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CFA Newsletter

is the newsletter of the Commonwealth Forestry Association

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The views expressed are not necessarily those of the CFA.

Meeting of professional forestry associations at World Forestry Congress



Opening ceremony at the WFC 2009

On behalf of the Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) I had opportunity to host a meeting of professional forestry associations at the World Forestry Congress 2009 in Buenos Aires. The meeting was well supported with UK Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF), Society of American Foresters (SAF) and New Zealand Institute of Forestry (NZIF) showing strong support. The meeting was well represented by many Latin American countries including Costa Rica, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Cuba and Brazil. There was also representation from South Africa, Bangladesh, Canada, Germany and Hungary.

The Latin American representatives were of the strong opinion that they were not well-organised and lacked knowledge and support in how to run professional associations. There were some strong professional bodies particularly in Costa

Rica, which had 4500 members and laws to oversee the profession. Like all of us, the Latin Americans suffered from a lack of profile for forestry in their country and the demonising of forest harvesting. There is a distinct need for them to work together and get organised as forestry has a huge role to play in the economic, environmental and social development of these countries.

Representatives from developed countries all identified similar issues: declining membership of their organisations, fragmentation of the profession into many different government bodies and a lack of focus on forest governance in their countries. There is also a decline in enrolments in forestry specific degrees throughout most of the world. My experience is that China is one of the few places where there is strong growth in the forestry profession.

Emeritus Professor John Helms (UC Berkeley Forestry School) suggested that the forestry profession needs to consider embracing specialists from other professions who work predominantly in forestry and forest science. He suggests we be less precious about the definition of a forester, as our profession is becoming more specialised and the old image of a generalist forester has perhaps passed us by. In addition we lose potential members to alternative professional societies. "If we want to be the profession which speaks with authority on forests, then we have to be ready to cater for all views," he said. He suggests SAF has credibility because it is a broad representative body and not driven by a narrow agenda. It tries to effect balance and solutions.

The SAF, ICF and IFA all run similar accreditation schemes. Admission to ICF requires sitting an exam and we were informed that it is quite rigorous with a significant fail rate among graduate foresters. In Canada, foresters cannot practice professionally in some provinces such as British Columbia without professional accreditation. Again graduates are required to undergo examination to achieve this accreditation. In the USA the requirement for professional accreditation varies between States. In Australia, IFA runs a Registered Professional Forester (RPF) scheme, but it is entirely voluntary and there is no supportive government regulation. All present agreed that the registration was important to demonstrate to the public that foresters could be "regulated" and there were some internal disciplinary procedures in place to sanction those that fall out of line.

The representative from Bangladesh called for significant help for professional support in countries such as his. He pleaded for help, from those present, to establish a strong professional body in his country. I also understand that India has recently formed a new Indian Institute of Foresters which is independent of government control.

There was broad support to re-establish the International Union of Forestry Societies (IUFS). How we make this happen is another thing. SAF held governance of the IUFS until the mid 1990's when the USDA reneged, two years into a five year funding deal. SAF has undertaken to look into this once more.

It is clear that professional foresters look to their professional bodies for support and provision of services. Professional journals, field days and other professional contact is a strong motivation for membership. Most importantly, all were agreed that the existence of a strong professional body was important in maintaining the profile of forestry and sustainable forest management within their country's government. Professional forestry societies were also indirectly responsible for raising profile in all aspects of society and providing ongoing employment and other opportunities for forestry professionals. This is one aspect that all agreed was often overlooked.

I came away from the meeting, convinced that there is

a place for organisations such as IFA. These types of bodies can only be successful with a strong membership base willing to fund and support the activities to keep the organisation strong. It is clear that professionals benefit from the contact, the coordination of submissions to government and industry alike and the maintenance of a strong and independent voice. Professional foresters are now employed in a wide range of activities from production forestry, which has been the traditional employment base, to broader natural resource management, fire and water management and conservation. As professional bodies we must embrace these new "industries" and provide a voice for good forest management based on good science and governance regardless of land ownership and land use.

On the world stage an organisation such as the IUFS could play an important role. The next opportunity to progress this will come at the Commonwealth Forestry Conference in Edinburgh in June of this year. In the meantime IFA, SAF, NZIF, Germany and ICF have agreed to communicate closely and to keep up the contact with other associations throughout the world who were represented at the meeting. We will also look into utilising the resources of the FAO Forestry section to assist in this area. It is good to see the CFA performs such a strong role among Commonwealth countries, but it still requires much greater support if it is to survive into the future.

One means of coming closer together is for members to attend forestry association meetings and conferences in other places to share their experiences and ideas. SAF will be holding their 2011 convention in Hawaii and suggested that IFA, NZIF and CFA members would be most welcome to not only attend, but contribute to their convention.

The NZIF will be hosting the ANZIF Conference in 2011 with the theme of Pacific Forestry. IFA and NZIF have for some time, both been interested in assisting the establishment of support for forestry professionals working in small Pacific Island nations. This conference is an opportunity to further cement relationships with our Pacific neighbours. At the moment venue and date for the conference is being finalised – one consideration is not to clash with the Rugby World Cup.

I remind you that 2011 is the UN International Year of Forests and that it is a great opportunity for forestry professionals to make an impact on the world stage. International cooperation between our associations is a great means to achieve this. The next step is to start to make things happen.

I invite CFA members who have an interest in this area to make contact with me at ifa@forestry.org.au

Dr Peter Volker
FIFA RPF MAICD
CFA member and National President
Institute of Foresters of Australia

Association News

Directory of Commonwealth NGOs related to forestry

If you have ever needed a list of Commonwealth NGOs with an interest in forestry then you will know the frustration of quickly finding out that you were out of luck. Nothing even remotely useful has existed in terms of coverage or accuracy...until now.

We have been working over the past year to put together a comprehensive directory of Commonwealth NGOs with an interest in forestry using information gathered from various

sources, mainly via the internet, and are pleased to announce that it was launched on our website earlier this month. The directory contains a list of national, regional and international organisations and provides a profile on each. It and can be accessed using the link on our home page at www.cfa-international.org and we would be particularly pleased to hear from members with any updated information.

Stories from the Commonwealth's forests

Hardly a day goes past when we aren't reminded of the news that forests are important to the international community. But forests, and trees, are also important to each and every one of us in our daily lives. Whether it is through work or our personal activities, forests have played an important part of our development, and that of our communities.

The CFA has launched a project to catalogue stories from

individuals about what trees and forests mean to them. We hope that through documenting the important place that trees have in the lives of ordinary people we will be able to raise awareness of the importance of valuing and managing such a crucial resource.

