

WCS EU Response to the Public Consultation on the EU Climate Pact

Relevance and importance of intact forests

The world's last remaining intact forests have a huge impact on climate mitigation. Around 30% of emissions are already removed by intact forests and other ecosystems each year, and additional action on forests and other land use could reduce the remaining net emissions by a further 30% or more.¹ Recent scientific papers show that the contribution of degradation of forests and other ecosystems has been dramatically under-estimated and is almost as high as the level of emissions from deforestation.² The conservation of forests and other carbon-rich ecosystems is crucial to achieving the objectives of Paris Agreement.

EU support for intact forests

The EU climate pact should therefore incorporate action to ensure the conservation of the world's last remaining intact forests. This should include conservation of the remaining natural primary forest that still exists within Europe, as well as support to high priority developing countries, including through EU overseas development assistance and the new Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). Forests Partnership Agreements can be developed to support partner countries to implement and enhance their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). These could support the implementation of nature based solutions that prevent existing large-scale forest areas from being deforested or degraded, for example, through programmes that involve and benefit Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including support for protected areas and community forest tenure.

Measuring success

A new index of forest landscape integrity is now available which can be adopted as an important measure of success.³ The forest integrity index provides a fine scale global index of ecological integrity for all forests of the world which is the first time the science community has been able to do this. Measuring forest integrity is just as important as measuring change in forested area, because reduced ecological integrity affects most of the benefits that forests provide, over huge areas. We envisage this index can help us work out where the most important degraded forests are, prevent further degradation and enable a large increase in restoration efforts.

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¹ <https://nature4climate.org/about/purpose/>

² For example, Erb, K., Kastner, T., Plutzer, C. *et al.* Unexpectedly large impact of forest management and grazing on global vegetation biomass. *Nature* 553, 73–76 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature25138> and Maxwell et al. (2019) Degradation and forgone removals increase the carbon impact of intact forest loss by 626%, *Science Advances* 5(10), DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.aax2546

³ <https://www.forestlandscapeintegrity.com/>