

World forest losses slow down but is it enough

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The latest snapshot of the world's forests shows that we are still struggling to meet a fundamental challenge, to make use of our forests while keeping them healthy for the benefit of us all. The 2020 edition of the *Global Forest Resources Assessment*, compiled with information from countries and territories worldwide, shows that regardless of strengthened efforts to halt deforestation, the world still continues to lose forest cover. Source: Timberbiz, FAO

The first such survey, released more than 70 years ago by the then United Nations agency, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), showed there were still sufficient forest resources to provide much-needed timber and but that sustaining the resource would require finding ways to benefit from the land without depleting the natural wealth on which the world would need to depend.

Fast-forward to 2020 and the latest forest assessment shows that forest loss is slowing but not enough is being done to conserve and restore forests for the benefit of us all. We cannot afford this.

Together with these forests, we have lost much more. We have lost valuable habitats that are home to about 80% of terrestrial biodiversity, including trees, plants, wildlife, and other organisms that keep our ecosystems functioning, ecosystems which provide us with wood, food, healthy soils, fresh water and so many other services.

While forests may at times feel far removed from our modern lives, their presence can still be felt everywhere.

Forests provide fuel, food, medicines, shelter and income for a huge number of the world's poorest people. Globally, around 2.4 billion people depend on wood as a source of energy for cooking their daily meals. We need to find sustainable ways to manage forests, more urgently than ever, to nurture the very resources on which so many rely. Resources that will play a key role in our resilience during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by supporting livelihoods in so many different ways.

Since 1990, the world's population has grown by 3.3 billion. During the same period, the world has lost 178 million hectares of forest, an area about the size of Libya. In the last 10 years, this trend has become most acute in Africa, which has lost nearly 4 million hectares of forest per year.

This pattern, on a continent which is home to a large share of the world's poorest households, largely reflects the combined impact of high population growth and people's need to survive on small-scale agriculture.

However, there are signs that some of what people have done to conserve and use forests sustainably is working. The latest data reported by countries to FAO show that globally, the net loss of forest cover continues to decline.

In South America, it has declined to about half the rate in 2010–2020 compared with 2000–2010. There are two other important signs that policymakers are moving in the right direction, namely, an increase in forests located in legally established protected areas, and forest areas with long term management plans.

Of the six major world regions, South America has the highest share of forests in protected areas whereas Europe has the highest coverage by management plans.

Amid a growing population, combined with climate change and continued biodiversity loss, having access to data and information on trends will go a long way to helping us to further improve this scenario.

Governments, for one, need to be able to make policy decisions based on hard facts and sound observations. Modern technology can help us to gather more comprehensive, higher-quality data and share it more widely.

Satellite imaging and other remote-sensing technology are of great help. Free access to vast digital archives of historical information and the ability to use these data to acquire more recent figures in almost real time can boost the quality, transparency and timeliness of information.

Web-based business intelligence solutions make it easier to present seemingly complex statistics in an understandable manner.

Source: <https://www.timberbiz.com.au/world-forest-losses-slow-down-but-is-it-enough/>