

Deforestation by Stephen Delfaus

The world's last rain forests are vanishing. Despite a determined international campaign waged for years by an array of conservation and government organizations, the irresistible forces of population growth and rural poverty are consuming the lush tropics as never before¹.

Environmentalists predict that more than half of the Earth's total species will be extinct by the middle of this century². Global warming, holes in the ozone layer, rising water levels, erosion of top soil, degradation of air quality, and ultraviolet rays from the sun are plaguing this planet like never before³. All of this is a direct result of global population increase and loss of the natural habitats and forests that prevent these catastrophes. Anti-deforestation activists struggle for the protection of animals' natural habitats and forests, arguing that their loss is irreparable and the Earth will become unable to sustain a sufficient balance. In turn, this endangers the human race.

In defense of deforestation, logging companies and other companies that profit from deforestation argue that they replant that which is lost at a rate faster than they are cutting down forests. Neither side of this issue can guarantee that their proposed plans will eliminate population growth or forest destruction, so the effects of both will inevitably build until the planet cannot sustain the amount of life it currently supports, and mass extinction of a form never before seen will ensue.

Anti-deforestation activists base their arguments on the simple statistics and facts that when one cuts down forests, irreversible damage is inflicted on the local ecosystem. Eventually, when enough forests are eliminated, damage will begin to show worldwide⁴. This is a truly compelling argument. The more forests that are destroyed, the more harm that is brought upon every species in existence, including humanity. If humanity is to survive, it has to slow its population growth, and more specifically slow the cutting down of forests and the ruining of Earth's ecosystems.

According to anti-deforestation activists, the destruction is so bad that a vast number of species will go extinct before they are ever found. This is extremely wasteful and impedes the advancement of humanity. Locked away in what's left of the forests and jungles of the world could lay secrets and medicines that could potentially cure the majority of diseases and viruses that plague humanity today. Vaccines for AIDS and cures for cancer, to name a few, could very well rest with an undiscovered species on the brink of extinction; or even worse, the organisms that held the secret could have already been destroyed.

Destruction of possible cures to the world's ailments is only one of the many relevant issues regarding deforestation. Gone are the days of families enjoying endless hours at the beaches and parks of the world; they have been replaced by limited exposure to sunlight, and even during this period of exposure, a number of uncomfortable and bothersome defenses must be worn⁵. Water levels around the world are rising as the polar icecaps threaten to melt and fears of losing vast amounts of landmass due to rising tides haunt predictions of the near future. Global warming has loomed over developmental actions of society in relevance to emissions and urban sprawl. With all of these fears, it is hard to comprehend why humanity as a race persists on eliminating forests and expanding at rates that mean extinction of half of all organisms on Earth.

When one is confronted with starvation and poverty in the present, this person drops all concerns about the future and focuses on a quick fix for the problem at hand. With starvation and poverty being so prevalent in third world countries in which most of the world's forests exist, the quick fix becomes deforestation to make room for farming. Considering this aspect, it is easily understood why people insist on cutting forests down—they have no other choice and are not willing to starve to death in order to ensure that a future exists for the next generation. This is where anti-deforestation loses some credibility; it focuses on stopping these impoverished countries from obtaining a source of income. Perhaps if anti-deforestation activists focused on raising the standards of living in these countries, thus giving their citizens the freedom to secure a more stable future, their argument would become more credible and helpful to humanity as a whole.

The problem with deforestation is that even though it may be true that companies plant more trees than they cut down, these companies do not (or cannot) rectify damage done to certain organisms. What's more, the impoverished nations that practice deforestation do so in an inefficient manner—they do not replace the sections of forest they burn or cut down. Just as the anti-deforestation activists overlook the fact that they do not consider the well-being of a vast majority of the population, so too are the deforestation proponents overlooking the fact that by replacing trees they cut down and not replacing the organisms, they are focusing their goals on merely appeasing the anti-deforestation advocates. They seemingly do not care about the destruction of half of the species on earth by the middle of this century.

