

"Forest biodiversity in rapid decline - Enhanced concerted efforts needed on climate change and deforestation"

**Keynote address by Rodney Taylor
Director, Forests, WWF International
XIIIth World Forestry Congress**

Buenos Aires, Argentina, 19 October 2009

Thank you Madame/Mr Chair. Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentleman.

I would like to thank Secretary General Leopoldo Montes for the invitation to say a few words on the theme of forests and biodiversity. I will take the opportunity to first review the trend of biodiversity and humanity's impact on nature. Secondly I will touch on the two biggest single threats to forest biodiversity – climate change and deforestation.

Finally, I will challenge all of you to rally behind a common target – one that sets the scale and urgency with which these threats need to be tackled to maintain the health of the planet.

Forest biodiversity is in rapid decline

WWF's Living Planet Report¹ features two global barometers of the condition of the Earth's environment. The first is the Living Planet Index, which measures trends in biological diversity and it shows an alarming trend.

Over the last 35 years, the index has fallen by 30 per cent - a rate unprecedented in human history.

The second index in the Living Planet Report is the Human Ecological Footprint. This compares human consumption of natural resources with the Earth's biological capacity to produce these resources and absorb the waste it generates.

Currently, humanity's Ecological Footprint exceeds the planet's regenerative capacity by about 30%. This is already a huge debt for future generations to repay, if they even can.

And if the world's population were to enjoy the same per capita consumption rate as the OECD countries, we would need three planets to resource this.

It is clear that closing the gap between human demand and the Earth's bio-capacity is necessary for maintaining biodiversity.

For all of us in the forest world the question is this: What role can the forest sector play in ensuring that humanity's footprint stays within the earth's capacity to sustain life; that natural resources are shared more equitably; and that the decline in the Living Planet Species Index is reversed?

The importance of forest biodiversity

This room assembles many leading forest experts. You know better than anybody the value of forest ecosystems services, for example in the supply of clean water, and biodiversity, for example in protecting wild relatives of food crops and medicinal plants.

The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) initiativeⁱⁱ has also done ground-breaking work in making the economic case for the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity. According to TEEB, an investment of \$45 billion in protected areas alone, could secure nature-based services worth \$5 trillion per year.

The ongoing loss of forest biodiversity is driven by many factors. The situation is very complex and a single solution does not exist. However, we must address the two biggest single threats: climate change and deforestation.

Climate Change and Biodiversity

Climate and biodiversity are closely linked.

On one hand, climate change is a threat to forest biodiversity, and on the other, biodiversity conservation is part of the climate solution. Maintaining forest ecosystems, through conservation and improved management of forests, particularly on peatlands, is key to the mitigation of GHG emissions. The proposed REDD mechanism recognises this.

Forests are also key to climate change adaptation. Forests moderate floods, replenish aquifers and stabilise soils. Mangroves are coastal defences. Intact forests can serve as refuges or corridors to assist species to migrate in response to climate change.

I am looking forward to this week's discussions on Forests and Climate Change. This is an opportunity to build consensus on how the forest sector can help achieve an early peak of greenhouse gas emissions and a rapid 80 percent decline in emission levels by 2050.

The forum is timely in the lead up to the climate conference in Copenhagen this December, where rich countries must commit to cut emissions by at least 40% by 2020. They also need to contribute financial support of at least USD 160 billion per annum to developing countries, enabling them to deviate at least 30% from business as usual by 2020 (including REDD).

Zero Net Deforestation by 2020 – a unifying target

Now let us focus on deforestation.

Deforestation is the core problem behind the loss of forest biodiversity and forest-based GHG emissions. It continues at an alarming rate - 13 million hectares per year, or 36 football fields a minute. The net forest loss is 7.3 million hectares per year.

Many countries have made efforts to stop forest loss, with some remarkable achievements. Examples include the Amazon Regional Protected Area (ARPA)

Programme, the "Heart of Borneo" declaration and Paraguay's Zero Deforestation Law, which succeeded in cutting the rate of deforestation in Paraguay's Atlantic Forests by 85% in 2005/6. Here, in our beautiful host country Argentina the Forests Law (26.331) adopted in 2007 can, if implemented well, be an important step towards the reduction of deforestation and forest degradation. But ultimately, we must come together to meet the deforestation challenge. To do this, we must share a common vision on how to tackle this problem.

WWF is proposing a target of "zero net deforestation by 2020", which should help to consolidate efforts to halt deforestation across various international initiatives and to set a global benchmark against which the success of these efforts can be measured.

These initiatives include The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the three Rio Conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification, UNFF's global objective to reverse the loss of forest, and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF).

WWF is pleased that at the CBD COP9 in Bonn in May 2008, delegates from 67 countries pledged their support to WWF's call for zero net deforestation by 2020.

"Zero net deforestation" does not mean "zero deforestation." "Zero net deforestation" acknowledges that some forest loss could be offset by forest restoration and afforestation on degraded land.

A net target leaves room for change in the configuration of the land-use mosaic, provided the net quantity, quality and carbon density of forests is maintained. It recognizes that, in some circumstances, conversion of forests in one site may be part of a plan to optimise sustainable development and conservation across the wider landscape.

However, to maximise the conservation of biodiversity and the reduction of GHG emissions we need to conserve as much of the world's remaining natural forests as possible. This is also underpinned by the key findings of leading experts assembled in the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on biodiversity and climate change.

Can Zero Net Deforestation be achieved by 2020?

Yes, it can.

But this is a global target, and we can only do it together.

The forest sector, for its part, can contribute through the conservation and sustainable use of forests, but the foresters cannot do it alone. The integration of other sectors, particularly agriculture, energy and finance, is key for formulating sustainable land-use policies and planning processes.

Rich countries can provide funds to support developing countries in their efforts to curb deforestation, through REDD initiatives. All governments should support the inclusion of a REDD mechanism as a credible and compensated form of emissions reductions within a post-2012 UN climate treaty.

The private sector can help by adopting responsible production and purchasing practices for forest and agricultural products, such as maintaining areas with high conservation values, and respecting the rights and interests of local communities. Credible certification schemes are key for that.

I invite you to join WWF at this evening's side event to showcase how companies are working to improve forestry practices within the WWF Global Forest and Trade Network (GFTN) and the New Generation Plantations Project.

Finally, WWF is asking you to support the proposed target on "zero net deforestation by 2020". The members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), in particular, are in a strong position to advocate that this target is accepted as a global benchmark of success in international agreements, such as the post 2010 biodiversity target of the CBD.

Conclusion

Forests are important for all countries, be they in boreal, temperate, or tropical areas. WWF offices around the world are addressing the challenge of keeping these forests.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me assure that we will continue and enhance our collaboration with foresters, governments and other stakeholders to make the major shifts in policy and practice that are needed to achieve zero net deforestation by 2020.

I hope you will join us in these efforts.

Thank you for your attention.

ⁱ www.panda.org/livingplanet

ⁱⁱ www.teebweb.info