Forest Declaration Assessment

SUMMARY FOR POLICYMAKERS

Forest Declaration Assessment 2025

October 2025

ABOUT THE FOREST DECLARATION ASSESSMENT

The Forest Declaration Assessment is an independent, collaborative initiative led by a coalition of civil society organizations and researchers, known as the Forest Declaration Assessment Partners. Since 2015, the Assessment has published annual updates on progress toward global forest goals. All findings undergo a rigorous peer review process conducted by experts across the globe.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Global forests remain in crisis" is not the headline we hoped to write in 2025. As the halfway point in the decade of ambitious forest pledges, this year was meant to be a turning point. Despite the indispensable role of forests, the verdict is clear: we are off track. Deforestation rates have scarcely budged since the start of the decade; sustainable supply-chain commitments remain the exception rather than the rule; forest finance is still a fraction of finance putting forests at risk; and governance barriers—from limited access to justice and decision-making for many groups, to corruption, to insufficient recognition of community land tenure rights—persist.

This moment in 2025 represents a dangerous confluence: halfway through a critical decade, yet in many countries, climate and environmental ambition appear to be retreating. Exploitative production models, overconsumption, weak governance, and persistent power imbalances fuel ongoing deforestation and degradation.

This crisis cannot fade into the background noise. Forests are non-negotiable infrastructure for a stable planet: they provide livelihoods for more than one billion people, shelter 80 percent of terrestrial plant and animal species, and help stabilize the global climate by helping to limit global warming to 1.5°C. Failure to meet forest goals will not happen in a vacuum. Inaction on forest goals will also derail the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

World leaders have recognized and underscored the gravity of the crisis. In the first UNFCCC Global Stocktake (2023), Parties agreed that halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030 is indispensable for meeting the Paris Agreement's temperature goal (Decision 1/CMA.5, paras 33–34). These commitments must now be translated into national climate plans (NDCs) and acted upon without delay. Across the Assessment's four thematic chapters, the gap between current realities and the pathway to progress is clear. Yet there are compelling signs that change is possible, with promising initiatives across all themes demonstrating that reversing negative trends is achievable.

But isolated successes will not be enough. Lasting progress requires systemic shifts: rules that create a level playing field rather than relying on voluntary pledges, companies and investors willing to move beyond cost-neutral fixes, policies and finance aligned across sectors instead of working in silos, and decision-making processes that are inclusive and participatory. This year's Forest Declaration Assessment takes stock of where such shifts are beginning to emerge and where ambition must rise much further.

Next year, we hope to write a very different headline: "Global forests on the path to recovery." This will require more than just incremental improvements—it demands bold, coordinated, and sustained action from all sectors of society.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1. Progress toward overarching forest goals

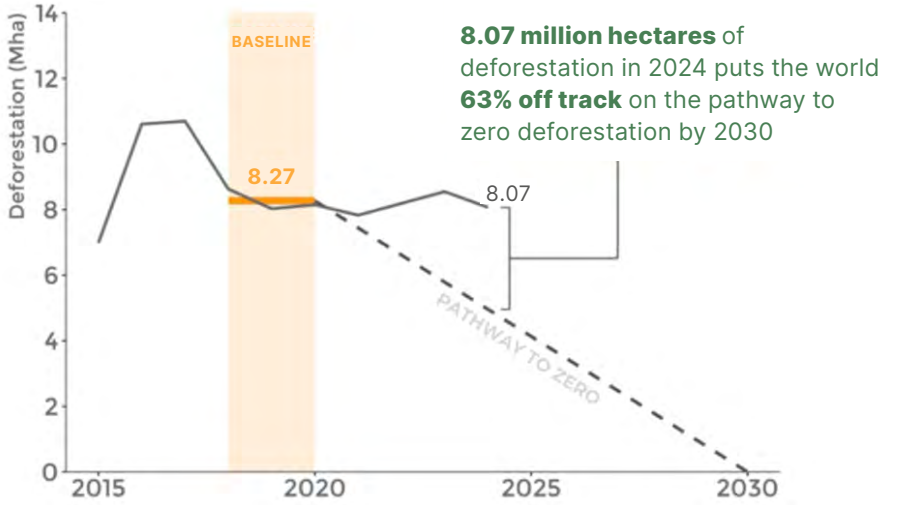
In 2024, forests remained under massive pressure. Each year that we fail to make progress, the gap widens between reality and the 2030 goals.