Please send us your personal stories of what trees and forests mean to you and we will include them in our project.

Your chance to suggest a project

Each year the CFA carries out a range of activities ranging from workshops to sponsoring professional development. We always appreciate receiving ideas from our members about what matters most to them. So, here is your chance; if you have a project

you would like us to consider undertaking then please let us know. Big or small, we would like to hear from you!

Forestry, Biomass and Sustainability workshop

The CFA is pleased to be supporting **Forestry, Biomass & Sustainability: Investment opportunities and carbon reductions 2010**, taking place in London on 13 & 14 May.

This two-day conference, produced by Environmental Finance Publications, will provide a full analysis of the latest developments in policy, economics and financing of forestry



and biomass projects, and identify new investment opportunities and risks in these rapidly growing markets. Please see the advertisement in the Newsletter and the attached flyer for more information.

CFA members can claim a 15% registration discount by quoting Ref CFA/15.

Letter

Comments on the article *Brazil: Roads are ruining the rainforests*¹

When I read this article some questions came to my mind. In fact, these questions always come to my mind when I read an article about the negative impacts of roads on forest resources. In general, such articles point out that roads are the roots for deforestation and that they threaten biodiversity among other arguments. However, it is worth considering the following:

1. Europe as well as USA and Canada have roads all over the country, however, the area of their forest resources are increasing or, at least, they are stable according to FAO. Why are roads in those countries not a stimulus to promote deforestation? Is it related to the development status of these countries? Such characteristics that are common to underdeveloped countries can contribute, in some cases, to push people into forests (encroachment). In this regard it is also important to consider the expansion of the agricultural frontier either by poor peasants and/or by agribusiness.
2. About 20 million people live in the Amazon Region in cities as well as along the rivers and roads. Those people that live along the roads during the rain season can become isolated and, consequently they cannot

have access, for example, to health care except in an emergency. Those that criticize roads in the Amazon region base their arguments on the need to save the biodiversity yet it seems that people that live in this region are completely ignored and not considered adequately.

So, it is important to bear in mind that the basis of the process of deforestation and land degradation has different and complex causes and varies between countries, and even from one region within a country, to another. In other words, forests are affected by numerous and complex factors and not just the construction of roads. As a result, there is not a single answer or 'blue print' universal solution, so it is difficult to draw simple conclusions and make reliable projections. However, a good starting point would appear to be to promote policies in order to improve the living conditions of these people.

Sebastião Kengen

¹ Published in the CFA Newsletter, No. 46, September 2009, p. 16

Forest scenes

EU approach to forest protection?

Forests and forest management are increasingly facing challenges due to ecological and socio-economic developments, such as fire, pests, invasive species and an increasing demand for wood from the bioenergy sector. Albeit these challenges affect forests all over Europe, to date no common forest policy exists at the EU level. Instead, forest and forestry issues are addressed by several EU policies in the environmental, agricultural, energy fields and others. The "EU Forestry Strategy" (1998) and the "EU Forest Action Plan" (2006), which both follow a voluntary approach, aim to improve the coordination of these policies by proposing forest related actions to be carried out by the Commission and by Member States. These instruments do not, however, provide a coherent and binding policy framework.

Against this backdrop, the European Commission's Environment Directorate General assigned a study on "EU policy options for the protection of European forests against harmful impacts" to the Freiburg Institute of Forest and Environmental Policy (IFP) and the Ecologic Institute. The

study examines in detail which environmental challenges may necessitate a Community approach to protect European forests from harmful impacts and developed options for a common EU approach on forest protection.

The first part of the study provides an overview of the current state of European forests as well as relevant threats and challenges regarding European forestry and forest protection. It further discusses existing forest and forest-related policies across the EU. Based on both analyses, needs for action for the protection of European forests are identified. The second part aims to develop and evaluate policy concepts to respond to these needs. Based on the input of an expert workshop (Brussels, May 7-8, 2009), four policy options for European forest protection with different degrees of policy changes needed for implementation are developed:

- Continue and Improve Current Approach
- (Re-) establish European Forest Monitoring
- Forest Framework Directive
- Open Method of Coordination



Will the sun shine for European forests in the future?

The ex-ante evaluation of potential effectiveness and feasibility of the options was stimulated by expert interviews carried out during the project. The evaluation mainly showed that there is an evident trade-off between policy effectiveness and feasibility. Thus, if a more coordinated Community approach is desired, a well balanced approach has to be chosen and relevant stakeholders have to be included in the process right from the start.

There are potential trade-offs between different forest uses such as timber production and forest protection. Coordinated action therefore has to take the demands of both perspectives into account. Financial incentives have been frequently mentioned as tools for enhancing acceptance among resistant groups, for instance by providing compensatory payments for efforts to reach forest protection goals.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that the development of any new Community option for forest protection would touch on the principle of subsidiarity and the delicate question of the distribution of competences between the European institutions and the Member States. Thus, each approach must clearly demonstrate the benefits for the Member States and stress that any new standardisation will serve their interests.

Based on the evaluation of the four policy options three scenarios of political pathways to pursue are presented.

The first scenario, entitled “environmental policy framework” is based on the assumption that enough evidence and political support exist to pursue a coherent environmental framework for forest protection at Community level. Such a policy process would lead over a Green and a White Paper towards a Co-decision procedure for a Forest Framework

Directive in accordance with Community competences in environmental issues. In the second scenario, called “policy learning”, the Community might enter into a process that mostly orientates on elements of the “Improved Current Approach” option and the “Open Method of Coordination”, striving for an iterative mutual consultation process with Member States and relevant stakeholders from civil society. This scenario implies that political support is not sufficient to follow the procedure in scenario 1, although the possibility that the consultation process might be followed by similar steps undertaken in scenario 1 would not be excluded right from the start. In the third scenario, the “selected issues approach”, the Commission might choose specific forest protection issues that are rather uncontested in terms of their severity and causes on different temporal and geographical scales and enter into a similar process as outlined by scenario 2 and/or 1.

On 8 October 2009 the results of the project were presented in Brussels at the Standing Forestry Committee (SFC). The study is available at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/pdf/ifp_ecologic_report.pdf

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Rwanda

The Republic of Rwanda was admitted to the Commonwealth at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in November 2009. It is only the second country to join the Commonwealth that was not a British colonial territory – the first being Mozambique. Rwanda was formerly a German colony then, following the First World War, it was governed by Belgium under a League of Nations Mandate; later, with the establishment of the United Nations it became a UN Trust Territory administered by Belgium. It became an independent republic in 1962. Sadly, in recent years it is often remembered for the 1994 genocide of Tutsi and Hutu moderates.

