

Deforestation

Forests cover about 30% of the planet. And the ecosystems they create play an essential role in supporting life on earth. But, deforestation is clearing earth's forest on a massive scale. And at the current rate of destruction, the world's rainforest can completely disappear within 100 years.

Why should we care about deforestation? Together, Forestry and Agriculture are responsible for 24% of greenhouse gas emissions, making deforestation a significant contributor to climate change.

Deforestation impacts the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere in two ways. First, when trees are fallen, they release the carbon they are storing into the atmosphere. Second, trees play a critical role in absorbing the greenhouse gases that fuel global warming. Fewer forests mean larger amounts of greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere, and increasing speed and severity of global warming.

In addition to helping regulate the earth's climate, forests provide habitats for over 80% of the plants and animals that live on land. But, deforestation destroys these habitats, diminishing biodiversity. Some estimate that four to six thousand rainforest species go extinct each year. This also affects the more than two billion people who rely on forest as sources of food and shelter. The biggest driver of deforestation is agriculture. Farmers chop down trees in order to plant crops like soybeans, palm trees, and cocoa, or to make room to raise livestock for beef. Logging operations which provide the world's wood and paper products also cut countless trees each year. Forests are also destroyed as a result of growing urban sprawl, and land is developed for dwellings.

The effects of deforestation are grave, but not irreversible. Efforts such as managing forest resources, eliminating clear-cutting and planting new trees to replace those removed, are already being made to reduce deforestation's environmental impact on our planet. And while some plant and animal species are gone forever, combating deforestation can help prevent further loss of biodiversity.