An often unconsidered aspect (for its outrageous implications) to this debate is the idea that humanity's expansion is directly proportional to the amount of wild habitats in existence. This idea implies that nature does not need to be defended, but instead is defending itself in that as humanity kills off forests, it kills itself off. It may be true that as forests are destroyed, countless organisms perish, but just as evolution played a major role in the age of the dinosaurs, so too does evolution and natural selection play a major role here

Natural selection is defined as the process in nature by which only the organisms best adapted to their environment tend to survive⁶. Millions of years ago, the same process took place. Only the organisms best suited for the changing climate of Earth lived to evolve into the forms we know them today. Their ability to survive and adapt was put to the test when meteors impacted Earth's surface, causing great upheavals in the average change in temperature across the planet. In this scenario, a great majority—far more than fifty percent of all species—went extinct. All of these occurrences were required in the process of creating the world as civilization knows it today.

With this in mind, one could put forth the argument that the destruction of Earth's natural habitats is similar to one of the great catastrophes that occurred millions of years ago. Just as in the past, vast majorities of the living species are passing into extinction, with only those adapted for survival in such extreme conditions living on. This is another period of evolution for every organism on Earth, including humankind. With the expenditure of all of Earth's natural resources looming over the heads of every planetary citizen, it is somewhat difficult to believe that evolution will be humanity's only means of survival. If nature intends for humanity to end, evolution (in the form of thought, general consensus or something physical) will not occur and humanity will ironically put itself into extinction.

How this all applies to deforestation is simple. If humanity as one of millions of species on earth does not soon realize that nature is "putting it to the test" by allowing it to turn its wood into

furniture, only to see if they are smart enough to realize when enough is enough, the human race will be added to the list of Earth's former inhabitants. The process is nature's way of ridding itself of a possible mistake in evolution. Arguing one way or the other will not change the fact that neither side of this debate is correct in their assumptions, nor that neither side can fully put an end to the destruction.

When one analyzes humanity's overall effect on the planet, one can draw similarities between humanity and a disease. Just as a disease plagues an organism's existence, so too does humanity plague Earth. Nothing wastes more natural resources than the average human being. Levels of pollution have grown exponentially since the first sight of humanity a few thousand years ago to a level where Earth's own ozone layer is being torn open. Factories, air conditioners, automobiles, oil spills, plastics, and wars are all contributing to the turning of Earth—a once rich, clean planet—into a waste land of trash heaps, pavement, smog filled skies, and chemical filled waters. From Earth's perspective, humanity is a sickness that needs to be cured. Also, much like a disease spreads throughout an organism, so too will humanity spread through out its spatial organism—the solar system. Until humanity can coexist in nature, giving as much back as it takes, there will always be a conflict, and a lowered probability of a healthy future.

Though the problem is obviously much bigger than deforestation, it would be a novel idea to start with eliminating deforestation, or making it more environmentally friendly. Wood, after all, is one of the most important resources to man. Deforestation proponents wrongly focus their solutions on appeasing the views of anti-forestation activists, thus ignoring what occurs in third world countries. Anti-deforestation activists wrongly focus their views on stopping the cutting down of trees, meanwhile not realizing that this does nothing in the way of stopping the desire and need to cut down trees for impoverished civilizations. In order to truly stop the elimination of natural habitats, controlled deforestation is a must, along with bettering the standards of living in most third world countries. The way humanity is approaching the problem at present makes it seem as if it does not want to exist on Earth much longer.

Notes

1. David Hosansky, "Saving the Rain Forests" *CQ Researcher* June 11, 1999.
2. Mary H. Cooper, "Mass Extinction" *CQ Researcher* September 15, 2000.
3. Mary H. Cooper, "Global Warming" *CQ Researcher* November 1, 1996.
4. Mary H. Cooper, "National Forests" *CQ Researcher* October 16, 1998.
5. Mary H. Cooper, "Ozone Depletion" *CQ Researcher* April 3, 1992.
6. David Hosansky, "Saving the Rain Forests" *CQ Researcher* June 11, 1999.
7. Mary H. Cooper, "Mass Extinction" *CQ Researcher* September 15, 2000.
8. Mary H. Cooper, "Global Warming" *CQ Researcher* November 1, 1996.
9. Mary H. Cooper, "National Forests" *CQ Researcher* October 16, 1998.
10. Mary H. Cooper, "Ozone Depletion" *CQ Researcher* April 3, 1992.