In 2024, forests continued to experience large-scale destruction, with nearly 8.1 million hectares permanently lost globally. Primary tropical forests continue to be cleared at alarming rates, with 6.73 million hectares lost last year alone, releasing 3.1 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases. Losses in forested Key Biodiversity Areas reached 2.2 million hectares, up 47 percent from the previous year, threatening irreplaceable habitats.

Deforestation remains overwhelmingly driven by clearance for permanent agriculture, accounting for an average of about 86 percent of global deforestation over the past decade[1] with other drivers such as mining exerting growing pressure.[2] Because deforestation commodities are both consumed domestically and exported internationally, deforestation represents a systemic problem; national land-use policies and practices are deeply intertwined with global demand. This highlights the urgent need for structural change in how production and trade are regulated, monitored, and ultimately governed.

Forest degradation, though less debated and documented than deforestation, is escalating just as rapidly. In 2024, 8.8 million hectares of tropical moist forests were degraded—more than double the annual level compatible with halting degradation by 2030. The Amazon Basin was particularly hard-hit by fire-induced degradation, a vivid example of how anthropogenic climate change and poor forest management practices can turn natural disturbances into co-drivers of ecosystem collapse. Yet degradation remains a blind spot in national targets and monitoring systems. Addressing this requires a paradigm shift: integrating degradation metrics into monitoring frameworks to ensure that forest health—not only forest cover—is safeguarded, across all latitudes and forest types.

Figure 1. Global deforestation from 2015-24, in million hectares (Mha)



Source: Own analysis using tree cover loss data (Hansen et al. 2013, updated through 2024) and drivers of tree cover loss (Sims et al. 2025, updated through 2024)

Amid the 2024 losses of forest cover and forest integrity, restoration efforts reveal both untapped potential and emerging success. From 2015-21, naturally regenerating tropical moist forests expanded by more than 11 million hectares,[3] with regrowth rates increasing sevenfold in Latin America and over fourfold in Asia. Though often excluded from official restoration targets, this regrowth already contributes significantly to carbon sequestration and ecosystem recovery—if protected from renewed clearance.

Active restoration initiatives are currently underway on an estimated 10.6 million hectares of deforested and degraded land. This represents about 5.4 percent of global reforestation potential[4] and only 0.3 percent of the global biophysical forest restoration potential[5]—falling far short of the 30 percent target set under Target 2 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, though this is likely a significant underestimate of the true scale of restoration efforts. Roughly two-thirds of this area (about 7 million hectares) is in tropical regions, 3.3 million hectares are in

temperate zones, and 250 thousand hectares are in boreal forests. These figures capture a wide spectrum of interventions—from reforestation and natural regeneration to agroforestry and restoration of ecosystem services in productive landscapes. While encouraging, the overall scale remains modest compared to global needs, and hectares alone provide only a partial measure of the ecological and social benefits these efforts can deliver.

2.2. Progress on sustainable production and development

Sustainable production pathways exist and have shown results, but they remain the exception rather than the rule, with commodity-driven deforestation continuing largely unchecked.

Pursuing sustainable development pathways and making commodity production more sustainable are essential for achieving global forest goals. Commodity production—including crops, timber, livestock, and mined resources such as coal, metals, and minerals—remains the predominant driver of deforestation and ecosystem conversion worldwide. Rising global production of primary crops continues to drive escalating losses of forests and biodiversity.