Rwanda has for some time seen its future as being with the English-speaking countries of Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, on whom it relies for trade and for access to the sea. It has joined the East African Community, a customs union, the other members of which are Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Much of this small landlocked country consists of rolling hills, with mountains in the north-west. It has a population of 8.4 million people and one of the highest population densities of any African country, at 341 million/km². About 80% of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture. It has few natural resources and little industry, its primary exports being coffee, tea, flowers and the mineral coltan. Eco-tourism is said

to be growing, often to see the mountain gorillas in the Virunga Park. The government now aims to transform the country from subsistence agriculture to a knowledge-based economy.

FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment of 2005 reported that its forest cover was 480,000 ha, or nearly 20% of the land area. There is a further 61,000 ha of other wooded land. Forest cover evidently increased by 27,000 ha/year between 2000 and 2005 due to a well-supported planting programme and nearly 90% of the forest cover is planted forest, often of eucalyptus which is the mainstay for domestic energy. For this reason more than three quarters of the forest land has a primary function of production, and just over 10% for protection, despite the steep terrain. About three quarters of the forest area is publicly owned, the remainder being in private hands.

I knew Rwanda in the 1960s, when I was District Forest Officer in south-west Uganda. My memories are of the broken terrain, which gave the country its popular name of "Land of a Thousand Hills", with annual crops and coffee cultivation on terraces on the steep slopes and eucalyptus woodlots in the valley bottoms. Its accession to the Commonwealth will make little difference to the Commonwealth's forest cover but it will offer a possible link to French-speaking African countries.

Jim Ball
CFA Chair

Global Canopy Programme update

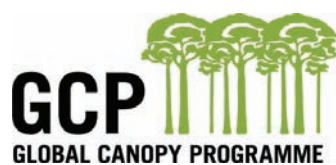
REDD Desk

The REDD Desk (www.theredddesk.org) is a new collaborative platform for REDD+ and REDD Readiness, initiated by the Global Canopy Programme and the Forum on Readiness for REDD, represented by the Woods Hole Research Center. Although in its infancy, many organisations and individuals are already supporting this collaborative effort by adding their knowledge and resources to the site – and we welcome involvement of Commonwealth Forestry Association members. Visitors to the site will be able to see who has contributed, share their own material and resources, hear the latest on the REDD negotiations, watch an 'Introduction to REDD Basics' video and download both *The Little REDD+ Book* and its new companion, *The Little Climate Finance Book*, a guide to the multitude of proposals put forward to address the scale of financing needed to tackle climate change.

REDD+ at Copenhagen

Whilst many see Copenhagen as a failure for not producing a legal agreement, the Copenhagen Accord mentions forests specifically, recognising the 'crucial role of reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation' and calls for 'the immediate establishment of a mechanism including REDD+'. It also calls for 'substantial finance to prevent deforestation (REDD+)'. Finally, it commits developed countries to provide 'new and additional resources amounting to \$30 billion for the period 2010-2012'. Not all of this would be for forests but 'Forestry' is specifically mentioned as one of the mitigation and

adaptation options. To find out more visit: www.theredddesk.org.



Forest Footprint Disclosure (FFD)

The FFD Annual Review 2009 (available at www.forestdisclosure.com) presents the results of a survey of major companies potentially driving deforestation through their use of 'Forest Risk Commodities'. The FFD's disclosure request is backed by \$3.5 trillion dollars of investor assets under management who want to know what the companies they invest in are doing on this issue. For the first time, the report details performance in relation to managing corporate forest footprints. You will already see many big names participating in what it is hoped will become a game-changing process over time.

InterAcademy Panel Statement on Tropical Forests and Climate Change

Signed by a majority of the world's national science academies, this powerful Statement was catalysed by the Royal Society, the InterAcademy Panel on International Issues (IAP) and the Global Canopy Programme following the Nobel Laureate's Meeting on Climate Change at St James' Palace, hosted by HRH The Prince of Wales. It makes six calls on world leaders for comprehensive and immediate action on forests saying 'there can be no solution to climate change without addressing deforestation'. The Statement (available at: <http://www.interacademies.net/CMS/About/3143.aspx>) calls for an emergency funding mechanism for avoided deforestation and sustainable forest management to assist forest-rich developing countries in their climate mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Deeper economic thoughts on forest-based carbon trade

The Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) met for the 15th session in December, 2009 at Copenhagen, Denmark. One of the significant decisions reached was the adoption of **methodological guidance for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries**¹. Increasing concerns are however generated on the side of the forest-land owners and their proponents particularly in developing countries, as industrial firms and intermediaries from developed countries launch into the pursuit of prospects for carbon trade partnerships in order to offset their carbon emissions.

Forests play an active role in determining the level of CO₂ (most significant greenhouse gas) in the atmosphere both due to their vast ability to serve as carbon sinks and also their ability to release vast amounts of carbon under unregulated and massive exploitation (DeFree *et al.* 2005; Sedjo 2006; Rudell *et al.*, 2006; Mitchell *et al.* 2007; Weaver, 2007). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report released in May 2007 stated that forest-related mitigation activities can considerably reduce emissions from sources and increase CO₂ removals by sinks at low cost. It further stated that about 65% of the total mitigation potential (up to US\$100/tCO₂-eq) is located in the tropics and about 50% of the total could be achieved by reducing emissions from deforestation.

Under international agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol, participating nations agree to reduce their carbon emissions below a certain level. Nations that struggle to meet their emissions target can buy carbon credits from other countries that either have no target (as it is currently the case for developing nations), or from countries that produce fewer emissions than allowed. Like any tradable commodity, the price of carbon credits is largely determined by supply and demand (Laurance, 2008). However, in spite of the promises held by this approach towards saving the global economy from unabated climate change threats, there have been several counteracting opinions and thoughts questioning both the economic soundness and social rationality of such initiatives. Moreover, adopting a market-based mechanism for carbon emissions control through carbon credit trade has been occasionally challenged as a parody of penance, a new form of colonialism, and a means for the sacred cows of economic growth and free market in the developed nations to defraud the developing nations (Carbon Trade Watch, 2006²; Lohmann, 2006).

The world has less than 4 billion hectares of forests (FAO, 2005) which stocks twice as much carbon in the trees and soils as the Earth's atmosphere (Mitchell *et al.* 2007). This stored carbon are being released as deforestation takes its toll on the terrestrial sink through conversion of forest lands to agribusiness, industrial and residential development, and

the non-sustainable management of forests across the globe. Mitchell *et al.* (2007) coined forests as giant utilities which offer the single largest opportunity for cost effective and immediate reductions of carbon emission. The problem that has not been adequately addressed over time is that the economic incentives to convert forests are greater than the incentives to conserve or wisely manage them (Mitchell *et al.* 2007).

