

Global Green Betrayal: Excuses Are Plenty, Forests Empty, and Truth Overlooked



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Abstract

Global outrage over COP30's Amazon tree-felling mirrors a far broader crisis, as deforestation accelerates across continents and ecosystems collapse under human pressure. Biodiversity is plummeting at record speed, with wildlife abundance down nearly three-quarters and economic losses reaching trillions annually. Agricultural expansion, industrial extraction, climate-driven wildfires, and conflict now drive unprecedented forest destruction, especially in tropical regions. Together, these forces push the planet toward an ecological breaking point, raising an urgent action demanded to safeguard the world's remaining forests before they are lost forever.

Keywords: Tree-cover loss; Permanent land-use change; Tropical deforestation; Armed conflicts; Biodiversity decline; Agricultural expansion; Climate-driven wildfires; Mining-related loss; Wildfires

Introduction

The COP30 conference has sparked outrage. Brazil, the host nation, reportedly felled 100,000 Amazon trees to build a highway for visiting delegates—a move widely condemned as a betrayal of its own environmental promises [1]. Yet this is no isolated incident. Tree felling has become a global scourge, ravaging livelihoods, development projects, and even war-torn lands.

While nature nourishes the Amazon with Sulphur-rich dust carried more than 6,000 kilometers from the distant Sahara, humanity continues to strip it of life [2]. Between 2000 and 2018, the rainforest lost an area larger than Spain [3], and over the past four decades' deforestation has consumed land equal to the combined size of Germany and France [4]—driven by cattle ranching, soy cultivation, logging, mining, and unchecked expansion, leaving its biodiversity increasingly fragile

Biodiversity is immense, with estimates ranging from 100 million to a trillion species [5], yet only around two million—comprising animals, plants, insects, and fungi—have been formally documented [6]. *The Living Planet Report* warns that nearly three-quarters of global wildlife populations have been lost over the past five decades [7]. According to the World Health Organization, this decline costs the global economy approximately US\$10 trillion annually [8], accounting for rising healthcare expenses and crop losses as pollinators disappear.

Global Drivers of Accelerating Deforestation and Tree-Cover Loss

Biodiversity faces severe threats from deforestation, one of humanity's most devastating imprints on the planet. Since 10,000 BC, humans have cleared forests for crops and livestock [9]. Prior to the twentieth century, temperate regions—including Europe, Russia, China, North America, and Australia—bore the greatest burden of forest loss, driven by an unrelenting demand for food and timber [10]. Today, roughly five million hectares of forest destroyed each year, with 95 per cent of the loss occurring in tropical regions [11].

Agricultural and industrial drivers of global deforestation

With the global population now exceeding 8 billion, pressure on forests is intensifying. Urbanization and industrial expansion are driving large-scale deforestation, as growing cities and infrastructure encroach on once-forested land. Studies show that growing demand for land and forest resources intensifies deforestation and illegal logging, leaving remaining green patches ecologically fragile and poorly connected [12]. Industrial activities—including logging, mining, and agriculture—continue to clear vast areas, while soaring global demand for commodities

such as beef, soy, palm oil, and paper further accelerates tree loss. Consequently, agricultural expansion now accounts for over 80% of global deforestation [13].

Palm oil cultivation, livestock grazing, and the production of beef and animal feed together account for over 40% of global deforestation [14]. Between 2001 and 2015, Global Forest Watch reported that cattle pasture alone was responsible for more than 45 million hectares of forest loss, while soy cultivation for animal feed cleared another eight million hectares [15]. In South America—which produces a quarter of the world’s beef—production rose by 70% between 1990 and 2020, and an estimated 90 million hectares of degraded pasture continue to

drive deforestation across the region [16].

Permanent land-use change: a major driver of global forest loss

Between 2001 and 2024, over a third of global tree-cover loss—168 million hectares, an area larger than Mongolia—was likely driven by permanent land-use change, according to the World Resources Institute using Global Forest Watch data (Figure 1). The impact is even more pronounced in tropical primary rainforests, where more than 60% of forest loss—50.7 million hectares, roughly the size of Thailand—can be attributed to permanent land-use conversion [17].