Forests are consistently recognized across multiple international commitments as essential to sustainable development and climate goals. Yet this recognition has not translated into sufficient real-world action—particularly in the face of high rates of forest loss, ongoing degradation, and the limited ambition reflected in many national climate plans. In 2025, geopolitical and economic turbulence will add to long-standing pressures on forests. Conflict, mounting debt burdens, and trade disputes threaten conservation efforts, while early warning signs—such as delayed environmental regulations and reductions in foreign assistance—could put at risk recent momentum toward forest goals.

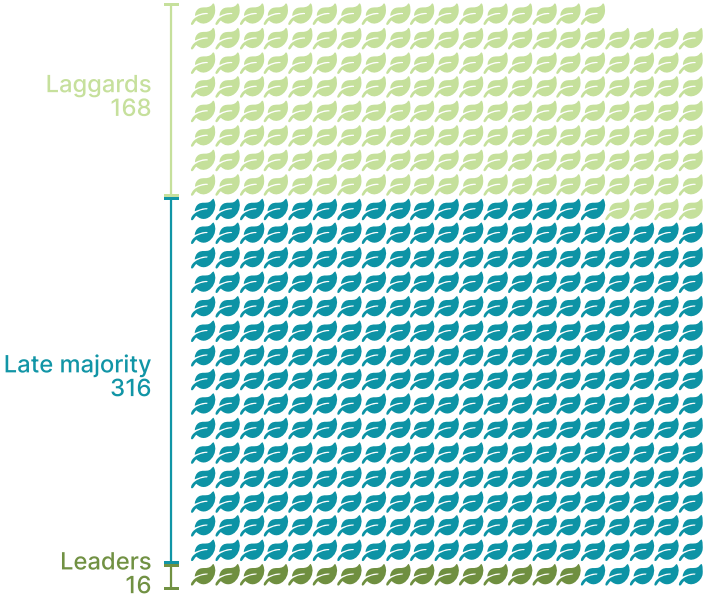
Recent history shows that meaningful progress is possible. Governments already have a diverse set of proven policy tools at their disposal. Where policies are well designed, effectively executed, and adapted to local contexts, they have delivered measurable benefits for both forests and communities, demonstrating that deliberate, sustained action can translate into progress on sustainable production and development. Countries such as Brazil, Colombia, and Indonesia have demonstrated that strong domestic reforms can lead to real progress in slowing deforestation, though sustaining these improvements remains challenging.

When it comes to the private sector, voluntary corporate action—though an important step in progress towards forest goals—has not curbed forest loss at scale. Only 3 percent of companies assessed by Forest 500 meet expectations for strong deforestation commitments, while 63 percent demonstrate shortcomings in either ambition or implementation. In 2024, these 500 major companies fulfilled, on average, just 16.2 percent of the criteria for implementing and reporting on zero deforestation commitments, with 34 percent making no public commitments at all. Mining sector companies disclosing through CDP remain overall weak in adopting commitments and policies to address forest and biodiversity risks from their operations. While there are bright spots—such as growing ambition in palm oil and timber sector commitments, and increased adoption of robust certification schemes in mining—forest-risk sectors remain composed far more of laggards than leaders. Agriculture continues to be the largest driver of deforestation and conversion, while mining represents a rapidly growing threat to forests. The current level of company-level ambition and implementation is not enough.

In recent years, several successful models of international and regional multistakeholder partnerships—which are crucial to ensure that governments and companies are aligned in their approaches to driving increased traceability and transparency—have demonstrated the power of collaboration to advance sustainable production and development. Recent case studies from subnational jurisdictions in Mexico[6] and Indonesia[7] demonstrate that well-designed initiatives can achieve meaningful results in managing commodity supply chain impacts on forests. In addition, successful international and regional multistakeholder partnerships highlight the value of coordinated action between governments, companies, and other stakeholders to enhance traceability, transparency, and sustainable development outcomes. Corporate engagement in landscape and jurisdictional approaches is increasing, particularly in the palm oil, cocoa, and pulp & paper sectors, though it

remains low for beef and soy.[8] Still, it is worth noting that only about one third of disclosed landscape and jurisdictional approaches were assessed as operating "credibly" through transparent, truly collective action to achieve and monitor progress toward shared landscape sustainability goals.

