

# Study shows the cost of deforestation in Cambodia

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Evidence of illegal logging in Veun Sai-Siem Pang National Park. Credit: ANU

Researchers from The Australian National University (ANU) have warned of the economic consequences for Cambodia if nothing is done to halt illegal deforestation of one of the nation's most important forests - the Veun Sai-Siem Pang National Park.

For the first time, researchers have calculated the financial contribution

the forest makes to Cambodia's economy - an estimated US\$129.84 million per annum.

Lead researcher Abu Kibria said the 55,000 hectare forest on the Cambodian border of Laos and Vietnam, has been disappearing due to illegal logging driven by demand primarily from China and Vietnam.

"If this is allowed to continue there will be significant long-term [economic consequences](#) for Cambodia," said Mr Kibria, a PhD scholar in the ANU School of Archaeology and Anthropology.

The research, done in partnership with Conservation International, found the forest was providing three main streams of financial value - the prevention of [soil erosion](#) (US\$22 million a year), [water storage](#) and distribution (US\$32 million a year), and air purification (US\$56 million a year).

"The forest is like a sponge. After rainfall, the tree canopy slows down the flow of water, which increases the water storage in the soil," he said.

"If there is no forest, the drop in the land's water holding capacity will lead to soil erosion and damage the natural irrigation system. This will then have an impact on agriculture and industry."

**Annual value of ecosystem services provided by Veun Sai-Siem Pang National Park**

Provision of goods (e.g. food items)	US\$1.76 million
Carbon storage	US\$7.87 million
Water storage	US\$32.31 million
Soil erosion prevention	US\$22.21 million
Soil fertility improvement	US\$9.47 million
Air purification	US\$56.21 million
Recreation	US\$0.02 million

Researcher Dr Alison Behie said in addition to the financial value of Veun Sai-Siem Pang National Park, it was also incredibly important for its biodiversity.

"The park is home to around 250 species of mammals, reptiles and birds, many of which are endangered," she said.

"It is home to what is thought to be the world's largest group of the endangered northern buff-cheeked gibbons, likely four times larger than the next biggest group."

Dr Behie said that while the [forest](#) was upgraded from a Conservation Area to a National Park last year, the area could still be at risk as there is often the issue of a lack of funding to enforce the protection of these important areas.

"Despite best efforts, sometimes there just isn't enough funding for rangers, patrols and other protective measures," she said.

The study has been published in the *Journal of Ecosystem Services*.

Provided by Australian National University

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