

Protected and intact forests lost at an alarming rate around the world

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Tropical forests have been cut in Cambodia. Credit: Timo Räsänen / Aalto University

Protected and intact forests have been lost at a rapid rate during the first 12 years of this century. According to researchers at Aalto University, Finland, 3% of the protected forest, 2.5% of the intact forest, and 1.5% of the protected intact forest in the world were lost during 2000 – 2012. These rates of forest loss are high compared to the total global forest loss of 5% for the same time period.

In Australia and Oceania, as well as North America, the loss in protected forests exceeded 5%. Worryingly, in parts of Africa, Central Asia, and Europe, the relative forest loss was higher inside protected areas than outside. However, in several countries of South America and Southeast Asia, protection was found to substantially prevent forest loss.

On a global scale, agricultural land expansion is one of the most important processes causing forest loss.

According to the analysis, high rates of protected forest loss were also associated with high proportions of agricultural land. At the same time, the losses in protected and intact forests were associated with a high gross domestic product, challenging partly the previous findings.

"Forests maintain ecological diversity, regulate climate, store carbon, protect soil and water and provide resources and livelihoods for the world's population. It is alarming that official protection in many places does not actually protect the forests," says Timo Räsänen, Postdoc fellow at Aalto University.

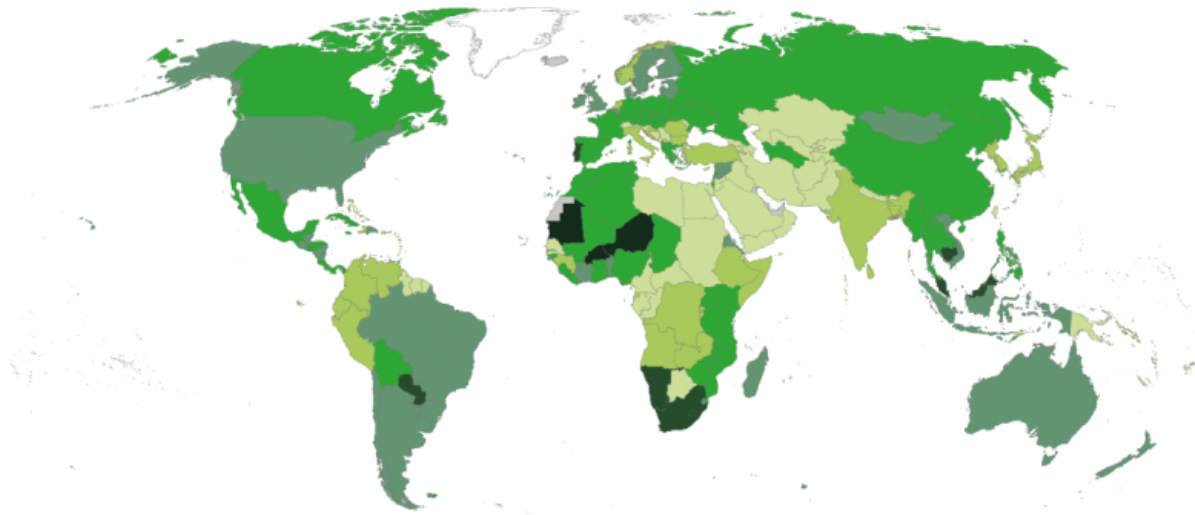
"However, there are also positive signs, especially in the tropics. For

example, the rate of forest loss in the Brazilian Amazon has finally declined in recent years," continues Matias Heino, researcher at Aalto University.

The analysis was conducted, using recently published global remote sensing based forest cover change data, together with global spatial datasets on protected areas and intact forest landscape. Global [forest loss](#) in protected areas and in intact forest landscapes have not been previously assessed with detailed and uniform datasets that allow consistent [forest](#) extent comparisons over space and time.



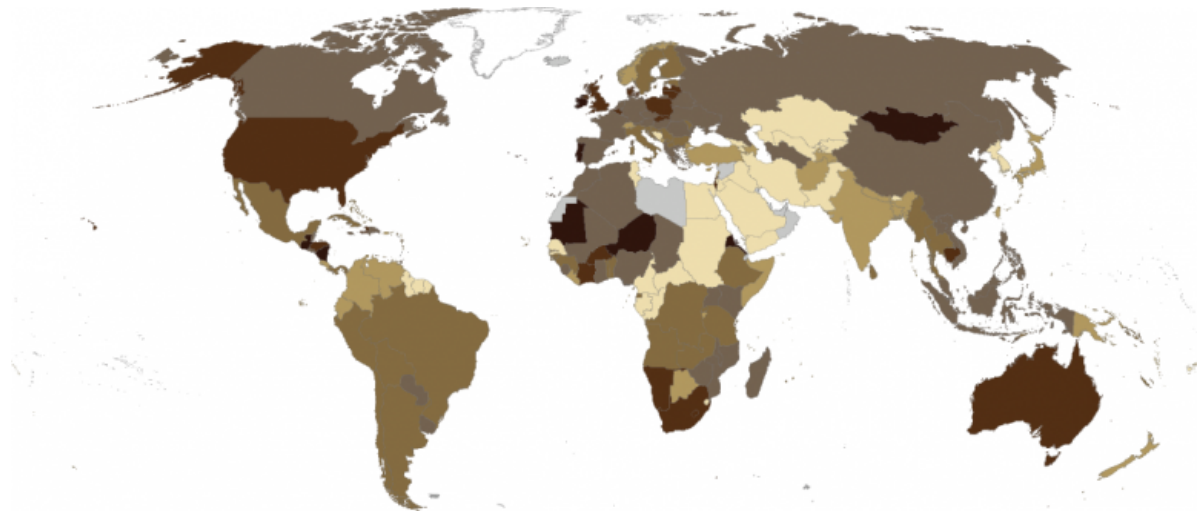
Tropical forests have been cut in Cambodia. Credit: Timo Räsänen / Aalto University



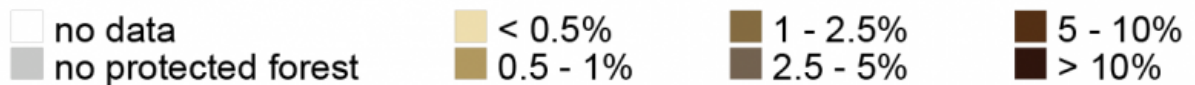
Forest loss of total forest (%), 2000-2012



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Protected forest loss of total protected forest (%), 2000-2012



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More information: Matias Heino et al. Forest Loss in Protected Areas and Intact Forest Landscapes: A Global Analysis, *PLOS ONE* (2015).

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