Figure 2. Leaders, late majority, and laggards among Forest 500 companies



Source: Thomson, E., 2025, Companies profit, forests fall: everyone pays the price, Global Canopy, Oxford, UK

2.3. Progress on finance for forests

Public and private finance flows remain drastically misaligned with forest goals, while supervisory bodies and financial institutions are still in early stages of integrating nature risk into financial management decisions.

International public finance for forests rose to an estimated USD 5.7 billion in 2022-24, up from USD 1.7 billion in 2018-20.[a] Nonetheless, this total represents only 1.4 percent of the USD 409 billion in public finance directed annually towards environmentally harmful agricultural subsidies. Finance for tenure rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendent peoples, and local communities averaged USD 728 million per year from 2021–24, a 41 percent increase from 2018–20,[9] but remains far below the USD 10 billion target called for by civil society organizations to be mobilized by 2030.[10] And while many governments have acknowledged the need to reform and repurpose environmentally harmful incentives, including subsidies, few have taken meaningful steps toward implementation. Systematic data on the uptake of reforms is scarce, and concrete examples remain limited.

Meanwhile, private finance continues to flow into forest-risk sectors, often with limited safeguards. Despite agriculture, forestry, and other land uses (AFOLU) offering 20–30 percent of global climate mitigation potential, the sector captured just USD 5.6 billion in private finance flows in 2023 (roughly 0.3 percent of total private finance for climate mitigation that year).[11] While this is a sharp and welcome increase from USD 0.4 billion in 2018, the sector still struggles to attract private capital at scale.[12] Voluntary carbon markets mobilized USD 342 million in 2024,[13] but due to limited incentives for private buyers to use carbon credits and integrity

a The estimate of average annual international public finance for forests post-Glasgow Leaders Declaration (GLD) (2022-24) is calculated using three different datapoints: i) climate-related Official Development Assistance for the forestry sector (2022-23 data sourced from the OECD. Data for 2024 is not yet available and is predicted using the average yearly relative change over the last five years.); ii) international REDD+ disbursements (2022-24 data sourced from the Climate Funds Update Data Dashboard); iii) disbursements under different forest finance pledges by public and philanthropic donors (Climate Focus analysis of 2022-24 data from different sources). The estimate of average annual international public finance for forests pre-GLD (2018-20) is calculated using 2018-20 data on climate-related overseas development assistance for the forestry sector (OECD data) and international REDD+ disbursements (data from Climate Funds Update). The period 2018-20 is used as reference period to align with the reference period used for tracking progress on overarching forest goals (see Chapter 1 of the full report); and to exclude the year 2021, in which values deviating from historical trends were recorded, presumably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Disbursements under different forest finance pledges include a small, yet insignificant share of philanthropic finance.

concerns, markets have not raised finance at the speed and scale hoped for. On the other hand, corporate climate commitments signal potential for substantial future finance for forests, with companies worth over USD 38 trillion—including more than 1,200 businesses committed to forest, land, and agriculture targets via SBTi—positioned to drive investments in forest-risk commodity supply chains.[14]

Financial institutions have not made sufficient progress in assessing, managing, and mitigating forest-related financial risks, nor have supervisory bodies put relevant, effective, and/or timely regulations in place. Among financial institutions, only 40 percent of those most exposed to commodity-driven deforestation risk in their investments have a policy to address deforestation.[15] In 2024, 52 percent of the jurisdictions assessed by WWF's Sustainable Financial Regulations and Central Bank Activities (SUSREG) Tracker had partially integrated deforestation and ecosystem conversion into financial supervisory frameworks.[16] While this signals growing recognition of these risks by regulators, most frameworks still lack enforceable expectations or detailed guidance. The European Union's sustainable finance framework—including the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive—remains the most comprehensive effort to date to embed nature and deforestation considerations into finance. Ongoing efforts to simplify the Directive risk diluting hard-won advances in corporate transparency and accountability for nature impacts. However, the rapid global uptake of the investor-focused International Sustainability Standards Board standards demonstrates the political feasibility of disclosure with a narrower focus on financial materiality.

