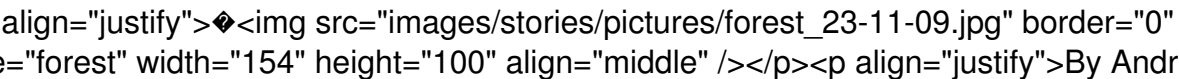


How Protecting the Jungle Can Help Combat Global Warming

Written by 3K Admin

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A photograph of a lush green forest landscape with tall trees and a dense canopy, likely representing the Ulu Masen ecosystem in Indonesia.

By Andrew Marshall / Ulu Masen Monday, Nov. 30, 2009

There are two important things to know about tracking wild elephants, and it's better to learn both of them before you're actually in the jungle, tracking wild elephants. First, elephants are fast. In thick forest in this case, the vast Ulu Masen ecosystem in the Indonesian province of Aceh, where leeches writhe beneath your feet and white-handed gibbons hoot from the treetops they can outpace even deer. Second, elephants can't climb trees. This is good, because that's precisely what you're meant to do if one of them charges.

Or at least that's the advice of the jungle-hardened rangers who patrol just one corner of this 1.9 million acre (7,700 sq km) wilderness. They are trained by the London-based conservation group Fauna and Flora International (FFI) to protect Ulu Masen from illegal loggers and poachers, who greedily eye its valuable hardwoods and teeming wildlife: elephants, gibbons, tigers, leopards, bears, pythons and scaly anteaters. The rangers' work might seem remote from the modern world, but it has implications far beyond Ulu Masen's frontiers from Africa and the Amazon, which along with Indonesia are home to what's left of our rain forests, to the meeting rooms of Copenhagen, where thousands of delegates will arrive for next month's historic climate-change conference. (See heroes of the environment 2009.)

Green plants use light to transform carbon dioxide, absorbed from the atmosphere, and water into organic compounds, with oxygen as a by-product. The process is called photosynthesis, and it enables forests like Ulu Masen to play a critical role in regulating our climate. Forests store an estimated 300 billion tons of carbon, or the equivalent of 40 times the world's total annual greenhouse-gas emissions emissions that cause global warming. Destroy the trees and you release that carbon into the atmosphere, putting the great challenge of our age averting catastrophic climate change beyond reach. Forest destruction accounts for 15% of global emissions by human activity, far outranking the total from vehicles and aircraft combined. Forests are disappearing so fast in Indonesia that, incredibly, this developing country ranks third in emissions behind industrial giants China and the U.S. Since 1950, estimates Greenpeace, more than 182 million acres (740,000 sq km) of Indonesian forests, the equivalent of more than 95 Ulu Masens, have been destroyed or degraded.

The good news is that protecting forests "is one of the easiest and cheapest ways to take a big bite out of the apple when it comes to emissions," says Greenpeace spokesman Daniel Kessler. Ulu Masen will be one of the first forests to be protected under a pioneering U.N. program called REDD Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries that offers a powerful financial incentive to keep forests intact. Here's how it works. Preserve Ulu Masen, and over the next 30 years an estimated 100 million tons of carbon are prevented from entering the earth's atmosphere the equivalent of 50 million flights from London to Sydney. Those savings can be converted into millions of carbon-offset credits, which are sold to rich countries and companies trying to meet their U.N. emissions-reduction targets. The revenue produced by the sale of credits is then ploughed back into protecting the forest and improving life in communities living along its edge, thereby giving people a reason to leave the trees standing. In other words, forests are better REDD than dead. (See the top 10 animals stories of 2008.)

With schemes now proliferating across Indonesia and the globe, the U.N. estimates that REDD revenues could pump up to \$30 billion a year into the developing world, promising much-needed revenue at a time when rich nations still haggle over how much money to give poorer countries to help them adapt to climate change. REDD will likely be part of any

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global climate pact negotiated in Copenhagen. "Everyone has got a lot of hope in REDD," says Joe Heffernan, an expert in environmental markets at FFI. "It's a big one." </p><p align="justify">The Money Tree
Ulu Masen received a boost last year when U.S. bank Merrill Lynch pledged to invest \$9 million over four years. "That gave the project a lot more certainty," says Dorjee Sun, chairman of Sydney-based firm Carbon Conservation, which is helping Aceh's provincial government devise the scheme. "It showed there was appetite from investment banks to buy these credits." Merrill Lynch calls Ulu Masen "the world's first commercially financed avoided deforestation project." Money has been followed by political muscle: a year later, Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, along with the governors of Wisconsin and Illinois, signed a deal committing the state to finding ways to incorporate forest credits within U.S. carbon-trading systems. Ulu Masen is expected to generate \$26 million in carbon credits in its first five years. </p><p align="justify">Humans won't be the only animals to benefit. Clearing land for palm-oil plantations is Indonesia's leading cause of deforestation, says a 2007 U.N. report, with Sumatra, Kalimantan and Papua the three worst-affected provinces. Thanks largely to the global appetite for palm oil, which is found in everything from chocolate bars to biofuels, the natural habitat of endangered animals such as the orangutan and Borneo rhino shrinks further each year. REDD could save them, said a recent study of Kalimantan by researchers from the University of Queensland in Australia. They believe that the revenues generated by preserving a forest could not only compete with the profits of cutting it down for palm oil but also fund biodiversity projects to put the brakes on species extinction. REDD could "fundamentally change conservation [in tropical countries] and provide benefits for mammals at a scale we've never seen before," writes its lead author Oscar Venter. If REDD's champions seem almost religious in their support, it is partly because the scheme appears to contain so many holy grails. Done right, its advocates say, REDD will alleviate poverty, preserve rain forests, protect endangered species and do more to avert catastrophic climate change than grounding jets and banning coal. It also offers a rare partnership between two disparate and often conflicting worlds: capitalism and conservation. With REDD, you can save the planet and make money. </p><p align="justify">Source: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1940544,00.html?artId=1940544?contType=article?chn=world</p>