

Looming tropical disaster needs urgent action

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A major review by University of Adelaide researchers shows that the world is losing the battle over tropical habitat loss with potentially disastrous implications for biodiversity and human well-being.

Published online today in the Ecological Society of America's journal *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, the review concludes we are "on a trajectory towards disaster" and calls for an immediate global, multi-pronged conservation approach to avert the worst outcomes.

Lead author Associate Professor Corey Bradshaw, from the University of Adelaide's School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, says tropical forests support more than 60% of all known species. But up to 15 million hectares of tropical rainforest are being lost every year and species are being lost at a rate of up to 10,000 times higher than would happen randomly without humans present.

"This is not just a tragedy for tropical biodiversity, this is a crisis that will directly affect human livelihoods," says Associate Professor Bradshaw. "This is not just about losing tiny species found at the base of big trees in a rain forest few people will ever see, this is about a complete change in ecosystem services that directly benefit human life.

"The majority of the world's population live in the tropics and what is at stake is the survival of species that pollinate most of the world's food crops, purify our water systems, attenuate severe flood risk, sequester carbon (taking carbon dioxide out of the air) and modify climate."

Associate Professor Bradshaw says recent technical debate about likely extinction rates in the tropics could be used by governments to justify destructive policies.

"We must not accept belief that all is well in the tropics, or that the situation will improve with economic development, nor use this as an excuse for inaction on the vexing conservation challenges of this century," he says.

"We need to start valuing forests for all the services they provide, and richer nations should be investing in the maintenance of tropical habitats."

One of the biggest issues is corruption. "The greatest long-term improvements can be made in governance of tropical diversity resources and good governance will only come from strong multi-lateral policy. We need international pressure to ensure appropriate monitoring and accounting systems are in place," says Associate Professor Bradshaw.

Source: University of Adelaide

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