

Rainforest Information Sheet

Rates of Rainforest Loss

Rainforests cover less than 2% of the Earth's surface, yet they are home to some 50 to 70% of all life forms on our planet. The rainforests are quite simply, the richest, oldest, most productive and most complex ecosystems on Earth. As biologist Norman Myers notes, "*rainforests are the finest celebration of nature ever known on the planet.*" And never before has nature's greatest orchestration been so threatened.

Global rates of Destruction

- 2.47 acres (1 hectare) per second: equivalent to two US football fields
- 150 acres (60 hectares) per minute
- 214,000 acres (86,000 hectares) per day: an area larger than New York City
- 78 million acres (31 million hectares) per year: an area larger than Poland

In Brazil

- 5.4 million acres per year (estimate averaged for period 1979-1990)
- 6-9 million indigenous people inhabited the Brazilian rainforest in 1500; in 1992, less than 200,000 remain

Species Extinction

- Distinguished scientists estimate an average of 137 species of life forms are driven into extinction every day, or 50,000 each year.

Projected Economic value of One Hectare in the Peruvian Amazon

- \$6,820 per year if intact forest is sustainably harvested for fruits, latex, or timber
- \$1,000 if clear-cut for commercial timber (not sustainably harvested), or \$148 if used as cattle pasture.

While you were reading the above statistics, approximately 150 acres of rainforest were destroyed. Within the next hour approximately six species will become extinct. While extinction is a natural process, the alarming rate of extinction today, comparable only to the extinction of the dinosaurs, is specifically human-induced and unprecedented .

Experts agree that the number-one cause of extinction is habitat destruction. Quite simply, when habitat is reduced, species disappear. In the rainforests, logging, cattle ranching, mining, oil extraction, hydroelectric dams and subsistence farming are the leading causes of habitat destruction.

Indirectly, the leading threats to rainforest ecosystems are unbridled development, funded by international aid-lending institutions such as the World Bank, and the voracious consumer appetites of industrialized nations. If deforestation continues at current rates, scientists estimate nearly 80-90% of tropical rainforest ecosystems will be destroyed by the year 2020.

Source: Rainforest Action Network. 1998. *Deforestation Rates in Tropical Forests and Their Climatic Implications*. http://www.ran.org/info_center/rates.html (July 23).