

Selective logging hardly damages tropical forests

June 1 2012, by Roelof Kleis

Between 85 and 100 percent of biodiversity maintained. 'Don't dismiss it as lost acreage.'

Sustainable [logging](#) in tropical forests is not such a bad option. If logging is selective, much of the value of the nature in forests is retained. This is the message of a review article published by a group of scientists in *Conservation Letters*. The authors include Pieter Zuidema and Marielos Peña Claros of the Forest Ecology and Forest Management Group in Wageningen University.

Logging in [tropical forests](#) raises images of huge bulldozers decimating forests, but that is misleading. 'Ninety percent of tropical hardwood comes from forests with selective logging', explains Zuidema. 'This means the trees are felled in such a way that the [forest](#) structure and [natural](#) regeneration are kept intact. What they do is fell somewhere between a couple of trees and twenty per hectare.'

Such forests are labelled 'degraded', but a study of more than one hundred papers on the effects of logging on local nature shows there is no reason for this, says Zuidema. Selectively logged forests retain about eighty percent of their carbon storage function and consequently their value in combating climate change. Furthermore, there is hardly any reduction in biodiversity: 85 to 100 percent of the initial biodiversity is maintained.

Corridors

There is a proviso to the limited impact on biodiversity. [Biodiversity](#) is about more than just counting species. Zuidema: 'That's right, you need to take a nuanced view. For instance, we don't know exactly what we are losing. It is also possible that we are losing far more species but that they are being compensated for by the arrival of new species.'

'But our initial impression is that these forests still have immense value', continues Zuidema. 'So we mustn't dismiss them as lost acreage.' That is the positive message the group is sending out, says Zuidema. 'This is a strong statement aimed at those nature conservationists who persist in seeing full protection as the only way of conserving forests.'

However, this does not mean that strict conservation of nature in reserves is unnecessary. 'Of course you should do that too. But spend some of the money and effort on forests with sustainable logging as well. For example, you could use those forests as corridors between the nature reserves.'

Provided by Wageningen University

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