However, examples of progress exist, and promising innovations and transformative solutions are emerging to increase forest finance and shift other finance from harmful to helpful activities. Changes in regulatory frameworks and supervisory guidance in several countries are beginning to reshape financial markets. Strengthening the integrity and safety of forest-related investments (such as through robust REDD+ projects and expanding jurisdictional REDD+ programs) builds investor confidence. Innovative financing models like the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) or Indigenous and community-led funds are making it easier to channel long-term, large-scale investments into tropical forests and directly towards IPs and LCs.

Ultimately, the global financial system continues to incentivize unsustainable land use, and while efforts like the Bridgetown Initiative and the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation offer opportunities to redirect finance, consistent, large-scale alignment of public, private, and philanthropic flows with forest protection goals is still far from reality.

2.4. Progress on forest rights and governance

Power imbalances, insecure land rights, and weak enforcement undermine forest governance globally, despite clear evidence that inclusive, participatory approaches work.

Forest decision-making remains heavily skewed toward powerful interests, limiting the participation and influence of IPs, LCs, women, and civil society organizations (CSOs). While international policy increasingly recognizes the vital role of IPs and LCs in forest governance, this acknowledgment is often not reflected in national strategies or implementation. Women's participation continues to be limited even in jurisdictions that have strengthened community forest rights, though targeted initiatives—such as those supported by the Governors' Climate & Forests Task Force[17]—demonstrate that women's engagement can enhance project outcomes. Simultaneously, civil society is facing growing restrictions: by 2024, at least 41 countries were repressing CSOs more frequently than in 2014, and 18 had tightened entry and exit controls, limiting their ability to influence policy.[18] In contrast, private corporations and industry groups continue to wield strong influence over forest policies, shaping regulations in ways that often prioritize commercial interests over sustainable management. The European Union's deforestation and sustainability regulations have become focal points of lobbying efforts, with both attempts to weaken and strengthen the rules affecting their implementation.[19,20,21]

There are several key legal and policy frameworks for equitable and sustainable forest landscapes. While some countries have sought to strengthen conservation of forests and to enhance the sustainability of their forestry sectors, elsewhere the political and economic power of industry has dominated, resulting in policy changes that facilitate the conversion of forests to other land uses and drive forest degradation.

The area of land under protected status continues to increase globally, reaching 17.5 percent of global land area as of 2024.[22] Of this, 63 percent is government-managed, 12 percent under collaborative governance, and only 4 percent managed by IPs and LCs. Despite this growth, the degazettement and downgrading of protected areas remain ongoing concerns. Further, violations of IPs' and LCs' rights persist in the establishment and management of protected areas, and processes for resolving land and resource disputes are often opaque. Although IPs and LCs have seen increased territorial rights in some countries, it remains the exception rather than the norm, and recognition of women's forest tenure rights lags far behind. Import regulations, such as the European Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR), offer opportunities to drive progress, but producer countries have argued that the EUDR imposes unfair regulatory burdens, especially considering European countries' long history of benefiting from their own deforestation activities.

Failure to uphold existing laws—due to lack of capacity, political will, or entrenched impunity for large actors—is a key barrier to effective forest governance. Estimates suggest that between 61 and 94 percent of tropical deforestation for agriculture is illegal.[23] Environmental crime—including illegal deforestation, and timber and wildlife trafficking—generates as much as USD 281 billion annually.[24] These activities are tied to organized crime and corruption. New understandings of forest crimes as threats to national security may be leading to intensified efforts by security agencies to address forest crimes.[25] Law enforcement is sometimes used to target communities or small actors while ignoring larger players that drive deforestation, and there have been rollbacks in the enforcement of some forest laws. Several high-profile enforcement efforts in 2024, including investigations into financial fraud within high-net-worth supply chains, may signal a shift toward enforcement strategies that leverage expanding data access and AI capabilities.[26]

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As of 2024, the state of global forests paints a sobering picture: despite years of commitments, we remain off track to meet critical forest goals by 2030. Despite this challenging reality, there are compelling signs that change is possible. Across all themes, promising examples and initiatives—from emerging forest finance mechanisms to advances in traceability and instances of improved participation in forest decision-making—demonstrate the potential to accelerate progress.

