



FORESTS FOREVER

Luke Breit
10-2-4/9

The forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited kindness and benevolence that makes no demands for its sustenance and extends generously the products of its live activity; it offers protection to all beings offering shade even to those who destroy it."

Buddha

Over the past half century the earth's vast green mantle of forests has been reduced to tattered remnants. As the world's population has grown from 2.3 billion in 1950 to 6.7 billion today, some 300 billion acres of the world's original forest cover - nearly half - has been lost. The destruction continues: in each of the last dozen years, about 14.6 million hectares of forest has been cut, bulldozed, or burned.

Vast forests are essential to life itself. They absorb carbon dioxide (the main climate-altering gas in the atmosphere) and produce oxygen, anchor soils and prevent erosion, regulate water flow and protect watersheds, modify climate and cool the air, and provide a habitat for millions of species of plants and animals.

By providing water cycle regulation, soil conservation, and biodiversity, forests are vital to maintaining healthy ecosystems - on which humanity depends.

In the North America, farmers and foresters depend on migratory birds, along with bats and insects, to pollinate crops, disperse seeds, and prey on pests. Mexican brown bats dine on a variety of insects that plague corn, cotton, and potato crops in the United States, saving farmers millions of dollars in damages, while reducing use of pesticides.

The world's forests act as great reservoirs that store about 830 billion tons of carbon. Trees are an important component of the global carbon cycle, a geochemical process that helps to regulate the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide. Living trees soak up carbon dioxide, but when the trees are cut down they become a source of carbon. In the last decade, tropical deforestation has released large amounts of stored carbon - accounting for roughly one-quarter of the carbon dioxide emissions to the atmosphere from human activity.

The world's remaining intact and old-growth forests play a critical role in the fight against global warming. **Deforestation and forest degradation account for nearly 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions.** Forests absorb carbon, storing incredible amounts in trees, plants and soil. When these forests are cut, most of the carbon they hold is released back into the atmosphere.

While some forestry companies claim that the answer to climate change is to log forests in order to 'store' carbon in wood products, this is misleading. Protecting intact and old-growth forests so they can continue to absorb and store carbon is a key part of mitigating climate change.

Remember, the forests are the lungs of the earth. I want to thank the members of the Air Resources Board for looking more closely at this issue and making a real effort 'to protect California's forests and' the world's future.

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