

Novel carbon-trading scheme could stop large-scale extinctions

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A new strategy for saving tropical forest species was published in the leading journal *Science* on the eve of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, Denmark, by a team of researchers, including William Laurance, senior staff scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and distinguished professor at James Cook University. The authors state that wealthy countries should adopt a carbon-payment system that explicitly incorporates biodiversity values.

"If we're smart we could combat global warming while saving some of the most endangered wildlife on Earth," said Laurance. "Billions of dollars will be spent on forest-carbon initiatives in the next decade, and this could translate into huge benefits for vanishing species if we focus some of the spending in places where tropical biodiversity is most imperiled."

Destruction of [tropical forests](#) causes about 20 percent of human-caused carbon emissions. In strategies to reduce carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, carbon-producing nations pay tropical countries to keep some of their land in forest. The authors, mostly researchers working with Hugh Possingham, director of the Ecology Centre at the University of Queensland, evaluated several carbon-based credit scenarios.

"Dollar for dollar, a carbon-focused approach contributes little to slowing biodiversity loss and will save far fewer species than a

biodiversity-focused strategy that targets the most imperiled forests," said lead author Oscar Venter, doctoral candidate at the University of Queensland.

A biodiversity-based system would change where carbon funds are spent, resulting in less money for areas like the [Amazon](#) where relatively few species are endangered because considerable forest remains. Spending to stem biodiversity loss would favor high-biodiversity nations in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, where most forests have already vanished.

The team's findings are expected to draw attention at the forthcoming climate negotiations, where international leaders hope to hammer out a final strategy for combating global warming.

Source: Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute

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