

These numbers on the global loss of forest cover are way too alarming

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A tribal family in Koraput, Odisha. (Photo: Shiv's fotografia/[Wikipedia](#))

“And into the forest I go, to lose my mind and find my soul.” – John Muir
Forests hold more than three-quarters of the world’s biodiversity, provide many products and services that contribute to socio-economic development and are particularly important for hundreds of millions of people in rural areas. The livelihoods and food security of many of the world’s rural poor depend on forests and trees. Forests are home to many species of birds, reptiles, arthropods, annelids and mammals. Thus, forests are the foundation of most life on Earth. But, forests and dependent biodiversity are facing the impacts of anthropogenic climate change due to deforestation, urbanisation, industrialisation, pollution and increasing human population. Anthropogenic activities are raising the level of carbon dioxide by about two parts per million a year in the atmosphere.

World population is projected to increase from around 7.6 billion today to close to 10 billion people by 2050. Global demand for food is estimated to grow by 50% during this period; it will place enormous pressure on forests to agriculture land conversion which will threaten the livelihoods of foresters, forest communities and indigenous peoples, but also the variety of life on our planet. We can expect a loss of habitat, land degradation, soil erosion, decrease in clean water, dropping of ground water and the release of carbon into the atmosphere. Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) and FAO found that the world’s forest area decreased from 31.6% of the global land area to 30.6% between 1990 and 2015. According to Britannica, in the 19th century, tropical forests covered approximately 20% of the dry land area on Earth, but by the end of the 20th century this figure had dropped to less than 7%. In India, according to State of Forest Report 2017, the total forest and tree cover in India was 80.20 million hectares, which was 24.39% of the

geographical area of the country with a reduction of 0.34 million hectares of moderately dense forests due to forest degradation. Three-quarters of the globe's accessible freshwater comes from forested watersheds but 40% percent of the world's 230 major watersheds have lost more than half of their original tree cover. An estimated 18 million acres (7.3 million hectares) of forest, which is roughly the size of the country of Panama, are lost each year, according to FAO. It is estimated that 15% of all greenhouse gas emissions come from deforestation, according to the WWF. The growing intensity of wildfires and their spread to new corners of the globe is a big danger for forests. This is really alarming.

The Importance of Forests

Apart from food, fodder and medicine, forests supply about 40% of global renewable energy. About 2.4 billion people depend upon forests for basic energy services. Forests and trees play a crucial role in controlling greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. They act as carbon sinks and absorb about 2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.

What Do We Do Now?

The value of ecosystems to human livelihoods and well-being amounts to \$125 trillion per year. The United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030 includes a target to increase forest area by 3% worldwide by 2030, signifying an increase of 120 million hectares, an area over twice the size of France. Urgent action must be taken to reduce the loss of forests, habitats and biodiversity which are part of our common heritage and which support food and water security. Climate change mitigation and/or adaptation are the need of the hour if we are to ensure peace and security.

Source: <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2019/10/why-forests-matters-to-us/>