



Joint Submission by Global Wildlife Conservation, Rainforest Foundation Norway, United Nations Development Programme, Wildlife Conservation Society, and World Resources Institute, members of the Forests for Life Partnership, regarding views on information and data for the preparation of the Standing Committee on Finance 2020 Report on the determination of the needs of developing country Parties, in particular the role of intact forests and their potential for enhanced action in the land sector

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INTRODUCTION

Article 5 of the Paris Agreement explicitly states that all countries “should take action to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases as referred to in Article 4, paragraph 1(d), of the Convention, including forests.” In Article 4.1(d), all Parties under the Convention committed to pursuing actions in the land sector that “Promote sustainable management, and promote and cooperate in the conservation and enhancement, as appropriate, of sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases ..., including biomass, forests and oceans as well as other terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems.”

‘Natural climate solutions’ from better forest and land-use management may offer at least 30% of the mitigation action needed by 2030¹. Intact forests², many of which are located in High Forest Low Deforestation (HFLD) regions and countries, are irreplaceable and make a critical contribution in terms of global climate and development goals. They hold immense and unique value for both the climate and the biosphere, while supporting important co-benefits and social, economic and environmental outcomes³. It is essential to maintain the ecological integrity of these important landscapes because they:

- Store around nine years’ worth of human-caused emissions⁴ and sequester more than a quarter of humanity’s carbon emissions each year⁵ (11 GtCO₂e/year).
- Enhance resilience, by sustaining regional rainfall and reducing ecological vulnerability to fire, droughts, floods etc.
- Conserve the biological diversity essential to maintaining ecological functions, adaptation and resilience (SDGs 14 & 15).
- Help secure the livelihoods and cultures of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), while delivering cost-effective social benefits such as functioning watersheds, food security and reduced disease transmission (SDGs 1, 2, 3 & 6).

Well over 35% of the world’s most intact forests are home to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), who therefore play a central role in their conservation⁶. IPLCs manage at least 17% of the carbon stored in forestlands across 64 assessed countries.

The value of intact forests as both storehouses and active sinks of carbon plummets when they are cut down or degraded, removing an essential natural brake on climate change. Once degraded, forests also become less resilient to the threats that climate change itself poses⁷.

Despite their value, intact forests are in rapid decline. By one measure, from 2000 to 2016 we lost about 9% of the planet's most intact forests, or 0.6% per year⁸. New science reveals that the carbon impacts from the loss of intact tropical forest between 2000 and 2013 have been grossly underreported and are six times higher than previously thought, calculated through a full carbon accounting that includes a wider range of degradation impacts as well as forgone carbon removals to 2050 – or, carbon sequestration that would have occurred annually if cleared or degraded forest had remained intact⁹.

The outdated perception that intact forests are too remote to face any serious threats now forms one of the greatest barriers to policy measures or finance for their protection. In fact, satellite evidence shows that human actions are driving the destruction of intact forests at twice the rate of deforestation overall¹⁰. If the losses continue at this pace, half of what currently remains will be cleared or seriously degraded by 2100. Recent trends suggest that the rate is actually accelerating as the global footprint of intensive human activity spreads ever wider.

These staggering results serve to further highlight the foundational, stabilizing role that intact forests play for carbon and climate change mitigation and enhancing resilience, and underline the urgent need for their protection and sustainable management through policy change, governmental support, and adequate international finance.

Such losses are preventable if countries take action on long-term protection of intact, natural forest carbon sinks and reservoirs. Such action should be key in countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and can include policies and measures known to be effective, when properly resourced, such as:

- increasing the extent of equitably established and managed protected areas,
- expanding recognition of legally valid claims to territorial ownership by IPLC and supporting management by those groups, and
- preventing or minimizing the impacts from the major drivers of degradation and deforestation.

Alarming, however, the conservation of intact forests has not been made an explicit priority in many nationally determined contributions (NDCs) or in existing climate finance mechanisms for the land sector that focus mainly on near-term emission reductions¹¹. In other cases, countries have recognized the importance of intact forests in their NDCs but lack sufficient funding to implement conditional contributions.