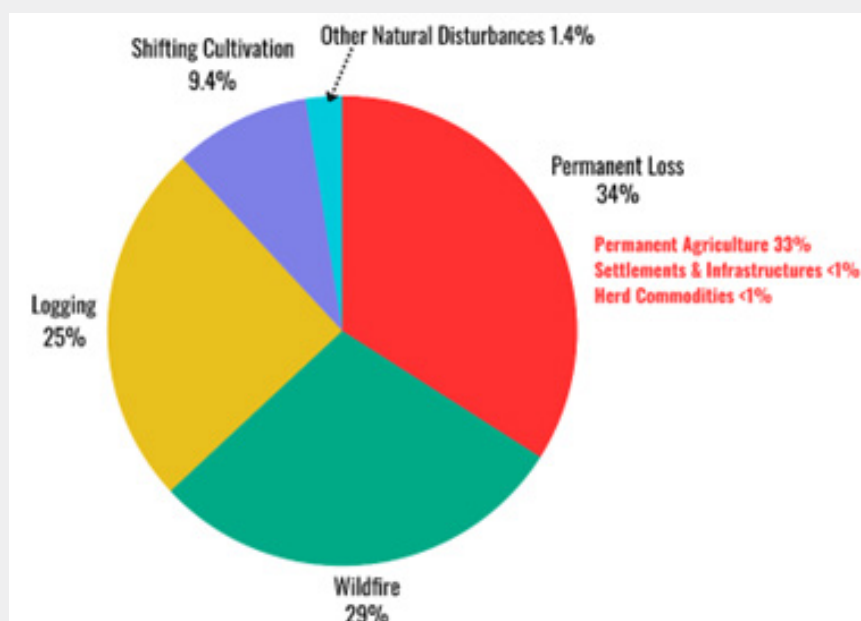


Figure 1: The pie chart shows an estimated 515 million hectares of global tree-cover loss between 2001 and 2024, with 34% deemed permanent. Based on nearly 7,000 reference samples, the dataset—developed by WRI and Google DeepMind and available via Global Forest Watch—uses a neural-network model with 90.5% accuracy to identify the drivers of loss. Regional patterns indicate that logging dominates in Europe, permanent agriculture in the tropics, and wildfires in Russia, North America, Asia, and Oceania.

Accelerating forest loss driven by climate and human-caused wildfires

Global forest loss hit record levels in 2024, with climate-driven wildfires in some areas now 25 to 35 times more likely than in a cooler world [18]. Tropical primary forests were hit hardest, with fires accounting for nearly half (49.5%) of their destruction—nearly quadruple the 13.3% recorded in 2023 [19]. Analyses by the University of Maryland show that the world lost forest cover equivalent to 11 football fields every minute in 2022 [20]—a figure that climbed sharply to 18 per minute by 2024 [21]. Nearly half of this destruction was driven by wildfires. While such blazes occur naturally in certain ecosystems, in tropical forests they are largely the result of human activity [22], often ignited to clear land

for agriculture and subsequently spreading uncontrollably into surrounding woodlands.

The forest cost of global mining

Miners worldwide are locked in a fierce race for mineral wealth, forgetting that the true treasures lie in the lush greenery of nature—nurturing biodiversity for centuries and sustaining human life itself. While global leaders proclaim their devotion to saving the planet, their actions tell another story: in the name of progress, they pursue relentless excavation, mining the world’s poorest lands as if they belong to another planet. However, global mining has expanded by more than half since 2001, driven by demand for gold, coal, lithium, cobalt, and other industrial minerals, increasingly threatening forest ecosystems worldwide

[23]. Between 2001 and 2020, mining activities wiped out nearly 1.4 million hectares of tree cover—an area about the size of Montenegro [24]. Alarming, just eleven countries, including Indonesia, Brazil, Russia, the United States, and Canada, account for over 85% of all mining-related forest loss [24,25].

Armed conflicts and post-war drivers of forest loss

Armed conflicts often leave forests in ruins. During the Vietnam War, millions of acres were defoliated with the herbicide Agent Orange, destroying both tree cover and food sources for guerrilla fighters [26]. In Gaza and the West Bank, the felling of olive trees has targeted livelihoods while entrenching occupation [27]. In Ukraine, nearly 600 square miles of forest—twice the size of New York City—were lost within two years of war with Russia [28]. Across Europe, rising energy costs have driven households to burn wood, a trend intensified by EU bioenergy subsidies, even in protected forests [29]. Even post-war, forest loss often accelerates due to reconstruction, weak governance, and renewed logging. A study published in an Elsevier journal found annual forest loss in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Ivory Coast, and Peru rose 68% in the five years after conflicts, far above the 7.2% global average [30], driven by illegal logging and agricultural expansion.

Conclusion

Our forests, the silent custodians of life on Earth, are being lost at an unprecedented pace. Global warming, human greed, and relentless land-use change are setting them ablaze, as if the world itself has turned against its trees. Humanity seems trapped in a tragic cycle of deforestation, blind to the irreplaceable gifts that forests have provided for millennia. As tree cover continues to vanish across continents, one cannot help but ask: can we alter our course before these vital ecosystems are lost forever?

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