



# WWF's Approach to Forest Conservation

## WWF Mission and Guiding Principles

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the natural environment and build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- Conserving the world's biological diversity;
- Ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable;
- Promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

## The importance of forests

Although only covering 30 per cent of the earth's surface, forests are the most important terrestrial reservoir of biological diversity. It has been estimated that forests contribute directly to the livelihood of the 1.2 billion people in the developing world that live in extreme poverty. Forests provide a range of environmental goods and services for those who live far away from them. They store carbon (which would otherwise contribute to global warming), regulate water runoff and quality and produce wood and many non-timber products.

## Threats to the world's forests

Despite their value to humanity, forests are under threat and half the world's original forests have been lost. In the last 50 years, deforestation and forest degradation has occurred at an unprecedented rate in the tropics. Recent estimates by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations put the natural forest loss in the tropics at 14.6m ha per year (an area the size of Nepal). Sometimes the cleared forests are replaced by agriculture or tree crops, but often the forest soils are too poor to sustain crops and the result is degraded lands with little value for biodiversity conservation or economic development.

Forest areas in most temperate countries are now stable, or even increasing. However, this often masks a loss in the quality of the forests, with diverse natural forests being replaced with plantations of a single species. The factors leading to forest loss and degradation are multiple and complex. They include misguided policies of governments and international agencies, illegal logging, fires, and lack of secure tenure for local communities.

Forests are often seen by national governments as a reservoir of unoccupied and unproductive land. This attitude underestimates the market and non-market values of forests for both local communities and the world. It leads to ill-advised policies that encourage forest clearance. A few benefit from these policies, many suffer from them.

## WWF's approach

Forest conservation has been a high priority for WWF ever since the organisation was founded over 40 years ago. Early projects focused on research and the protection of individual species. WWF's approach has broadened as the conservation movement has evolved over time. Field projects on forest protection have been complemented by efforts to integrate conservation with development for local communities. Policy research on trends in the international timber trade, on the underlying causes of forest loss and degradation, and on the links between trade and environmental issues, has allowed WWF to influence the policies of national governments, international agencies and the private sector.

*\* One of a series of guidance notes developed by the WWF Forests for Life target driven programme to help implement the targets and milestones agreed by the WWF Forest Advisory Group*

***"The world will have more extensive, more diverse and higher quality forest landscapes. These will meet human needs and aspirations fairly, while conserving biological diversity and fulfilling the ecosystem functions necessary for all life on earth".***

Partnerships have always been a cornerstone of WWF's work, whether with local conservation groups, innovative leaders in the private sector, labour unions and indigenous peoples' organizations or with research institutes. IUCN-The World Conservation Union is WWF's closest partner. WWF was a founding member of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and this partnership has been vitally important in bringing certified wood products to market. In 1997 an Alliance for Forest Conservation and Sustainable Use was established with The World Bank. WWF has also worked closely with development agencies such as DGIS and GTZ.

With limited resources available for forest conservation, prioritisation will always be important. The need to establish clear priorities encouraged WWF scientists to identify the "Global 200" ecoregions<sup>1</sup> as globally important centres of biodiversity and consequently as needing particular attention. Conserving these "jewels in the crown" should be a top priority for global conservation efforts. WWF is increasingly focusing its own efforts on the Global 200. The strategy of ecoregion conservation, with interventions proceeding simultaneously at multiple scales, is the guiding force behind the organisation's fieldwork, policy interventions, training activities and communications.

### **WWF's forest vision and goal**

In collaboration with IUCN, WWF promotes the following vision for the world's forests:

"The world will have more extensive, more diverse and higher quality forest landscapes. These will meet human needs and aspirations fairly, while conserving biological diversity and fulfilling the ecosystem functions necessary for all life on earth".

In line with this vision, the WWF/IUCN forest goal is "to halt and reverse the loss and degradation of forests worldwide".

### **Goal**

Within the WWF Forests for Life campaign, our research suggests that over the next 50 years we should be aiming at achieving a global forest estate with the following characteristics:

"By 2050, the world's forest resources will be allocated to a balance of uses, consistent with the vision. Meeting this challenge will involve establishing a network of ecologically representative, socially beneficial and effectively managed forest protected areas. It will also involve achieving environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of forests outside protected areas. These forests will include forests managed both intensively and extensively for the production of timber and non-timber forest products, as well as for environmental services and a wide range of community needs. In addition, by 2050 all of the world's forest regions will consist of diverse and connected, original and restored forest landscapes that support viable populations of native species, meet essential human needs and are resistant and adaptable to threats."

WWF's targets and milestones until 2005 are one important step in the direction of this broader vision.

### **WWF Forests for Life targets: Protect-Manage-Restore**

WWF uses the expression "Forests for Life" as a general label for its global forest conservation programme. This programme adopts three complementary approaches to forest conservation: protect-manage-restore. Work in each area is guided by time-limited targets: these are a challenge to the world. WWF alone cannot achieve the targets: we need to work with many partners to be effective. Protect, Manage, Restore implies that forests will be used for a variety of purposes and that multiple stakeholders will be involved. Issues of governance and participation are therefore key for successful forest conservation.