Stern (2006) called for urgent annual funding of USD 10–15 billion/year to reduce deforestation by half. There is no enough philanthropy or donor appetite around to fix the problem, hence only markets can sustain funds at this scale (Mitchell *et al.* 2007). A strong opportunity cost incentive needs to be provided to public and private forest land owners across the globe in order to facilitate an increment and preservation of the global forest land cover, while at the same time providing a means for polluters to offset their emissions by making investments in several forest carbon sink projects. This can only be done under a well-forged trading scheme which creates a win-win situation between the buyer and the seller.

There has been an on-going intense debate about the adoption of carbon trade as an amenable approach to the reduction of carbon emission. Moreover, there have been unresolved puzzles about the inclusion (or exclusion) of forests-based carbon in this trade initiative. There have been several criticisms mainly from the stables of environmental justice NGOs and movements such as Carbon Trade Watch, who came up with the argument that carbon-trading is a proliferation of the free market into public spaces and environmental policy-making. While it can argued that those who are big-time carbon emitters are imposing costs on the world and future generation, putting an appropriate price on carbon simply implies that people are faced with the full social cost of their actions. This will lead individuals and businesses to switch away from high-carbon goods and services, and to invest in low-carbon alternatives in the long run (Stern, 2006). Furthermore, like any tradable commodity, the price of carbon credits is largely determined by supply and demand (Laurance, 2008); hence through market approach, carbon emission reduction will be roller-skated with an auspicious trade-based approach by evolving a fair equilibrium price based on the forces of demand and supply. This piece will be concluded in the next edition of the newsletter.

Julius Adewopo
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Around the world

Guyana gold, gem miners protest tree felling rules

Hundreds of gold and diamond miners in Guyana's main mining town on recently protested against restrictions on tree felling proposed by the government as part of a \$250 million forest-saving carbon deal with Norway. The protest in Bartica, located deep in the Guyana jungle some 65 miles (105 km) from the capital Georgetown, was the biggest demonstration yet against a low carbon development strategy by President Bharrat Jagdeo that includes stringent mining regulations as part of its agreement with the Norwegians. "The protest was unlike anything I have ever seen. Hundreds of people marched down the road and all businesses were closed; hardly any children were in school," said Tarzie Ghanie, owner of the town's only TV station, TSS Channel 5.

In November, Norway pledged to pay Guyana up to \$250 million by 2015 to help save the England-sized forests which cover 75 percent of the South American nation's territory.

The protest was led by small and medium sized mining operations. Larger mining companies looking for gold and diamonds in the English speaking country of about 760,000 people include Canada's Guyana Goldfields. Miners are allowed to cut trees in areas they work in. The new regulations

would oblige miners to give notice six months in advance of the area they intend to clear trees. Prime Minister Samuel Hinds said timber operators are required to obtain pre-approval from the Guyana Forestry Commission before felling any trees. The same rule is to apply to miners.

Small and medium scale mining companies, which are Guyanese owned and operated, fear the new rules will put them out of business and lead to a collapse of the industry. The government says their fear is misplaced. "The government would not support policies to regulate mining out of existence," says Dr Roger Luncheon, the government's chief spokesman. "The interest is to have a balanced, sustainable, exploitation of our natural resources," said Luncheon.

Last year, Guyana had one of its best gold years. Small and medium size miners exceeded projections, declaring 305,178 troy ounces, according to the Guyana Gold Board. This represented a 17.2 percent increase over 2008 figure. The projection was for 257,503 ounces. The gold board said gold exports for last year amounted to \$281.68 million.

www.reuters.com

Indonesia: BBC documentary leads Unilever to blacklist Indonesian palm oil company

Unilever has told Indonesian suppliers to stop sourcing palm oil from Duta Palma due to concerns over deforestation, reports Reuters. Unilever's warning comes shortly after a BBC documentary linked palm oil used in the company's products to rainforest destruction by Duta Palma.

Derom Bangun, vice-chairman of the Indonesian Palm Oil Board, an industry body, told Reuters Unilever's decision was a direct result of the documentary. "It is Unilever's decision," Bangun told Reuters. "Unilever did not have a supply contract with Duta Palma to begin with. They are safeguarding their supply mechanisms by asking their traders not to buy palm oil from this company after that BBC report."

The move comes two months after Unilever, the world's

largest corporate palm oil buyer, dropped a \$32.6 million contact with PT Smart, a subsidiary of Sinar Mas, Indonesia's largest palm oil producer, due to the company's poor environmental record. Sinar Mas has seen an exodus of major Western buyers in recent weeks.

The latest move by Unilever adds pressure on the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), a budding certification scheme that aims to encourage environmental stewardship among palm oil producers. RSPO is seen by many as a path forward towards more responsible palm oil production, but the initiative has been criticized by environmentalists for weak monitoring and compliance protocols. The Duta Palma incident adds fuels to the fire since the company is a member of RSPO.

"It creates a lot of suspicion between the two groups,"

an RSPO official in Malaysia told Reuters. "But it highlights the difficulty of trying to stay green, especially when the Indonesian government is handing out concessions to develop oil palms."

As the world's oil palm is the highest-yielding commercial oilseed, palm oil production offers more vegetable oil per unit of area than other widely-grown crops including soy, canola, or rapeseed. Thus oil palm expansion on abandoned agricultural lands could offer producers a more effective way to sustainably meet growing demand for vegetable oils than with other oilseeds.

Environmentalists are most concerned by palm oil production that comes at the cost of carbon-dense and biologically-rich rainforests and peatlands. Since 1990 more than half of plantation growth has occurred at the expense of natural forests, boosting greenhouse gas emissions and increasing the vulnerability of endangered species like orangutans, Sumatran rhinos, pygmy elephants, and Sumatran tigers to extinction in the wild. Plantations have also been strongly associated with social conflict in some areas.

mongabay.com

Copenhagen 'fails forest people'

A multi-billion dollar deal tabled at the Copenhagen climate summit could lead to conflicts in forest-rich nations, a report has warned. The study by the Rights and Resources Initiative said the funds could place "unprecedented pressure" on some areas.

Six nations offered \$3.5bn as part of global plans to cut deforestation, which accounts for about 20% of all emissions from human activity. Campaigners warn the scheme fails to consider the rights of forest people.