Overall public and private finance for Nature-Based Solutions has been inadequate, particularly in the land sector. Goal 8 of the New York Declaration on Forests calls for provision of support for the development and implementation of strategies to reduce forest emissions, but financial resources for forests are insufficient to realize their full mitigation potential¹². Less than 2 percent of international climate finance goes to forests, while subsidies and investments in sectors driving deforestation (e.g., agriculture) amount to 40 times more than investments in protecting forests, including multilateral financing mechanisms and cooperation with the public and private sector¹³. The situation is especially daunting for HFLD and other tropical forest countries looking to conserve and maintain their intact forests. These countries face additional, significant barriers in accessing forest finance to catalyze transformations to sustainable green growth trajectories, since the already established frameworks (including REDD+) have tended to be beneficial to countries with historical high deforestation rates.

Role for the SCF

If the existing carbon stocks and ongoing sequestration capacity of intact forests (including peatlands) are not maintained, humanity may well find that all safe climate mitigation pathways are out of reach. Importantly, nearly half of intact forests (48% in 2013; Potapov et al. 2017) are tropical forests in developing countries -- which support the highest rates of sequestration and biodiversity, but have also experienced the highest rates of loss since 2000. Actions to safeguard the forest carbon sinks that intact forests provide should be a key component in countries' NDCs, with the support of climate finance mobilized by developed countries under Article 9 of the Paris Agreement.

Protection of large, intact, undegraded forest areas has received limited climate finance, both in HFLD countries and in comparably intact regions within other countries. Existing REDD+ results-based payment schemes are inherently unlikely to provide sufficient support to such areas¹⁴. In some cases, their participation in a portfolio is restricted or excluded altogether. In others, their participation is explicitly capped or constrained by a policy focus on nearer-term emission reductions, rather than carbon stock maintenance. This disconnect means that REDD+ incentives largely ignore indirect, emerging or longer-term threats that will determine the fate of these forests in coming decades.

Therefore, a new, integrated approach is needed: one that goes beyond emission reductions alone to ensure that intact forests, within HFLD countries and elsewhere, can also continue to contribute to meeting the global climate mitigation targets. Such an approach should build upon a better understanding of the conditions, forms, and needs for enhancing commitments to protect forest sinks in NDCs as soon as possible. This understanding must cover a range of topics, including the following:

- the types of support needed by HFLD and REDD+ countries;
- how policies and measures can be implemented with both domestic finance and international support;
- potential pilot or model approaches and monitoring frameworks.

To maximize collective progress towards achieving the purpose of the Paris Agreement and its long-term goals, the potential contributions from the land sector must be an integral part of collective climate action. The resources put into this process should set the stage to create policy responses that ensure the strongest possible mitigation contribution of all sectors, including the land sector. They should create a foundation that leads to concrete recommendations on how current and future NDCs can be resourced to be strengthened over time, and on how to incorporate the best-available science into the process (e.g., mitigation potential, accounting methodologies, etc.).

We urge the SCF to fully include the mitigation potential of the land sector, including all forest landscapes, in its work. Many segments of the land sector, including agriculture, forestry, wetland management, and other land management practices (AFOLU), are already positioned to play a fundamental role in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Over 100 countries have already included the land sector in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC)—and many of these countries have made the sector a key focus of their emission reduction targets¹⁵. However, the negotiations that led to the Paris Agreement did not fully clarify how Parties should collectively take into consideration their existing sinks and reservoirs in the land sector, of which intact forests play a central role. Since understanding the role of these sinks and reservoirs is fundamental to assessing the overall progress under the Paris Agreement, it is appropriate and necessary to consider them in assessing the needs of developing

countries in assessing the needs of developing country Parties related to implementing the Convention and the Paris Agreement.

The IPCC plays a crucial role in clarifying the potential contribution from the land sector, as well as the risks of increased land sector emissions due to future climate impacts. In particular, the IPCC Special Report addressing mitigation pathways compatible with 1.5°C in the context of sustainable development can and should be considered in any in-depth exploration of the potential contribution of the land sector undertaken by the SCF. Also, the IPCC Special Report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems is also a valuable source of information for the SCF to consider.

Furthermore, the 2019 IPCC Refinement to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories offers a set of methodologies sufficient for any country to track and account for existing sinks and reservoirs in the land sector. Parties may use a range of approaches, in accordance with their national circumstances and respective capabilities. We urge Parties to contribute to the work of the IPCC's 6th Assessment Report (AR6) and its other Special Reports, and to use IPCC findings to inform the SCF work relevant to nature-based solutions.

To meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, global forest and climate policy needs to take a multi-decade perspective. Over these time-scales, anthropogenic emissions from currently intact forests are projected to increase due to increasing threats—including anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic climate impacts. The Paris Agreement provides an umbrella framework for ambitious action to include global forests, but further efforts are needed to recognize the key role that intact forests play in the long-term stability of the climate. Urgent action is needed from the SCF to promote additional financial incentives and sufficient funding to secure the critical role intact forests play as part of mitigation within the land sector.

CONCLUSION

The Standing Committee on Finance has the opportunity to take an important step through this 2020 Report to ensure that the developing countries can be supported in identifying and seeking resources to implement the full mitigation and adaptation benefits of the entire land sector in the global carbon cycle and in the long-term sustainability of the climate regime. The UNFCCC should recognize the synergies that can be achieved when the role of intact forests is considered within the land sector—through land-use planning, conservation, and resource management—and these synergies should be recognized and facilitated through the work of the SCF. These actions will enable and promote the creation of specific policy approaches related to intact forests through NDC formulation and implementation. With targeted attention from the SCF, the land sector can achieve its rightful place as a key element for the success of the Paris Agreement.

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- ² As defined by Watson, J. E. M., *et al.* (2018) The exceptional value of intact forest ecosystems. *Nature Ecology and Evolution* 2: 599-610.
- ³ Reviewed in detail by Watson, J. E. M., *et al.* (2018) The exceptional value of intact forest ecosystems. *Nature Ecology and Evolution* 2: 599-610.
- ⁴ Potapov, P. *et al.* (2017) The last frontiers of wilderness: Tracking loss of intact forest landscapes from 2000 to 2013. *Science Advances* 2017;3: e1600821.
- ⁵ Le Quéré, C., *et al.* (2018) Global carbon budget 2017. *Earth Syst. Sci. Data* 10: 405-448. Pan. Y. *et al.* (2011) *Science* **333**: 988-993. Houghton (2013) *Carbon Management* (4)5.
- ⁶ Fa *et al.* (2020) Importance of Indigenous Peoples' lands for the conservation of Intact Forest Landscapes. *Frontiers in Ecology & Environment* doi:10.1002/fee.2148
- ⁷ Watson, J. E. M., *et al.* (2018) The exceptional value of intact forest ecosystems. *Nature Ecology and Evolution* 2: 599-610; Thompson, I. *et al.* (2009). *Forest Resilience, Biodiversity, and Climate Change. A synthesis of the biodiversity/resilience/stability relationship in forest ecosystems*. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal. Technical Series no. 43.
- ⁸ Potapov, P. *et al.* (2017) The last frontiers of wilderness: Tracking loss of intact forest landscapes from 2000 to 2013. *Science Advances* 2017;3: e1600821 plus supplementary analysis of the 2016 data from <http://www.intactforests.org/news.html>
- ⁹ Maxwell *et al.* (2019) Degradation and forgone removals increase the carbon impact of intact forest loss by 626%. *Science Advances* 2019;5: eaax2546
- ¹⁰ Potapov *et al.* op. cit.
- ¹¹ Mackey, B. *et al.* (2015) Policy options for the world's primary forests in multilateral environmental agreements. *Conservation Letters* 8(2): 139-147; Watson, J. E. M., *et al.* (2018) The exceptional value of intact forest ecosystems. *Nature Ecology and Evolution* 2: 599-610.
- ¹² https://forestdeclaration.org/images/uploads/resource/2018_NYDF_Goals1-10_UpdatesSummary.pdf
- ¹³ NYDF Assessment Partners. (2019). Protecting and Restoring Forests: A Story of Large Commitments yet Limited Progress. New York Declaration on Forests Five-Year Assessment Report. Climate Focus (coordinator and editor). Accessible at forestdeclaration.org.
- ¹⁴ Funk, J.M., *et al.* (2019) Securing the climate benefits of stable forests. *Climate Policy* DOI: 10.1080/14693062.2019.1598838
- ¹⁵ Seddon, N., Sengupta, S., García-Espinosa, M., Hauler, I., Herr, D. and Rizvi, A.R. (2019). Nature-based Solutions in Nationally Determined Contributions: Synthesis and recommendations for enhancing climate ambition and action by 2020. Gland, Switzerland and Oxford, UK: IUCN and University of Oxford.