

Cautious conservation: How to ensure that slowing global warming will protect biodiversity

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While it is clear that massive destruction of tropical rainforests poses a serious threat to the incredibly rich biodiversity found on Earth, other hazards are not so explicit. An international group of prominent scientists argue in the November 17th issue of the journal *Current Biology*, a Cell Press publication, that the most promising new strategy to protect our planet may not live up to its full potential. The group calls for global implementation of careful and sensible protective policies.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) consists of 192 countries that seek to develop intergovernmental policies addressing challenges posed by climate change. The UNFCCC will meet in Copenhagen in December of 2009 to complete an agreement to slow global warming by reducing [carbon emissions](#) caused by deforestation. Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) proposes to compensate tropical [forest](#) countries if they reduce their rate of deforestation, thereby reducing [greenhouse gas](#) emissions, and includes strategies for conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

"REDD should have multiple benefits. But, unfortunately, although the final rules might safeguard carbon stocks, they may fall short of their potential to protect [biodiversity](#)," explains the author who organized the collaboration, Dr. Stuart L. Pimm from the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University. Dr. Pimm and colleagues explain in

detail how REDD policies might have a less-than-advantageous impact on biodiversity and suggest how careful policies might reduce carbon emissions while benefiting biodiversity.

The researchers point out that if REDD emphasizes reducing deforestation rates, governments are likely to focus on areas that are cheapest to protect, and that areas with high biodiversity might not be cost-competitive. Furthermore, forests with the greatest density of carbon might not be the most essential locations for biodiversity conservation. There is also concern that [deforestation](#) processes will not be effectively abated by REDD but will simply be displaced to other areas. "Implementing REDD might accelerate the conversion and degradation of high-biodiversity areas where REDD or other conservation funding is not available," offers Dr. Pimm.

The authors make several suggestions for maximizing the positive biodiversity impacts of REDD policies. They propose that rules to assess, conserve, and perhaps even financially support biodiversity should be included in the text of the Copenhagen agreement.

"Biodiversity, itself, is essential to ecosystem adaptation. Ensuring that REDD policies not only reduce carbon emissions but conserve biodiversity will ensure that humanity and the biosphere can be as resilient as possible to climate disruptions," concludes Dr. Pimm.

Source: Cell Press ([news](#) : [web](#))

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