The money - tabled by Japan, Norway, Australia, France and the US and UK - was made available under the UN's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) scheme. However, delegates in the Danish capital failed to reach agreement on the mechanisms needed to monitor and manage the framework. "One of the things that the world has learned over the years is that Redd is far more difficult than many people imagined," said Andy White, co-ordinator of RRI, a US-based think-tank, and one of the report's lead authors. "The forested areas of the world - by and large - have very high levels of poverty, low levels of respect for local rights, and a very low level of control among local people to shape and control their destiny. "So the rather simplistic notion that money from the rich North can control or limit deforestation was unrealistic."

Redd was developed as a global concept that would provide developing countries with a financial incentive to preserve forests. The Copenhagen conference was expected to

finalise an international Redd finance mechanism for the post-2012 global climate change framework. The RRI's report, *The End of the Hitherlands*, said that there would be "unparalleled" attention and investment in forests over the coming year.

It asked: "But who will drive the agenda and who will make the decisions?" The authors said studies showed that there was the potential for "enormous profits", but this would lead to increased competition for forest resources between governments and investors on one hand, and local communities on the other.

Dr White told BBC News that the UN-Redd scheme still had "tremendous potential".

"It requires, from our perspective, that the governments who tabled the \$3.5bn quickly get together and decide on the standards and mechanisms that they will set up," he suggested. "This would send the necessary signals to the private sector, as well as forest-rich nations, about what is expected from them in order to comply with the policy.

"Sorting out the institution arrangements in developing nations in order to manage the forest market is a huge undertaking." But the report said that the "unprecedented exposure and pressure" on forest regions was being met by a rise in local groups setting up co-operatives and representative bodies. The authors added that it gave "nations and the world at large a tremendous opportunity to right historic wrongs, advance rural development and save forests".

news.bbc.co.uk

UK: public support for forests vital as climate change bites, British forestry chief warns

The Earth needs its forests more than ever as climate change bites, but foresters must heed the needs of society if we are to realise their benefits, Britain's top forester warned today. Tim Rollinson, Director-General of the British Forestry Commission, and Chairman of the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration, was delivering the prestigious annual Forestry Lecture in Sustainability at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. He said the pressure on the Earth's resources, including land, were going to be immense as the world's population grew to a forecast eight billion by 2025. At the same time, the continuing drift of people to towns and cities meant they were losing their contact with forests and

their understanding of how crucial they are to life on Earth.

"The world needs permanent, sustainable forests to lock up carbon, to conserve soil and water, to oxygenate the atmosphere, to provide timber, food, medicines and other products and services, to preserve and protect biodiversity and wildlife, and to provide places where people can go to refresh body, mind and soul," Mr Rollinson said. He said that to provide all these services foresters need to be able to conserve, harvest and manage forests sustainably, and restore the forests that have been lost. To do this they need a 'licence' to do so from the societies they serve, and this licence needs to be earned.

"The messages from forest restoration programmes around

the world are clear: forests can be replaced to restore the environmental, economic and social functions they originally provided, and this can be done relatively quickly and economically.

“However, the involvement of local people lies at the heart

of almost every example of successful forest restoration and sustainable management around the world. “Without their input and their support, we will fail.”

www.forestry.gov.uk

Madagascar: What will you do when the trees are gone?

Madagascar's transitional government is allowing the export of illegally harvested precious hardwoods as a source of revenue to keep itself afloat. Conservationists say the cost is incalculable, and the huge Indian Ocean Island stands to lose its status as one of the world's biological hotspots. Groups like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and Conservation International (CI) say illegal logging in Madagascar exploded in the aftermath of a political crisis that replaced President Marc Ravalomanana with Andre Rajoelina, current leader of the Transitional Authority, in March 2009.

The international community condemned the coup-style change of leadership and shut off foreign aid. The island's civil service, including its nature conservation management system, all but collapsed. According to the International Monetary Fund, donor assistance accounted for about 50 percent of the Malagasy budget. “It is clear that the government needs the money from the export of wood that we know has been cut illegally,” Nanie Ratsifandrihamanana, director of conservation at the WWF in Madagascar, told IRIN.

In the absence of rangers to patrol protected areas, and with corruption rife at major ports, the export of precious hardwoods has gone unchecked for months. Armed criminal logging gangs effectively have free rein in Madagascar's national parks.

A government decree in September 2009 legalized the export of unprocessed rosewood, an endangered hardwood, which had previously been illegal. Prime Minister Colonel Camille Vital extended the decree on 31 December 2009. His decision has been strongly condemned by conservationists. “It takes a very short-term view that does not take into account the long-term sustainability of their actions. The result is the loss of Madagascar's natural heritage,” said Ratsifandrihamanana.

The government has denied profiting from the sale of already scarce rosewood and said the money from timber exports would be used to help protect Madagascar's natural environment in future. Critics say it is unclear where the funds from timber exports are going. In a joint statement released in September 2009, WWF, CI and the Wildlife Conservation Society said the decree “allows for the potential embezzlement of funds in the name of environmental protection and constitutes a legal incentive for further corruption in the forestry sector.”

It is highly unlikely that the logging will stop while the message being sent from the highest level of government is that there will probably be another chance to export illegal wood in future. James MacKinnon, technical director of CI in Madagascar, told IRIN that extending the decree had already allowed a further 200 containers of timber to leave Madagascar so far this year, which would encourage more trees to be felled in anticipation of similar government decisions in future. “It is highly unlikely that the logging will stop while the message being sent from the highest level of government is that there

will probably be another chance to export illegal wood in future,” he said.

Madagascar, the fourth largest island in the world, lies in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of southern Africa and is renowned for its unique flora and fauna: it is home to five percent of the world's plant and animal species, 80 percent of which are found nowhere else on Earth. With financial and technical support from foreign donors and conservation NGOs, Madagascar had made significant progress in the past decade, and the protection of wildlife enjoyed significant political backing.

In 2003 Ravalomanana committed to setting aside 10 percent of the island as a wildlife sanctuary, yet MacKinnon noted: “We know that most of this wood is coming from protected areas.” An investigation by EIA and Global Witness (GW), which monitors illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources, found that in the months following the coup, rosewood, palissander and ebony - all exotic tropical hardwoods - worth between US\$88,000 and \$460,000 was being harvested daily from national parks and protected areas. Their report, published at the end of 2009, noted a “serious breakdown in the rule of law - if not the active collusion of law enforcement authorities with illegal timber traffickers.”

WWF's Ratsifandrihamanana said local communities received scant benefit from the trade, while a small group - known as the “timber mafia” - controlled the industry, coercing local authorities and residents. “What the local communities gain from the timber trade simply does not compare with what the people who export the wood are earning. In addition, local people are subjected to threats and intimidation from logging gangs,” she said. Malagasy men earn just a few dollars a day for the back-breaking work of locating and removing trees from the forest. According to GW, a day's wage for a wood-cutter is around \$4, while one cubic metre of rosewood can fetch up to \$5,000 on Asian markets.

