Submission of the Global Environment Facility to the COP30 Presidency

Roadmap on Halting and Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation by 2030

Introduction

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) welcomes the initiative of the COP30 Presidency to develop an action-oriented Roadmap on Halting and Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation by 2030. As the financial mechanism serving the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) - the three Rio Conventions - the GEF is uniquely positioned to advance this transformative agenda at the intersection of climate, biodiversity, and sustainable land management.

The moment is urgent. Science is unequivocal: forests are irreplaceable pillars of planetary stability, and their continued loss constitutes one of the most consequential failures of our time. Despite many efforts and commitments by the global community, forests continue to be lost at an alarming rate. According to WRI, the world has lost 517 million hectares of tree cover since the turn of the century, equivalent to about 13 percent of global tree cover in 2000. Tree cover loss has been rising in recent history, from 13.4 million hectares of tree cover loss in 2001 to 29.6 million hectares in 2024. Around 34 percent of tree cover loss since 2000 was deforestation, characterized by permanent loss of forest - a trajectory that places the 2030 targets far from being met under current conditions. The COP30 Roadmap presents a historic opportunity to change this course.

This submission identifies the most critical dimensions of the forest crisis, sets out the urgent actions required to address them at scale, and presents the GEF's track record and forward commitments as a concrete contribution to the needed solutions.

The Scale of the Crisis and What Is at Stake

The Irreplaceable Value of Forests — With Primary Forests as a Priority

Forests are among the most vital systems on Earth. They store approximately 861 billion tonnes of carbon, host over 80% of terrestrial biodiversity, regulate hydrological cycles, prevent soil erosion, and sustain the livelihoods of more than 1.6 billion people, including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs). According to the World Economic Forum, $44 trillion, the equivalent of about half global GDP, is at risk due to nature loss.

Among the different types of forests, primary forests occupy a distinct and irreplaceable position. They represent ecosystems of the highest ecological integrity - characterized by complex species assemblages, undisturbed carbon stocks, and biological processes that cannot be replicated or restored once lost. Over the past two decades alone, the world has lost 83 million hectares of humid primary forest. Their destruction is irreversible.

Primary forests are not merely carbon reservoirs: they are the living repositories of biodiversity, the guardians of freshwater systems, and the ancestral territories of Indigenous Peoples. Their loss represents a permanent foreclosure on humanity's options for climate stability, ecological resilience, and cultural heritage. The COP30

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Roadmap should accord primary forests the highest level of protection, with dedicated policy instruments, financing mechanisms, and monitoring frameworks designed specifically for their conservation.

The Multidimensional Threat: Climate, Biodiversity, and Human Well-Being

Deforestation and forest degradation account for approximately 11% of global greenhouse gas emissions and 45% of land-sector emissions, making forest protection one of the most cost-effective mitigation strategies available. Article 5 of the Paris Agreement explicitly recognizes the role of forests, and paragraphs 33 and 34 of the Global Stocktake outcome (GST1) confirm that halting and reversing deforestation by 2030 is a critical component of the 1.5°C pathway.

Beyond climate, tropical forests alone harbor more than half of all terrestrial species. Their conservation is therefore a prerequisite for achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), particularly Target 3 (the 30x30 goal), Target 2 on ecosystem restoration, and Target 10 on the sustainable management of agricultural areas. Halting deforestation is inseparable from halting biodiversity loss.

Forests also constitute indispensable adaptation assets, protecting communities from extreme weather events, regulating local climates, and providing ecosystem-based adaptation services. The continuation of deforestation-driven commodity supply chains - including soy, palm oil, cocoa, beef, coffee and timber - generates short-term economic gains vastly outweighed by long-term ecological and economic losses, including increased disaster risk such as wildfires, water insecurity, and the irreversible erosion of natural capital.

The Severity of the Financing Gap

The financial basis for protecting the world's forests is totally inadequate. Current annual mitigation finance directed to forests stands at approximately USD 2.3 billion - representing less than 1% of the estimated funding needed annually. According to the State of Finance for Forests 2025 (UN REDD Program), the total annual forest investment must scale to USD 300 billion by 2030 and USD 498 billion by 2050 to meet global climate, biodiversity, and land restoration targets.

