires have become more frequent and intense, and degradation continues to pose a serious threat to forests all over the world.** The use and ignition of fires needs to be carefully managed, while scaling up investments in systems to detect and combat wildfires when they occur. At the same

time, ecosystems must be conserved and restored to build their resilience to wildfires. And to improve clarity on the role of wildfires in climate change, countries must fully and transparently account for them in official greenhouse gas reporting.

- **Leaders must also prioritize investments in restoration, embracing the potential of assisted natural regeneration, alongside complementary restoration activities aiming to increase forest cover and increase the use of tree cover within productive, multifunctional landscapes.** Restoration interventions must be scaled up to counter the degradation of forests worldwide and to build regenerative bioeconomies that support rural livelihoods. In some cases, leaders should seriously question the productive focus of forestry, especially in areas where a focus instead on biodiversity conservation, restoring ecological integrity, or supporting climate goals may be more appropriate.
- **Ensure full transparency on the implementation of forest commitments, so progress can be tracked, and pledgers held accountable.** Endorsers and signatories to forest commitments must set clear interim milestones and publicly available strategies to align their economic and development priorities with forests. Without accurate, up-to-date data, we cannot get a complete picture of efforts to achieve forest goals underway around the globe.

When countries succeed in protecting forests, they must sustain those efforts; protecting forests is not a one-time achievement. We should celebrate victories, but it is essential that countries also remain vigilant and committed to ramping up their measures to protect, conserve, and restore forests, ensuring that our successes – not our failures – compound.

We cannot maintain "business-as-usual" for forests, nor should we simply replace unsustainable models of resource use with equally extractive "green" alternatives. The path ahead may be challenging at times, but it is achievable. We need a radical transformation in the way we approach consumption, development, and safeguarding the world's forests.

Endnotes

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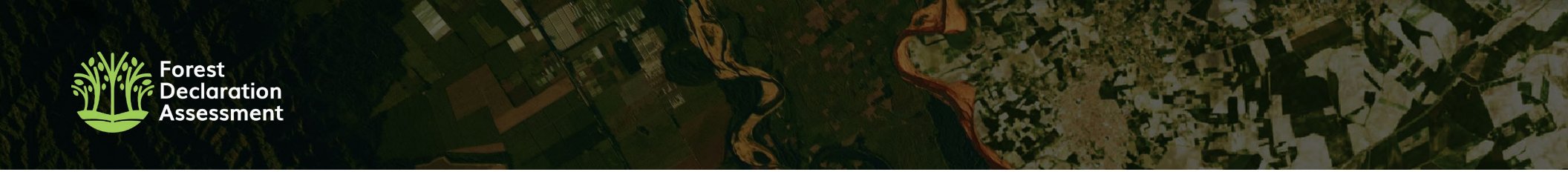

Forest Declaration Assessment

Accountability Framework initiative

BRAZILIAN COALITION ON CLIMATE, FORESTS AND AGRICULTURE

BRAZILIAN RESTORATION AND REFORESTATION OBSERVATORY

CDP DISCLOSURE INSIGHT ACTION

Centre for Sustainability PHILIPPINES

CIFOR

World Agroforestry

CLEAN COOKING ALLIANCE

climate & company

CLIMATE FOCUS

CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

CTrees

FOREST TRENDS

Global Canopy

IGES Institute for Global Environmental Strategies

ONE TREE PLANTED

RESTOR

RIGHTS + RESOURCES

SEI

Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe

THE SUSTAINABILITY CONSORTIUM

ZSL Zoological Society of London