The extraction of logs threatens more than just precious trees: loggers hunt endangered lemurs for food, while clearing pathways through the forest encourages the settlement of once-pristine habitats, opening them up to destructive practices like charcoal burning and slash-and-burn agriculture. The cumulative effect could ultimately put Madagascar's ecotourism industry, worth \$390 million a year, at stake.

GW noted that the demand for rosewood furniture in China was a major driver of the illegal timber trade; smaller quantities of precious woods were shipped to Europe and the United States for use in high-end musical instruments. Left with little recourse in Madagascar, conservationists believe that targeting overseas buyers may now be the only way to help fight illegal logging in the island. “International buyers should be careful,” said MacKinnon. “Anything containing Malagasy rosewood should be considered illegal, even if you are just transporting it.”

www.allafrica.com

Australia starts 10 million dollar initiative to find new species

Known as the 'Bush Blitz', Australia will spend 10 million Australian dollars (8.88 million US dollars) over the next three years to conduct biodiversity surveys in far-flung places, reports Sydney Morning Herald. The program hopes to both uncover new species and gather more data about innumerable little-known plants and animals on the continent.

The Bush Blitz will undertake a total of eighteen major expeditions during three years. Groups will be made up of 10-12 scientists and volunteers who will survey the nation's reserves for hidden biological treasures. The program is focusing on places that are little-known both to the public and researchers.

The International conservation group Earthwatch is set-up to manage research sites and coordinate volunteers.

"[Bush Blitz is] bringing together business, and community groups, and government, and volunteers, in a way that probably hasn't been done before. This is an important large-scale project that just couldn't be done by one group, or by scientists alone," Earthwatch Director, Richard Glimore, told the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The Bush Blitz is funded by the Australian government (6 million dollars) and mining company BHP Billiton (4 million dollars).

mongabay.com

News from the Prince's Rainforest Project

The expectation that the Copenhagen climate change summit might agree a new international treaty on climate change was not fulfilled when the meeting finished with a weak voluntary agreement.

This agreement, known as the Copenhagen Accord, does however contain references to what might be done to combat deforestation and does commit nations to providing finance for this purpose. The main reference to forest related action says:

'We recognize the crucial role of reducing emission from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) and the need to enhance removals of greenhouse gas emission by forests and agree on the need to provide positive incentives to such actions through the immediate establishment of a mechanism including REDD-plus, to enable the mobilization of financial resources from developed countries.'

This is a substantial shift in policy towards protecting forests, as previously most governments assumed that relatively little finance would be made available for forests until the market mechanism came into operation post 2012. However The International Working Group (a group of 35 countries

set up following the meeting convened by The Prince of Wales in April 2009) issued an influential report in September 2009 which described a consensus on the need to provide substantial and immediate interim finance to rainforest nations.

Subsequently, six nations (US, UK, Norway, France, Japan, Australia) pledged \$3.5 billion to support immediate REDD-plus activity between 2010-2012. The arrangements for this funding are being discussed during the first half of 2010, with the hope that an agreement can be reached in advance of the June UNFCCC meetings in Bonn.

The PRP continues to assist in the consensus building process that will lead to interim finance for the rainforest nations being available this year. In addition we are working with the agricultural sector in rainforest nations in order to encourage appropriate finance to farmers so that real behavioural change can occur. This is vital, as without this shift in agricultural production, little can be achieved to stop tropical deforestation.

www.rainforestsos.org

Nigeria: Crusading against desert encroachment

As climate change continues to threaten world safety, experts note that the impact of desert encroachment is becoming a major factor that must be given desired attention. This, they suggest, becomes necessary if the earth is to survive attendant effects of environmental calamities ranging from bio-diversity losses; declining soil fertility; massive destruction of arable land; depletion of water resources and global warming.

As parts of efforts at tackling the effects of global warming, Lagos State Government, through Ministry of the Environment, Niger Ministry of Environment and Fight Against Desert Encroachment (FADE) are partnering to ensure that the

crusade against desertification is won through desert warriors desertification reality show and a trip to London via road through the Sahara Desert.

FADE is a non governmental and non profit organization, founded in the year 2000 by Newton Jibunoh, with the central mission of drawing international awareness to the issue of desertification and its ravaging effects. Jibunoh first embarked on solo expedition by driving through the Sahara Desert in 1966, the second one in 1999, traveling in the reverse direction from Nigeria to Europe while at 70 years old and he and five other persons went on the third expedition in 2008.

The process of selection for the show, which started in December 2009 kicked-off on February 1, 2010 as Lagos state

governor, Babatunde Fashola officially flagged off the process where selected 40 contestants who would be joined by 10 others proceed to Agadez in Niger for the endurance reality show. During the period, contestants would be put through various endurance exercises, physical fitness challenges, discipline tests, social comportment and driving skills tests to determine whether they are fit for the journey to London. They will also join the Nigerian ambassador to Niger Republic and work with officials of Niger's ministry of Environment on various greening projects and community services. They are expected to arrive Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory en-route Kano to Agadez in Niger for the show. Out the 50 contestants, 15 are expected to emerge to become official desert warriors and on upon return from Niger to the country, they are expected to drive through Nigeria to the United Kingdom across the Sahara desert by road.

Fashola who received the warriors at Government House on their way to Abuja where they will be guests of the Federal Ministry of Environment and Foreign Affairs before proceeding to Kano and Agadez in Niger, thanked Jibunoh for his one-man crusade for greener environment, noting that advocacy remains the best way to combat the problem of global climatic change. He said his government has already taken the lead by protecting Lagos, against desert encroachment and attack from the Atlantic Ocean even as he called on the Federal Government to lead the crusade against the global warming. "For me, it is a national security problem", the Governor said adding, "Let us make this a national crusade to increase awareness among the people on the danger which we all face from the acts of nature but most significantly from acts we are not responsible for; the acts of industrialized nations who, as we know, are also looking for solutions and putting commitments on the table," he said.

The governor commended Jibunoh for his efforts thus far. "I see many potential Jibunoh now, and for his life time work, you have entrenched means of handover to worthy successors.

At this point in time, we also acknowledged that in the light of evidence of what has happened across the world, cities, villages, states and whole communities destroyed by flood," he stated.

These were some of the reasons why his government has been interested in the Jibunoh's initiative. "We have been lucky in Lagos state and as a government, we know that luck alone will not take us far, we need also to act proactive and decisive. These are the underlying currents that inform our support for this initiative because our country is properly the only country in Africa and properly the whole world that is threatened on both sides by the desert in the north and the sea in the south," he noted. Adding; 'Experts told me that first of all, the desert is the food basket of Nigeria and all the states where food is produced that all of us eat in the country face the threat of being lost to the desert and importantly that it adds to the climate change imbalance that increases water level and as a coastal state, we will be the most affected as water level continues to rise.'