The findings of this report reinforce that systemic shifts will need to occur across governance, finance, corporate action, and civil society engagement:

- **Governments must act to value forests.** A continuation of piecemeal efforts by a few corporate leaders alone will not suffice; voluntary efforts must be complemented—and in many cases superseded—by mandatory regulations that ensure accountability, traceability, and compliance. A true shift also requires pricing in the real costs of deforestation and forest degradation. The era of treating forests as free goods must end. Companies can no longer externalize forest destruction while privatizing profits—governments must ensure that these hidden costs are accounted for through tougher regulations and law enforcement, and through fiscal policies and trade measures.
- **Action must become integrated, not siloed.** The climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and social inequality are not separate challenges requiring separate solutions. They are interconnected crises demanding integrated responses that operate at the scale of entire landscapes and value chains. Narrow, sector-specific action will not achieve the necessary scale of change to protect and restore the world's forests. Integrated approaches are already demonstrating how aligned incentives can transform production models, but these approaches remain the exception rather than the rule.
- **Decision-making must be inclusive and participatory.** Rapid progress towards 2030 forest goals will not come from exclusive, top-down processes. It requires the leadership and full participation

of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and civil society. Equitable and lasting forest stewardship requires secure land tenure rights, transparency and accountability, and law enforcement grounded in justice and human rights.

If these shifts are realized, by the end of the decade, we could see a fundamentally different forest landscape: forest loss curtailed, biodiversity stabilized and restored, finance flowing to forest-positive initiatives at scale, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities securely recognized and protected. This vision aligns with the 2030 Global Forest Vision: a shared, civil society-led framework to unite governments, companies, financiers, and communities around a coherent action agenda for halting and reversing deforestation by 2030. The Vision is not another pledge but a practical roadmap that translates existing commitments into the near-term Priority Actions that different actors must take to stay on track. For governments and financial actors, these Priority Actions have already been published; private sector guidance will follow. Together, they offer detailed and actionable pathways for reviving stalled efforts and delivering on the long-broken promise of halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation globally.

COP30 presents a pivotal moment to establish an actionable framework for halting and reversing deforestation, integrating food production, commodity supply chains, and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities' rights. Given Brazil's leadership on forests and nature, COP30 is expected to strengthen links between climate, forests, and biodiversity by expanding commitments to the entire land sector, including new and innovative sources of finance for standing forests (such as the Tropical Forest Forever Facility), sustainable and deforestation- and conversion-free supply chains, healthy and resilient food systems, partnerships between producer and consumer countries, and reinforcing the decision to end deforestation-related emissions by 2030. Crucially, governments must also ensure that these commitments are reflected in their next round of NDCs, so that Global Stocktake outcomes become actionable drivers of national and international progress.

The path forward will not be easy. Achieving this vision will mean breaking down the barriers of short-termism, overcoming entrenched power imbalances, and committing to shared responsibility across the Global North and South. It will require a paradigm shift: recognizing forests not as expendable resources but as critical, living systems vital to our survival and wellbeing. Only through collective ambition, transparent governance, and genuine inclusion can we turn the tide and ensure that forests thrive for generations to come. The window for meaningful change is closing fast. But with urgent, systemic shifts and unwavering commitment, the story of 2026 can—and must—be one of hope, resilience, and recovery.

ENDNOTES

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Accountability Framework initiative

BRAZILIAN COALITION ON CLIMATE, FORESTS AND AGRICULTURE

BRAZILIAN RESTORATION AND REFORESTATION OBSERVATORY

CDP DISCLOSURE INSIGHT ACTION

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CTrees

FOREST TRENDS

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ZSL Zoological Society of London