This deficit is compounded by the misalignment of financial flows, policies and actions in the broader economy. Agricultural subsidies reached approximately USD 406 billion in 2023, many of which incentivize land-use practices that directly drive forest loss. An estimated USD 8.9 trillion in private finance continues to flow to companies with high deforestation risk. Meanwhile, IPLCs - recognized globally as the world's most effective forest stewards - receive only 1.4% of total public climate finance. This systemic underfunding and misallocation of resources constitutes one of the most critical barriers to achieving the 2030 deforestation targets and must be treated with urgency.

Structural Drivers: Governance Failures and Policy Incoherence

The forest crisis is not only a financing failure - it is also a governance failure. Deforestation continues to be driven by structural incentives embedded in sectoral policies that operate in isolation and misalignment from environmental commitments, undermining efforts of forest protection. Agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, and extractive industries proceed largely disconnected from national climate and biodiversity strategies. Approximately 50% of lands held by IPLCs remain without legal recognition, exposing the most biodiverse territories to encroachment and exploitation. National forest monitoring systems, enforcement capacities, and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms remain weak in many of the countries where forest loss is most severe. Without addressing these structural drivers, no amount of financing will be sufficient to reverse deforestation trajectories.

Solutions: What Must Be Done Urgently

Adopting Integrated Approaches for Systemic Transformation at Scale

Decades of experience have demonstrated that project-by-project, sector-by-sector approaches are insufficient to halt deforestation at the scale and speed required. The root causes of forest loss - agricultural expansion, infrastructure proliferation, extractive pressures, commodity supply chains, weak governance and illegal activities - are interconnected systems that require systemic, integrated responses.

The Roadmap must call for a decisive shift toward whole-of-economy and whole-of-landscape approaches that simultaneously address the multiple drivers of forest loss. This means integrating forest conservation into national agricultural, infrastructure, mining, and energy planning; promoting landscape-level management that aligns the interests of governments, the private sector, civil society, and forest communities; and investing in bioeconomy models that demonstrate the economic viability of forest conservation as a development pathway.

GEF funded Integrated Programs such as the Amazon, Congo and Other Critical Forest Biomes framework - which mobilizes nearly $300 million in grants and over a billion in co-financing across the world's most ecologically significant tropical forest biomes - offer a model for this approach. The Roadmap should institutionalize such integrated, multi-actor, multi-sector frameworks as a standard vehicle for forest finance and implementation.

Closing the Financial Gap: A Compulsory Imperative

Bridging the forest finance gap is not optional - it is the foundational precondition for achieving every other element of the Roadmap. The current annual shortfall of hundreds of billions of dollars cannot be closed by incremental adjustments. It requires a step-change in the scale, architecture, and alignment of forest finance, combining under national strategies a mix of adequate and sustainable instruments such as public grant finance, results-based payments, blended finance instruments, green bonds, debt-for-nature swaps, Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), and Conservation Trust Funds.

Critically, the Roadmap must address the perverse incentives that actively undermine forest protection. Agricultural subsidies must be progressively redirected away from practices that drive deforestation. Private financial flows must be aligned with deforestation-free supply chains through mandatory due diligence frameworks, building on instruments such as the EU Deforestation Regulation. High-integrity carbon and biodiversity markets should be developed as performance-based incentives for forest protection, with robust safeguards to ensure environmental and social integrity.

Direct and accessible finance channels for IPLCs must be established as a structural commitment, not a marginal add-on. IPLCs manage approximately 22% of the world's land and protect some of its most biodiverse and carbon-rich ecosystems. As now widely recognized, increasing the share of public climate finance flowing directly to IPLC-led initiatives - from the current 1.4% to a level commensurate with their conservation outcomes - is both a matter of equity and of effectiveness.

Enhancing Policy Coherence Across Sectors

Policy coherence is a transformational lever without which all other interventions are at risk of being undermined. At the same time, an increased alignment of policies and actions across sectors can reduce the financial resources required for forest protection, further contributing to the narrowing of the funding gap. Therefore, the Roadmap must place cross-sectoral policy alignment at its center, recognizing that forests cannot be protected by environmental ministries and actors alone.

