



The Scientists' Letter on the Copenhagen Commitment for Tropical Forests

APRIL 2010



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The production of carbon dioxide from tropical forests that are cleared amounts to about a sixth of total global emissions. Much of the rich biodiversity in these forests is also destroyed by logging them, and local climate patterns are disturbed. A world partnership to provide the funds necessary to keep these forests standing would avoid all of these negative consequences, and should be pursued actively.

**PETER H. RAVEN**

President, Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis; Recipient, U.S. National Medal of Science; Recipient, Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement

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Much of my scientific work has been carried out in tropical forests, the main reservoir of biodiversity, an essential resource pool for people living in the tropics and in temperate zones as well, and a key part of Earth's climatic system. The vast areas over which they have already been destroyed are a frightening sight to any biologist, anyone aware of the likely consequences of climate disruption, indeed anyone who cares about the fate of their grandchildren.

**PAUL R. EHRLICH**

President, Center for Conservation Biology, Stanford University, CA; Recipient, MacArthur Prize Fellowship; Member, National Academy of Sciences; Recipient, Crafoord Prize in Population Biology and the Conservation of Biological Diversity; Recipient, Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement

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Tropical deforestation is a major contribution to greenhouse gas emissions—and the cheapest one to stop. In doing so, we will stop the major driver of species extinctions and retain the homes of millions who live in, and depend upon, these forests.

**STUART PIMM**

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The planet actually works as a biophysical system and it is imperative to start recognizing that by protecting and restoring tropical forests.

**TOM LOVEJOY**

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**Representative David Obey**

Chairman, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations

**Representative Nita Lowey**

Chairwoman, State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee  
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**Senator Daniel K. Inouye**

Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

**Senator Patrick Leahy**

Chairman, State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee  
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Dear Chairs Obey, Lowey, Inouye, and Leahy,

Last December in Copenhagen, the Secretary of Agriculture announced that the United States would contribute \$1 billion for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest degradation in Developing countries (REDD+) over the next three years (2010–2012). This major commitment of short-term funding to preserve tropical forests is a big step toward re-establishing the United States as a leader in addressing climate change. As scientists with forest expertise, we ask that you fulfill the United States' commitment made in Copenhagen to devote \$1 billion to reducing tropical deforestation, with at least \$400 million in the FY 2011 appropriations.

REDD+'s potential advantages are easily stated. Tropical forests contain half of all carbon stored in terrestrial vegetation, and clearing and degradation of tropical forests constitutes about 15% of all anthropogenic carbon emissions. REDD+ can greatly strengthen measures to reduce carbon emissions, protect biodiversity, and provide other human benefits.

Forests provide essential ecosystem services on which many poor people depend. Tropical forests contain the majority of the world's rapidly vanishing indigenous cultures. REDD+ could also slow the loss of biodiversity—important in itself and in its central contribution to ecosystem services. Over half of all species live in tropical forests and are under threat from deforestation.

REDD+ is an inexpensive solution relative to alternatives such as industrial energy efficiency or solar or nuclear power and an immediate solution too—\$20 billion could cut emissions by half a billion tons and do so by 2020. Some countries can provide even less expensive reductions.

The \$1 billion will help jump-start programs to reduce tropical deforestation immediately, before U.S. climate and energy legislation or a comprehensive international climate treaty would go into effect and provide additional funds. This money will be used by developing countries to build their capacity to monitor and measure global warming pollution from deforestation and protect their forests. It is important that developing countries get this initial funding so that they have the technology and training necessary, as well as the incentive, to make bigger emissions reductions later and bring an end to global deforestation as soon as possible.

As agreed to in the Copenhagen Accord, the short-term funding for preserving tropical forests should be “new and additional” (<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/lo7.pdf>, para. 8). Funding to fulfill the U.S. commitment cannot be taken from existing programs for conservation and biodiversity. We urge you to ensure that the FY 2011 budget include at least \$400 million of new, additional funds for REDD+.

Sincerely,

Scientists from across the United States

The signers of this letter all have advanced degrees in the natural or social sciences and have forest-related expertise. Institutions are listed for identification purposes only.

cc: Ranking Members of Appropriations Committees and Subcommittees  
White House – Legislative Affairs Office

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## WISCONSIN

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## WYOMING

**Edward B. Barbier, Ph.D.**  
John S. Bugas Professor of Economics  
Department of Economics  
and Finance  
University of Wyoming  
Laramie, WY

**Stephen T. Jackson, Ph.D.**  
Professor, Director  
Department of Botany, Program  
in Ecology  
University of Wyoming  
Laramie, WY

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Tropical forest ecosystems are being lost at an alarmingly high rate. With global financial commitments, we can fight climate change cost-effectively by reducing global warming emissions from deforestation.

**SIR PETER CRANE**

Carl W. Knobloch Jr. Dean of the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University, New Haven, CT; foreign associate, U.S. National Academy of Sciences; knighted in the United Kingdom for services to horticulture and conservation

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The future of the planet and its irreplaceable array of biodiversity strongly depends on the conservation of tropical forests. With global financial commitments, we can fight climate change cost-effectively by reducing global warming emissions from deforestation and by increasing carbon storage through forest restoration and regeneration. These same actions will protect the unique biodiversity in tropical forest ecosystems.

