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## Commercial Logging and Climate Change

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*Amazonas (Colombia). (2023, July 14). In Wikipedia. [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazonas\\_\(Colombia\)](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazonas_(Colombia))*

***“Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity”***

**R**emember the time you walked through a lush green forest? You could smell the fresh, clean air. Perhaps you spent some quiet time listening to the sounds of the forest, especially the singing of the birds and the chirping of a squirrel. How happy you felt walking through the forest. Remember how quiet it was and how annoyed you felt when someone interrupted the silence. Perhaps you noticed the diffe-

rent types of trees as you slowly walked through the forest and the different shapes and colors of the leaves. You may have spent a moment or two silently praying, thanking God for such beauty.

Upon leaving the forest, you may have told yourself that we must protect the forest.

Forests around the world are under threat. The main threats are deforestation and forest degradation. Agriculture is the leading cause of deforestation.

tion, and the main cause of forest degradation is illegal logging.

Forests are estimated to cover 31% of the earth's land surface. Forests help living things survive by purifying water and air and providing people with jobs. Worldwide, millions have a job in the forest sector and millions have a job related to the sector. Forests are home to more than three-quarters of the world's life on land. Forests have a key role in the fight against climate change. Forests are carbon sinks and, therefore, help mitigate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. Tropical forests alone hold more than 228 to 247 gigatons of carbon, more than seven times the amount emitted yearly by human activities.

Deforestation is a concern in tropical rainforests because these forests are home to much of the world's biodiversity. For example, approximately 17% of the forest in the Amazon has been lost in the last 50 years, primarily due to forest conversion for cattle ranching. Deforestation in this region is rampant near more populated areas, roads, and rivers, but even remote areas have been encroached upon when valuable mahogany, gold, and oil are discovered.

Illegal as well as some government-approved logging must be addressed. On March 16, 2022, singer Carol King a resident of Idaho, USA testified at a hearing by the U.S. Congress entitled 'Fighting Fire with Fire: Evaluating the Role of Forest Management in Reducing Catastrophic Wildfires'. King testified, "They (U.S. Government) continue to facilitate felling mature trees under the guise of Orwellian euphemisms: thinning, fuel reduction, salvage, management, and the ever-popular restoration."

King testified that the logging industry's rhetoric persuades the public into thinking that logging is a safe and effective form of forest management that helps in part to prevent wildfires when it puts forests at risk and strips back protections against carbon emissions and climate change. "Clear cuts are tinderboxes. Coal, oil, and gas get much attention. Still, logging is also a huge emitter of carbon, and U. S. taxpayers have been subsidizing clear-cutting in our natural forests under multiple administrations for decades. It's institutional." King recommended that logging funds be reallocated to house hardenings or make houses more fire resistant, such as using metal roofs or fireproofing retardant roofing material.

King said, "Forest preservation is a climate solution. That's why we need action to safeguard the forests on our shared public land. Federal law re-

quires that most public lands be managed for multiple uses, such as recreation, gas and oil development, mining, and logging. But this longstanding policy is running headlong into efforts to slow the warming of our planet." Forests are being destroyed at breakneck speed by heavy equipment that can saw through a tree, strip its branches, and set it on a pile of logs in the time it took to say stop illegal logging.

In the 1970s, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was tasked with crafting an international compact to halt deforestation. But deep political divides - the Global North largely drove forest development, while most major forests existed in the Global South - made a global accord unlikely.

UNEP broadened its tactics, working with major development agencies, such as the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and the United Nations Development Program to combat deforestation.

When forests are cut, burned, or otherwise removed, they emit carbon instead of absorbing carbon. Deforestation and forest degradation are responsible for roughly 15% of all greenhouse gas emissions. These greenhouse gas emissions contribute to rising temperatures, changes in weather and water patterns, and an increased frequency of extreme weather events. For example, in Sumatra, rainforests on deep peatlands are being cleared, drained, and converted to pulp plantations, contributing to Indonesia's high greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change can affect forest-dwelling creatures by altering their habitats and decreasing the availability of food and water. Some can adapt by moving to higher elevations or latitudes, but species losses are real.

Trees play a key role in the local water cycle by helping balance the water on land and the atmosphere. But when deforestation or degradation occurs, that balance can be altered, resulting in precipitation and river flow changes.

Without trees to anchor fertile soil, erosion can occur and sweep the land into rivers. The agricultural plants that often replace the trees cannot hold onto the soil. Coffee, cotton, palm oil, soybean, and wheat plants can exacerbate soil erosion. Scientists have estimated that a third of the world's arable land has been lost through soil erosion and other types of degradation since 1960. As fertile soil washes away, agricultural producers move on, clearing more forest and continuing the cycle of soil loss.

Billions of people worldwide rely on forests for shelter, livelihoods, water, fuel, and food security. Approximately 750 million people live in forests,

including 60 million indigenous people. Deforestation disrupts people's lives, sometimes with devastating consequences. Deforestation has contributed to social conflict and migration in the Greater Mekong in Southeast Asia, where land tenure systems are weak. In Brazil, poor people have been lured from their villages to remote soy plantations, where they may be abused and forced to work under inhumane conditions.

To address infrastructure-related drivers of deforestation, the value of forests is factored into decisions about where to create or expand infrastructure. Humans have used forests for fuel for thousands of years, and 2.6 billion people still use biomass, mainly wood and charcoal—for cooking. Most conservation areas (mostly parks called "protected areas") are not well-funded. As a result, they are not well-managed, which often leads to deforestation. One way to address this challenge is to use a financial approach for conservation known as Project Finance for Permanence (PFP). Through this approach, donors from the public and private sectors contribute money to create a fund that will support the proper management of protected areas in a region—some of the funding can also be used to create new protected areas and expand existing ones. Still, most of the funding is for management. Effective policies help stop deforestation. That's why countries like Myanmar and Belize assess the value of their natural resources and their services, such as forests that absorb carbon and provide habitat for endangered wildlife. Decision makers use the assessments in various ways, including promoting a green economy approach—one in which the sustainable use of natural capital is integrated into a country's new plans and policies for the economy, agriculture, energy, and more.