Earlier, Commissioner for Environment, Muiz Banire said, outstanding successful desert warriors will receive cash prizes including Suzuki jeeps as well as monetary awards while the 15 warriors will become Lagos State environment ambassadors and honoured at a ceremony in London. Banire, explained that essence of the initiative is to guide against climate change. "The essence of the whole thing is about the struggle against the problems of climate change and desertification which from studies so far show that between now and 2015, a large per cent of this nation will be engulfed by desertification and if so the responsibility is for us particularly in Lagos state because it will serve as refugee of all these people with all its attendant consequences and the problem of food security which has its own multiplying effects on the health of the people," he said.

allafrica.com

USA: Genetically modified forest planned for U.S. Southeast

While the practice of splicing foreign DNA into food crops has become common in corn and soy, few companies or researchers have dared to apply genetic engineering to plants that provide an essential strut of the U.S. economy, trees.

But that will soon change. Two industry giants, International Paper Co. and MeadWestvaco Corp., are planning to transform plantation forests of the southeastern United States by replacing native pine with genetically engineered eucalyptus, a rapidly growing Australian tree that in its conventional strains now dominates the tropical timber industry.

The companies' push into genetically modified trees, led by their joint biotech venture, ArborGen LLC, looks to overcome several hurdles for the first time. Most prominently, they are banking on a controversial gene splice that restricts trees' ability to reproduce, meant to allay fears of bioengineered eucalyptus turning invasive and overtaking native forests.

If such a fertility control technology -- which has come under fire in farming for fear seed firms will exploit it -- is proven effective, it could open the door to many varieties of wild plants, including weedy grasses, to be genetically engineered for use in energy applications like biomass and

next-generation biofuels without fear of invasiveness.

ArborGen has been seeking government deregulation of its eucalyptus, which is primarily engineered to resist freezing temperatures, since 2008. If successful, ArborGen would likely revolutionize the timber industry and the Southern landscape by becoming the first company to roll out bioengineered trees on a massive scale, observers say.

In its rosiest scenarios, growers using ArborGen's presumably expensive seeds would see huge gains in productivity and become the preferred tree stock for a new generation of bioenergy refineries. The South would become the new Appalachia; timber would serve as its coal. Inklings of such progress have already arisen, including recent word that the German utility RWE AG would build the world's largest wood-pellet plant in Georgia to supplement its coal habits.

By adopting eucalyptus as a tree stock, the United States would simply be catching up with countries like Brazil, which has leveraged vast tree plantations in recent decades to pivot from a net wood importer to an exporter. While the South saw a rise in pine plantations during this time, pine cannot compete with eucalyptus for sheer growth rate, the company says.

www.scientificamerican.com

Australia: Gunns resolves - if you can't beat'em, join'em

Baby steps have been taken in Australia's highly charged forestry debate - a few in the right direction. A wobbly Gunns has signalled it will seek Forest Stewardship Council certification for the bulk of its managed native forest and plantation estate. That's significant. For years Gunns has been a key sponsor of the Australian Forestry Standard, an industry-backed code that accepts the logging of native forest.

FSC is the internationally recognised accreditation program created in the early 1990s to prevent logging of high-conservation-value forests around the world. It is a jealously guarded label, part of the ISEAL Alliance, which also includes Fairtrade, the Rainforest Alliance, the official organic standard and others.

There is a small but growing market for FSC accreditation in Australia. About 200 companies have FSC certification in Australia, including eight forest-management organisations. The FSC regime is used by Bunnings and importer Gunnersens to source sustainably logged timber and wood products. It is a risk management and marketing tool. Australian Paper's market share jumped when it stopped fighting the environment movement and instead sought FSC certification for many of its office paper brands, including Reflex. FSC chief executive Michael Spencer says it was a key point of difference for AP, which competes with cheap imported papers.

FSC certification is tough. The only native forest hardwood timber supplier in the FSC system is Australian Sustainable Timbers, in NSW's Upper Hunter Valley. No state forest agency has gained FSC. It is the strict criteria and stakeholder oversight that gives FSC its value. The FSC accreditation process is slow, involving pre and main audits by an approved independent certifier.

Any Gunns application for FSC accreditation will take a long time to determine - two years is typical. Gunns faces major hurdles. Under FSC principles, any plantation converted from native forest after 1994 is ineligible for accreditation. Gunns won't say what proportion of its plantations have been converted since 1994, but many of them - especially in Tasmania - were grown on land cleared of old growth forest, often using napalm to burn off waste and 1080 bait to protect seedlings, in a clear case of environmental vandalism.

A possibility might be for Gunns to seek FSC's lesser "controlled wood" status for any plantations converted after 1994, which would mean the wood meets five basic criteria and excludes wood from high-conservation value areas or areas being converted from native forest. Controlled wood can be mixed with FSC-certified material in a "mixed sources" labelled product. Gunns would have to give up its reliance on native forest timber, but that's been its fallback plan for a decade anyway.

Neither the industry nor the forestry union likes it, but Gunns' change of mind demonstrates that FSC will be the world standard for timber accreditation and the Australian forest products industry will have to adjust.

The industry is fighting back. There was a successful push for equal recognition, alongside FSC, of the Australian Forestry Standard-certified timber under Greenstar ratings published by the Green Building Council of Australia. From January, developers could get one point (out of a possible 140) for using either FSC or AFS-certified timber. Previously the only standard recognised by the Green Building Council was FSC.

www.smh.com.au/business

Canada creates massive new park in the boreal

The government of Canada and the governments of the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador recently signed a memorandum of understanding to create a the new Mealy Mountains National Park. Larger than Yellowstone National Park, the new Canadian park will span 11,000 square kilometers making it the largest protected area in Eastern Canada. The park is home to woodland caribou, moose, black bear, osprey, bald eagles, brook trout, and a rare population of Harlequin ducks.

"As we enter into the International Year of Biodiversity, it is fitting that we are working to establish a national park to protect this spectacular boreal landscape for all time for all Canadians," said Canada's Environment Minister, Jim Prentice, in announcing the creation of the park. Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ahmed Djoghlaif, said "this decision, taken by the host country of the Convention's Secretariat is of the greatest political significance and a befitting launch of the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity," adding that "the creation of this new protected area is a firm

foundation towards achieving the post-2010 biodiversity target, and the effective implementation of the Convention's programs of work on protected areas and mountain biological diversity."

