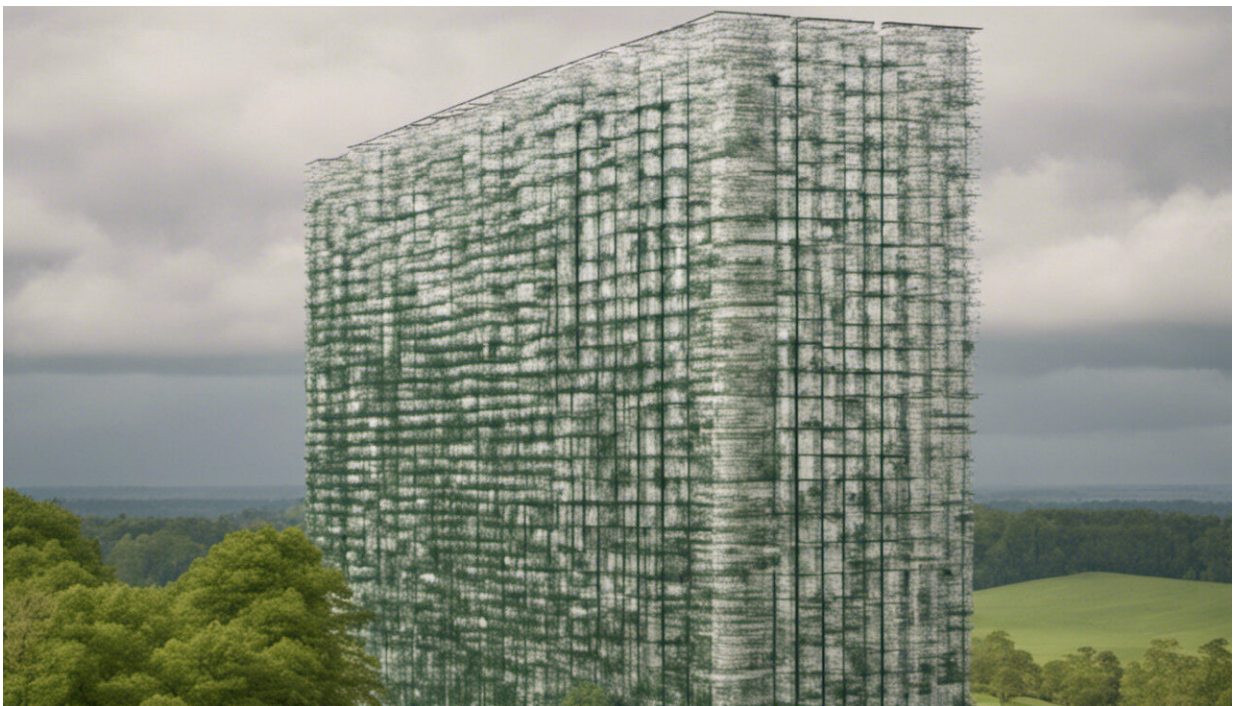


# Expose 'greenwashing' but do not ignore nature-based solutions to climate change, insists expert

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Nature-based solutions must not be forgotten in the drive to stabilize the climate. But care must be taken to ensure they are not hijacked or misused to "greenwash" emissions, insists Oxford biodiversity expert, Professor Nathalie Seddon in an article for the journal *Science*.

Professor Seddon's intervention comes after the words "nature-based solutions" were left out of the COP26 commitment last November. Nature-based solutions are actions that involve people working with nature, as part of nature, to address societal challenges, providing benefits for both human well-being and biodiversity.

The last-minute removal of the phrase followed concerns among some groups in Glasgow that nothing must distract from action to keep [fossil fuels](#) in the ground and reduce emissions—and that nature-based solutions risked this.

Professor Seddon insists, however, "There is robust evidence to show carefully designed and implemented, nature-based solutions really can help us address both the drivers and impacts of [climate change](#), while protecting biodiversity and supporting the economy.

"For example, protecting and restoring native ecosystems along coasts or in river catchments can promote healthy soil and vegetation that reduce the risks of floods, droughts, and landslides, while increasing CO<sub>2</sub> storage and generating jobs."

Meanwhile, careful adaptive management can reduce the impacts of [climate](#) change on the ecosystems themselves. Professor Seddon writes, the concerns have grown over nature-based solutions, despite evidence for the multiple benefits they bring when well-designed. She says, there are three main reasons for this:

- First, nature-based solutions are being used in "greenwashing." In particular, companies responsible for much of the ongoing damage to climate and nature organizations are claiming to supporting environmental action, because they invest in a so-called nature-based solutions scheme, while at the same time continuing to emit greenhouse gases.

- Second, actions labeled as nature-based solutions are sometimes implemented through top-down actions that do not respect local rights; fail to account for local voices, values, and knowledge in [decision-making](#); and perpetuate power asymmetries.
- Finally, there is evidence that misuse of nature-based solutions can harm biodiversity...A key concern is that current policy and funding emphasize [tree planting](#), including on areas not previously forested, rather than ecosystem protection and restoration, even though protecting existing ecosystems is critical to meet the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement to keep warming within 1.5 degrees.

She adds, "COP26 revealed that, whereas many organizations and governments are embracing the approach as an essential tool for tackling climate change, others... have dismissed it [nature-based solutions] as a dangerous distraction from systemic change."

In a podcast for Science, Professor Seddon emphasizes that nature-based solutions alone cannot stop climate change. And, in her article, Professor Seddon recognizes "drastic cuts in the use of fossil fuels" are needed to prevent dangerous warming. She highlights, "Nature-based solutions can make an important contribution to reaching net-zero carbon emissions this century, but only if combined with other climate solutions, including dramatic cuts in GHG emissions across all sectors of the economy."

But she insists, "This is not an argument against scaling-up nature-based solutions. Instead, it underscores the need to consider the many other well-evidenced benefits of nature-based solutions, especially their critical roles supporting human adaptation to climate change and protecting biodiversity."

Professor Seddon maintains nature-based solutions have a significant role to play in climate action and sets out the evidence for their

effectiveness, and potential contribution as part of the overall climate action strategy—alongside fossil fuel phase out. The nature-based solutions guidelines address these concerns and are being supported by multiple charities, environmental groups and research institutions.

The article also stresses, they have the advantage of being effective, ready, scalable, and affordable, relative to technological solutions, especially over the long-term.

She concludes, "Achieving net zero carbon emissions and transitioning to a nature-positive economy will also require systemic change in the way we behave as societies and run our economies, shifting to a dominant worldview that is based on valuing quality of life and human well-being rather than material wealth, and connection with nature rather than its conquest.

"Signals, such as the rise of climate and nature grassroots activism, indicate that this shift is taking place. If carefully implemented to ensure that multiple values of the natural world are respected, nature-based solutions offer an opportunity to accelerate this transition while also slowing warming, building resilience, and protecting biodiversity."

Professor Seddon says, "Nature-based solutions need to be included in the decision text of COP27 taking place in Egypt later this year—not only to give the parties oversight of implementation but, critically, to ensure pitfalls are avoided and the broad benefits harnessed."

**More information:** Nathalie Seddon, Harnessing the potential of nature-based solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change, *Science* (2022). [DOI: 10.1126/science.abn9668](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abn9668)

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