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Trump Plan to Plant a Trillion Saplings Misses the Forest for the Trees

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Donald Trump, it turns out, is a fan of trees. A big fan. Such a fan, in fact, that at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, late last month, the president announced that the United States will join the One Trillion Tree Initiative, an international plan to plant and restore a trillion trees globally by 2050. Doing so, he said, illustrated the country's commitment to "conserving the majesty of God's creation and the natural beauty of our world." Two weeks later, he again touted the project in his State of the Union speech.

These were odd statements and an even odder policy shift from a man who has pushed for drilling and logging in millions of acres of Alaska's Tongass National Forest, the United States' largest national forest; shrunk national monuments; and proposed slashing funding for environmental agencies. Just this past summer, as the Amazon rainforest was burning, Trump failed to support sending \$20 million in aid to the region to help fight the fires. (He said his resistance was due to a lack of coordination with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.) Trump has also had personal quibbles with certain trees: He once scoffed at the idea of a Japanese pine tree planted in Central Park in his honor because he thought it was too small. And as president, he allowed an oak tree gifted by French President Emmanuel Macron as a symbol of their countries' "friendship" to die.

In a way, experts tell me, Trump's apparent commitment to the World Economic Forum's One Trillion Tree Initiative is welcome news. Trees pull carbon from the atmosphere, lead to better air and water quality, increase property values, and, some studies show, may even reduce crime.

But while we all love trees, a plan to plant a trillion of them is nowhere near sufficient in addressing climate change. So if this is Trump's plan to address the global climate crisis, it's a complete cop-out.

"This needs to be, must be, part of a much broader suite of actions," says Rachel Cleetus, policy director with the Climate and Energy program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "It's going to be a drop in the bucket unless we actually are taking ambitious, aggressive near-term efforts to also cut CO2 emissions from our fossil fuel use."

Basically, planting trees without cutting emissions is like trying to clean up a major oil spill without stopping the leak first. It makes zero sense.

Source: <https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2020/02/trump-one-trillion-trees-initiative-misses-point-climate-change/>