## A Report by USAID

According to United States Agency for International Development (USAID) the illegal timber industry simultaneously threatens the world's forests and steals from local communities that rely on forests for food, health, and wealth an estimated \$51–\$152 billion annually. The corruption associated with illegal logging weakens the rule of law and fuels the cycle of transnational crime.

By degrading biodiversity and forests' economic value, forest exploitation also makes land even more vulnerable to deforestation for other uses. The continuously growing demand for commodities that require large land areas—including soy, palm oil, and beef—drives tropical deforestation, of which nearly half is illegal.

Deforestation and the conversion of forested lands to grow other commodities or to raise livestock contribu-

tes nearly 1.5 gigatons of carbon annually, about the equivalent of Russia's annual emissions.

The USAID Forestry and Biodiversity and Global Climate Change offices regularly engage with stakeholder forums, such as Forest Legality Week, to better understand the link between illegality, corruption, and deforestation. This work provides USAID Missions across the globe with programming tools to enhance natural climate solutions.

From harvesting and processing to buying and selling, there are many points in the supply chain when timber and timber products may violate national and sub-national laws. These violations, in turn, have direct implications for compliance with international market laws, including the 2008 U.S. Lacey Act. USAID continues to support the U.S. Lacey Act globally through partnerships with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and other organizations. This support has enhanced investments to scale innovative technologies, such as chemical and DNA analysis to help identify wood, or using isotopes to verify where the plant originally grew.

With USAID support, the Government of Cambodia designated more than 430,000 hectares as the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary and began recognizing local tenure rights. The communities are now empowered to protect the forests on which they rely.

Real-time satellite-based monitoring also continues to help with the detection of and response to illegal clearing and logging. With USAID support, the USFS has helped train law enforcement officials to use the University of Maryland's Global Land Analysis and Discovery (GLAD) alerts. Communities can now use GLAD alerts on mobile devices to verify intrusions and notify local authorities to take action.

Illegal logging and deforestation threaten the future of the Peruvian Amazon, which constitutes more than 60% of Peru's land. Through the Peru Bosques and Pro-Bosques activities, USAID helped the Government of Peru strengthen the monitoring and enforcement of the forest sector and to increase legal timber for international and domestic use. USAID supported the creation of Peru's National Forest and Wildlife Service, the agency responsible for forest- and wildlife-related issues, and the National Forest and Wildlife Policy, a long-term plan for forestry management. As a result of comprehensive activities, 2,623,322 hectares within biologically important areas are operating under improved management. During the five-year Peru Bosques activity, USAID supported the development of Peru's Forestry Policy and Regulations, supported the design of a system to verify that timber was legally sourced, improved citizen engagement in forestry management, and strengthened community oversight of forestry resources.

A key part of the solution is making good decisions from the forest floor to the sales floor. One of the best technologies to store carbon is an unlogged forest with minimal human intrusion. Forests sequester vast amounts of carbon dioxide in the trunks, leaves, and roots of trees of all ages and sizes and the soil beneath them. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and water from the air and ground and, through photosynthesis, release

oxygen into the air. It costs nothing to leave them as they are. Allowing commercial logging to continue in our forests would also be a catastrophe for the biodiversity they contain.

### **What Does Catholic Social Teaching Say About Care For Creation And Stewardship Of The Earth?**

Over the decades, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis have added their names to the list of former popes in favor of our responsibility of caring for all creation. Following are just a few of the statements by popes and other teaching of the Catholic Church.

**Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching, 1991 (no. 2)** – “Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all creation.”

**The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005 (no. 466)** “Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good, destined for all, by preventing anyone from using ‘with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate – animals, plants, the natural elements – simply as one wishes, according to one’s own economic needs.’ It is a responsibility that must mature based on the global dimension of the present ecological crisis and the consequent necessity to meet it on a worldwide level, since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the Creator. ‘One must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos’.”

**Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate), Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, 2009 (no. 50)**– “The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act justly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet.”

**On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio), Pope Paul VI, 1967, (no. 22)** “Already on the first page of Sacred Scripture we read these words: ‘Fill the earth and subdue it’ (Gen 1:28). By

these words we are taught that all things of the world have been created for man, and that this task has been entrusted to him to enhance their value by the resources of his intellect, and by his toil to complete and perfect them for his use. Now if the earth has been created to furnish individuals with the necessities of a livelihood or the means for progress, it follows that each man has the right to get what is necessary for him. The Second Vatican Council has reminded us of this in these words: ‘God destined the earth with all that it contains for the use of all men and nations, in such a way that created things in fair share should accrue to all men under the leadership of justice with charity as a companion.’”

"There can be no true ecological approach or effective efforts to safeguard the environment without the attainment of a social justice capable of respecting the right to the common destination of the Earth's goods, not only of present generations but also of those yet to come," Pope Francis, 2019.

**Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching, 1991 (no 8)** “Created things belong not to the few, but to the entire human family.”

**Audience with Representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the Different Religions, Pope Francis, 2013.** “The Church is likewise conscious of the responsibility which all of us have for our world, for the whole of creation, which we must love and protect. There is much we can do to benefit the poor, the needy, and those who suffer, and to favor justice, promote reconciliation and build peace.”

The Carmelite NGO strongly recommends reading *Laudato Si’ (Care for Our Common Home)* Encyclical Letter, Pope Francis, 2015.

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