At the national level, the Roadmap should call for the development of joint implementation frameworks that align Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), and National Action Plans to Combat Desertification (NAPs) around shared, measurable forest goals. National Coalition and Committees and Country-led Platforms could be the vehicle to embed environmental priorities across sectoral ministries, national budgets, and development plans. Perverse incentives, including subsidies that drive forest loss should be systematically identified, disclosed, and progressively reformed.

GEF has been supporting countries in strengthening policy coherence at multiple levels. Embedded as a cross-cutting priority in its recent programming, including those focused on forest protection, many GEF projects now explicitly address elements of policy coherence. At the international level, the GEF supports enhanced institutional and programmatic coherence across the UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD. Forests sit at the nexus of all three conventions, and fragmented action across these frameworks reduces efficiency and impact. The Joint Liaison Group of the three Rio Convention secretariats could be empowered to support countries in designing synergistic policies and harmonized reporting frameworks. The Roadmap should further call for the alignment of international forest-related processes - including the UN Forum on Forests, the High-Level Political Forum, and relevant G20 workstreams - beyond a common accountability architecture.

Supply chain policy coherence is equally critical. Mandatory due diligence requirements for high-risk commodity supply chains should become a global standard, ensuring that international trade does not externalize deforestation costs onto forest-rich, lower-income countries.

Empowering Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

The empowerment of IPLCs is not a complementary consideration - it is a cornerstone of any effective strategy to halt deforestation. Decades of evidence confirm that territories under indigenous stewardship consistently exhibit lower rates of deforestation, higher levels of biodiversity, and greater carbon stocks than comparably situated areas under other management regimes.

The Roadmap must recognize IPLCs not merely as beneficiaries but as rights-holders, decision-makers, and lead implementers of forest conservation strategies. This requires action on three fronts.

First, land tenure security. Without secure tenure, communities cannot defend their territories from encroachment, engage effectively in policy processes, or attract long-term investment. The Roadmap must include concrete commitments to accelerate the legal recognition of IPLC land rights, underpinned by Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

Second, direct and adequate finance. IPLCs must have access to dedicated, direct, and adequately sized finance channels – limiting filtration through layers of intermediaries that reduce accessibility and autonomy. Mechanisms such as the GEF's Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) and the Small Grants Program 2.0 offer models for direct community-level funding that could be substantially scaled.

Third, meaningful inclusion in governance. Traditional ecological knowledge held by IPLCs constitutes an irreplaceable scientific and management resource. It must be more integrated into national forest governance frameworks, monitoring systems, and international reporting processes. Women's leadership in forest management must be promoted, recognizing both the disproportionate dependence of rural women on forest resources and their effectiveness as conservation agents.

The GEF's Contribution: Past Results and Future Commitments

The GEF has been at the forefront of global forest finance for over 30 years, evolving progressively from support to individual protected areas to programmatic, integrated landscape approaches that address the systemic drivers of deforestation. This evolution reflects both institutional learning and a deepening understanding of what it takes to achieve conservation outcomes at scale. The significant impact of the GEF pioneer forest integrated program, the Amazon Sustainable Landscape program initiated around 15 years ago, demonstrated the relevance and the efficiency of the approach. As a result, this program further evolved and was extended at global scale in GEF-8 (2022) to become the Amazon, Congo and other Critical Forests Biomes Integrated Program including the most important primary forest biomes on the planet.

Since its inception, the GEF has invested approximately $6 billion in forest conservation, leveraging over $30 billion in co-financing across more than 100 countries. This track record spans protected area management, sustainable forest management, community-based forestry, landscape restoration, and the development of enabling policy, sustainable finance mechanisms and governance frameworks. It constitutes one of the most extensive and geographically diverse portfolios of forest investment in the world. In its current GEF-8 cycle, the GEF forest investments are expected to protect or strengthen management of over 115 million hectares of forests and ecosystems, restore 4.2 million hectares of degraded landscapes, mitigate 999 million metric tons of CO_2 equivalent, and directly benefit 19.7 million people — with 50% being women.