**ROBIN CHAZDON**

Full Professor, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Connecticut

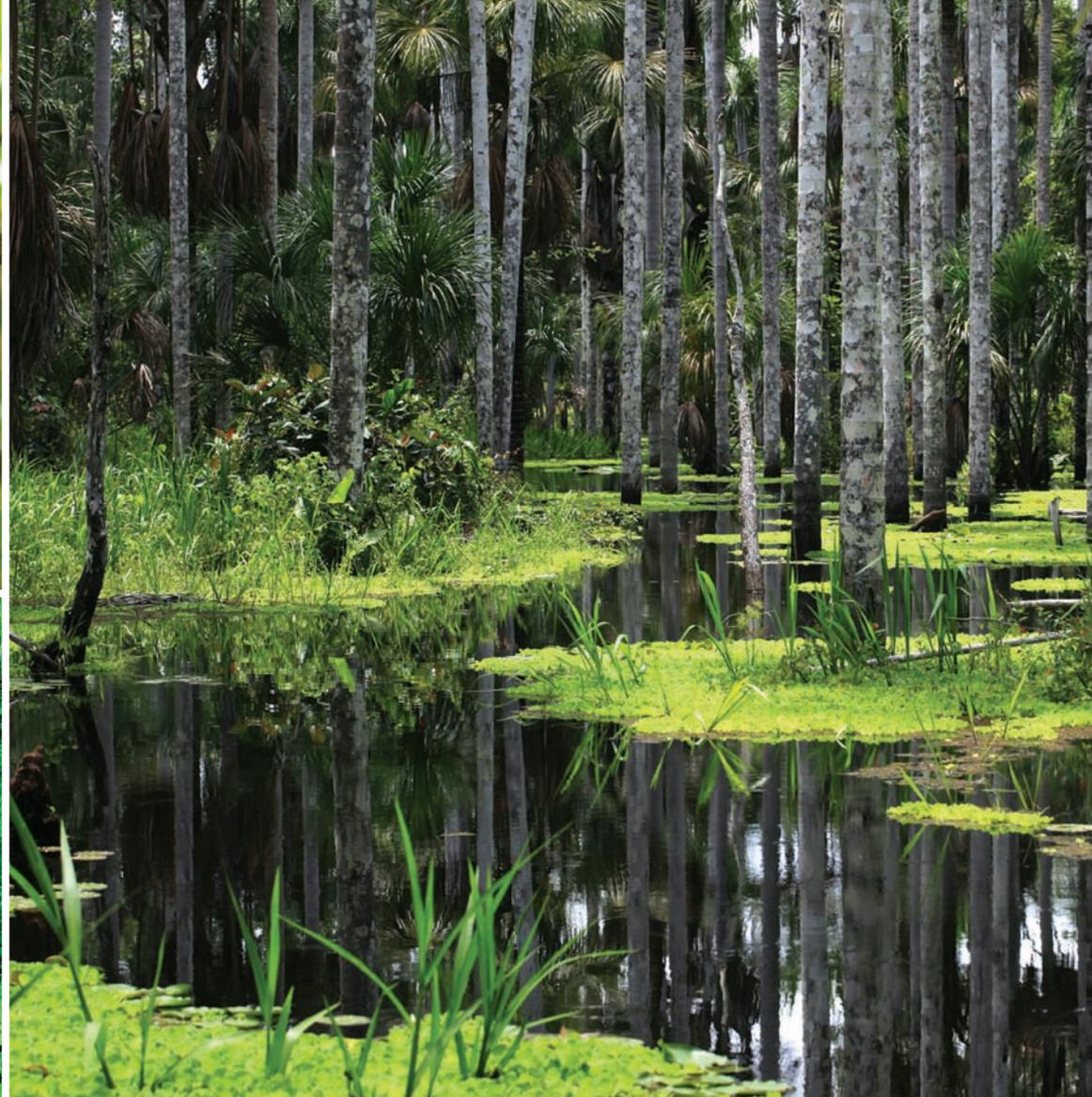
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One encouraging outcome from the international climate negotiations in Copenhagen was a commitment by many nations to work to reduce carbon emissions from cutting and burning tropical rainforests. We now have the technology to measure the quantities of carbon stored by tropical forests, so we know that protecting those forests will make a major contribution to our efforts to reduce carbon emissions to the atmosphere. Therefore, providing the resources and the political support structure to enable local people to protect tropical forests while meeting their economic needs is a vital component of global efforts to avert the looming deleterious effects of climate change.

**GORDON H. ORIAN**

Professor Emeritus of Biology, Biology Department, University of Washington, Seattle; Member, National Academy of Sciences

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Protecting the world's forests is not a luxury—it is a necessity. This substantial commitment [of \$1 billion over 3 years] is reflective of our recognition that international public finance must play a role in developing countries' efforts to slow, halt and reverse deforestation.

**SECRETARY TOM VILSACK**

Announcing the U.S. pledge in Copenhagen, Denmark  
December 16, 2009

[It's] probably the most cost-effective way for us to address the issue of climate change—having an effective set of mechanisms in place to avoid further deforestation and hopefully to plant new trees.

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA**

Speaking with Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of Norway  
December 10, 2009