

# New forest conservation manifesto calls for more power to the people

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More power needs to be put in the hands of local communities and decision makers if we are to avoid continued loss and degradation of the world's forests, scientists say.

Gathering at INTECOL, the world's largest international ecology meeting, in London this week, 50 leading forest ecologists from around the world said a radical rethink is required of the way we approach [forest conservation](#).

Crucial to the new approach, the group says, is taking advantage of new technologies and new ways of doing science. According to Dr Julia Jones from Bangor University: "People in a position to make decisions about forest conservation often lack the information they need to inform those decisions. Open access, [open science](#) and new communication technologies allow us to share huge amounts of data and we need to ensure it is in the hands of those who can use it; whether local communities, NGOs or regional authorities."

The potential for near real-time monitoring from space, combined with [citizen science](#) and participatory research, will empower local communities and provide information to decision makers at all levels.

The workshop was convened by Dr Markus Eichhorn of the University of Nottingham: "Forests and the values they provide – including carbon, biodiversity, [ecosystem services](#), supporting local livelihoods, silvicultural and agricultural production – are under threat from

unsustainable exploitation and [climate change](#). There is an urgent need to move beyond a focus on fortress conservation and incorporate improved management of the 90% of forested land which lies outside protected areas. The global research community must ensure that the relevant information is available to those responsible for making decisions on the ground."

Forests include the most biodiverse habitats on the planet. They store around 45% of [terrestrial carbon](#), regulate climate on local and regional scales, contribute around \$400bn to the [global economy](#) from wood alone, and provide both subsistence and economic products to 1.6 billion people.

According to Dr Constance McDermott of the University of Oxford: "The leading driver of deforestation globally is large-scale agriculture. Forest conservation strategies have increasingly focussed on trade-based measures to address these drivers, but have failed to generate adequate financial incentives to reverse forest loss while also creating market barriers for small-scale producers. Meanwhile, it is the local communities who pay the price for loss of forests."

A paper detailing a new agenda for global conservation, based on the outcomes of the workshop, will be published later in the year, and is intended to reinvigorate forest conservation efforts.

Provided by British Ecological Society

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