Target 1 : The establishment and maintenance of viable, representative networks of protected areas in the world's threatened and most biologically significant forest regions, by 2010

The protection target is: **The establishment and maintenance of viable, representative networks of protected areas in the world's threatened and most biologically significant forest regions, by 2010.** Natural forest protects biodiversity, ecosystem services, aesthetic and cultural values and vulnerable human communities. Yet only 10% of global forests are in protected areas and many of these are still threatened. We need a greater number of effectively managed forest protected areas in ecologically representative networks, linked by corridors, protected by buffer zones and designed to maximise resilience to climate change. Most protected areas also contain or exist close to human communities and therefore also have to provide equitable social benefits and involve local people in management, as partners and decision-makers.

The forest management target is: **100 million ha of certified forests by 2005, distributed in a balanced manner among regions, forest types and land tenure regimes.** Most forests are outside protected areas. In many cases a narrow focus on timber production has reduced the availability of other forest goods and services, yet many forests are not even well managed for timber. WWF believes that independent certification is an important tool to help solve this problem and that the Forest Stewardship Council provides the best framework for standard setting and auditing, which can be applied worldwide. There are now almost 700 companies committed to producing, trading or purchasing forest products certified as sustainably produced. WWF is committed to ensuring that the benefits of certification reach all types of forest and forest ownership in every region of the world.



Target 2 : 100 million ha of certified forests by 2005, distributed in a balanced manner among regions, forest types and land tenure regimes

The forest restoration target is: **By 2005, undertake at least twenty forest landscape restoration initiatives in the world's threatened, deforested or degraded forest regions to enhance ecological integrity and human well-being.** The loss and fragmentation of forests creates the need for well-planned and well-managed restoration of degraded forest landscapes. This is vital to protect biodiversity, reverse ecological simplification, conserve soil and water, buffer against environmental disasters and provide income and cultural benefits. Governments need to broaden their understanding of the fact that good restoration goes well beyond just tree-planting. Forest Landscape Restoration is about tailoring a package of measures that meet human and environmental needs and is implemented in co-operation with local communities. Good forest restoration will be characterised by an increase in ecological integrity, ecosystem function and human wellbeing.

Finally, particular attention will also be paid to issues that cut across the targets, including threats (forest fires, illegal logging, climate change and conversion), policy issues (subsidies, trade barriers, investment flows) and opportunities (community forest management).

### Operational Principles and values

In addition to the organisation's guiding principles WWF and IUCN share three sets of principles that guide their forest conservation work:

- **Ecological integrity:** Maintaining the diversity and quality of ecosystems, and enhancing their capacity to adapt to change and provide for the needs of future generation.'
- **Human well-being:** Ensuring that all people have a role in shaping decisions that affect their ability to meet their needs, safeguard their livelihoods and realise their full potential.'
- **Landscape approach:** Engaging key stakeholders to balance land management decisions at a scale that optimises delivery of essential forest goods and services, within the framework of Ecoregion Conservation.



Target 3 : By 2005, undertake at least twenty forest landscape restoration initiatives in the world's threatened, deforested or degraded forest regions to enhance ecological integrity and human wellbeing



Cross-cutting theme programmes look at some major threats to forests in the context of the targets, including climate change, illegal logging, conversion to oil palm and catastrophic forest fires



WWF also places its target work in the context of issues such as trade, inter-governmental processes, treaties etc

WWF recognises that valuable as targets are, there is an implicit risk in scoring success against targets that are essentially in nature. We have therefore committed ourselves to ensuring that the following "operational" values underlie our choice of focus:

- **Quality:** WWF will be discerning in the promotion of individual activities. They must satisfy not only the immediate target but also hold true to our mission and values. In addition, we will not accept weakening of certification or protected area standards to achieve hectare-based quantitative targets.
- **Quantity:** Part of the purpose of our targets is to inspire others to action. This means that we have to demonstrate that our approach can make a real difference to the world's forests and forest-dependant people. WWF will therefore put in place a transparent monitoring system to score the progress that is being made towards saving the world's forests.
- **Diversity:** Forests for Life has a global remit. It is therefore important to us that there is a balanced spread of effort across the network. We recognise that it will be easier to make particular advances in some areas rather than others and that it is likely that we could achieve our targets easily if we focused all our resources in one or two continents. However, Forests for Life is committed to ensuring our targets are achieved through a diversity of forest types, regions and land tenure regimes.

1. Biodiversity is not spread evenly across the Earth but follows complex patterns determined by climate, geology and the evolutionary history of the Earth. Although it is important that all biodiversity be conserved, WWF has identified those large areas of the Earth that best represent the breadth of biodiversity and ecological processes. These large areas are called "ecoregions" and the list of priority ecoregions is known as the Global 200 ecoregions

***This information sheet has been prepared by the Forests for Life TDP core team. Further details of WWF's views on the process of protect-manage-restore are to be found in a series of position paper and guidance notes. Contact Mark Aldrich : maldrich@wwfint.org***