GEF’s Strategy on Forests, grounded in the principle of "Preserving Forests for the Future of Nature and People" has progressively elevated the protection of primary forests as its highest conservation priority, recognizing their irrecoverable value and the permanent losses associated with their degradation. The strategy has also systematically expanded the role of IPLCs as central actors in GEF programming, moving from beneficiary inclusion toward rights-based partnerships, direct funding mechanisms, and governance co-leadership. The GEF portfolio demonstrates that one-size-fits-all solutions fail. Countries with high forest cover but low development (e.g., Guyana, Suriname) require approaches that prevent deforestation before it begins — meaning payments for ecosystem services, REDD+ frameworks, and strong monitoring systems. Countries with frontier deforestation pressures (e.g., Brazil, Colombia, DRC) require integrated landscape governance. Countries with low and fragmented forest cover need restoration-first approaches tied to land rehabilitation and sustainable agriculture.

The GEF also supported IPLCs with dedicated financing mechanisms. The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI), investing $25 million in GEF resources, supports nine IPLC-led initiatives across twelve countries, including DRC, Peru, Tanzania, Panama, and Thailand — with global components to strengthen Indigenous and community leadership in international policy and build knowledge-based action. The Heart of Conservation Initiative (HCI) in GEF-8 further deepens this commitment by directly funding Indigenous Peoples' organizations to conserve biodiversity and deliver global environmental benefits — embedding the principle that IPLCs are not just beneficiaries but decision-makers and leaders.

The GEF's experience suggests that the post-COP30 forest agenda should embrace a three-track differentiated approach: (i) prevent deforestation in high-forest, low-pressure countries through result-based finance and tenure security; (ii) reverse deforestation in frontier landscapes through integrated landscape governance and private sector engagement; and (iii) restore and reconnect fragmented ecosystems in lower forest-cover

countries or landscapes through nature-based employment and bioeconomy models. Across all three tracks, IPLC rights, knowledge, and leadership must be treated not as an add-on, but as the foundational condition for long-term success.

Building on its long experience, the GEF's ninth replenishment cycle (GEF-9) reflects a further evolution toward system-level interventions designed to achieve transformational impact at scale. The new cycle continues to support its flagship Amazon, Congo and other Critical Forest Biomes Integrated Program that remains the cornerstone of GEF-9 forest programming, targeting the world's most ecologically significant and threatened tropical forest biomes on the Planet and designed to maintain, preserve, and restore the integrity and functioning of tropical primary forests, through transboundary cooperation, landscape-level integration, enhanced policy coherence and habitat connectivity measures that reflect the ecological importance of these ecosystems.

Conclusion

The COP30 Roadmap on Halting and Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation arrives at a critical moment. The scientific evidence is unambiguous, the economic case is compelling, and the moral imperative is clear. What has been lacking - and what the Roadmap must now provide - is a framework that matches the scale of ambition to the scale of the crisis.

The GEF stands ready to serve as a strategic financial partner in implementing the Roadmap, building on its long experience and channeling resources with the integrated design that the challenge demands. It calls on the COP30 Presidency to ensure that the Roadmap promotes coherent governance architecture and actions, and the financing commitments necessary to unlock the full potential of partnerships such as the one of the GEF.

GEF offers the COP30 Roadmap a unique combination of capacities: a cross-convention mandate spanning climate, biodiversity, and land restoration; a long-experimented financing model that integrates grant finance and blended instruments; three decades of programmatic experience across more than 100 countries; and established relationships with governments, global organizations, civil society and the private sector, and forest communities.

GEF’s submission centers on five convictions that should be foundational to the Roadmap. The forest finance gap must be closed through binding commitments, innovative instruments, and the elimination of perverse incentives. Primary forests must be accorded with the highest level of protection with dedicated and irreversible commitments. Integrated, whole-of-economy and whole-of-society approaches must replace fragmented, sectoral interventions as the standard model for implementation. Policy coherence across sectors and levels of governance must be systematically institutionalized. And IPLCs must be empowered as rights-holders, decision-makers, and lead custodians of the world's most critical ecosystems.

The world's forests cannot wait. The time for incremental response has passed. The GEF calls the COP30 Presidency to seize this opportunity with the ambition it deserves.

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