The park will allow traditional use for indigenous people living in the area, such as hunting, trapping, fishing, and chopping firewood for personal use. But no new developments will be allowed. Conservationists were elated by the news. Many groups have been pushing for this designation since 2001. "This announcement sets an important precedent for parks in Canada," said Larry Innes, director of the Canadian Boreal Initiative. "This is not a remote, off-limits park; this is a new approach to conservation, that incorporates traditional uses and celebrates Labrador's rich and diverse cultural heritage, while securing ecological values."

Plans are also in place to add a waterways park to Mealy Mountain National Park adding another 2,000 square kilometers to the protected area.

mongabay.com

China: New forests fend off desert encroachment at Great Wall in NW China

Northwest China's Shaanxi Province has been successful in fending off desert encroachment with afforestation near the ruins of the Great Wall. Satellite images taken in August 2009 show the wind-and-sand zone along the ancient defence in Yulin City on the Loess Plateau has turned from yellow to green, according to the province's forestry department. "Compared with images taken in 2000, the forest has expanded about 400 kilometers northward from Yan'an City in the heartland of the Loess Plateau," said Yulin's forestry chief Li Junzhi. "It's a result of sustained afforestation."

China began an ambitious afforestation project in 1978 to curb desert encroachment and soil erosion in the northwestern and northeastern regions. The tree-planting, which created a new forest belt running 7,000 kilometers east to west, also aimed to reduce the intensity of the sandstorms that hit Beijing-centered north China. The wind-and-sand zone in northern Shaanxi Province, extending 500 kilometers in Yulin City, is one of China's most sparsely populated areas. "Twenty years ago, we had sandstorm sweeping through all year," said Du Fangxiu, who grew up at the foot of the Great Wall in Dingbian County. "Sand used to fall like snow and would bury all the seedlings in spring."

For years, Du, who made little out of the infertile cropland, planted drought-enduring trees such as poplars and sand willows and selling the lumber for a living. In response to the government call for "afforestation for ecology", Du stopped lumbering in 2000. In return, he has been subsidized at least 1 million yuan (147,000 U.S. dollars) for growing 8,000 hectares of forest in the formerly infertile land. The forests have also nurtured pieces of fertile cropland, where Du grows wheat, vegetables and other economic crops.

Du has written rhyming phrases on the red couplet that hangs on his front door. "Cover the infertile mountain with trees; Turn the crawling desert into oasis," it reads. But Du is not the only "green campaigner" in Yulin City. "Many spent heavily planting trees and are honored as the heroes who built the modern Great Wall of Forests," said Li Junzhi, the forestry chief. One of the heroes is 67-year-old Shi Guangyin, who

has fought with sandstorms since he was a kid. "I remember playing with a boy in the neighborhood one day and a sudden sandstorm swept us away," Shi said. "I shivered in the cold for days before my dad found me, about kilometers away from my home. That little boy was never found again. He was five and I was eight."

In 1984, Shi founded a company to combat sand with seven other rural families and planted trees on 200 hectares of land. To date, his company has spent more than 10 million yuan to plant and reinforce 13,000 hectares of forests in Dingbian County. After the sand was curbed, Shi's company began investing in ecological farms, economic crops and many other businesses that yielded better economic returns. Shi himself was awarded "outstanding farmer" by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 2002. In the past decade, Shaanxi Province spent nearly 22 billion yuan to plant 4.5 million hectares of forests, said Zhang Shenian, chief of the provincial forestry department. "The province's forest coverage has increased to 37 percent from 30 percent in 2000," said Zhang.

Even in Yulin City, which is surrounded by encroaching desert, forest coverage has reached 30 percent. The number of sandy days in the city was less than 10 last year, compared with nearly 30 days in the 1960s, according to figures released by the local weather bureau.

The forests have improved the living conditions of the local residents and helped protect what is left of the Great Wall from being devoured by the desert. The Shaanxi section of the Great Wall is on the main trunk of the Wall that runs from Shanhaiguan Pass in north China's Hebei Province west to Jiayuguan Pass in Gansu Province. The Shaanxi section of the Wall, which runs 470 km across the Loess plateau along the northern border of the province, was an important defence for Xi'an, the ancient Chinese capital. It also served as the city wall for Yulin, a historical center for trade and a former military base.

news.xinhuanet.com

Canada: Forester a 'happy lumberjack' over federal budget largesse

The forest industry will get \$100 million for new green energy technologies, making it the only industry in Thursday's federal budget to receive targeted money from Ottawa. That's on top of initiatives such as accelerating writeoffs in green-energy investments and extending the work-share program, changes that will encourage more capital investment and help keep jobs in the hard-hit sawmilling sector.

"I'm a happy lumberjack," said Avrim Lazar, president of the Forest Products Association of Canada. "From a forest industry perspective, the government has its priorities right."

Ottawa gave the industry \$1 billion last year to develop

green technologies with black liquor, an alternative fuel that's a byproduct of the pulp-making process. The \$100 million in Thursday's budget will be spread over four years to promote the development, commercialization and implementation of new clean-energy technologies.

"We are very happy with that because we see our future in green technology," Lazar said in a telephone interview from Ottawa.

The Canadian industry is threatened with falling behind its global competitors, the U.S. specifically, as most are receiving billions of dollars of government support in developing green energy. The forest products industry is moving toward

integrating bioenergy and bioproducts into traditional forestry operations, which will require new investment capital. The budget will help keep jobs in Canada and encourage more investment in green energy, Lazar said.

"Investors can write off their investments in two years instead of seven. It gives you a faster writeoff on your investment, which will bring private-sector money in," he said.

"And the extended employment insurance work-sharing program means some plants can get going faster. They can get going under the work-sharing program and put some jobs into the recovery.

"Those are very positive moves," he said.

Lazar said the forest industry "respects" the government's fiscal restraint moves "but we are certain that there are more opportunities to reallocate existing monies to high priorities, and we look forward to working more closely with the government on research reallocation." He said the industry believes there are opportunities for government scientists to work with industry scientists and academics "to use the existing money in a more focused way to support keeping jobs in Canada."

vancouversun.com

USA: Fog decline threatens US redwoods

Scientists in California say a drop in coastal fog could threaten the state's famed giant redwood trees. Their study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, says such fog has decreased markedly over the past 100 years.

The weather records analysed come from the US National Climate Data Centre.

"Fog prevents water loss from redwoods in summer and is really important for the tree and the forest," said research co-author Professor Todd Dawson. The team at the University of California, Berkeley was interested in how fog was involved in climate changes on the coast and noticed a drop that they believe could have an effect on the trees. The scientists say redwoods are concentrated along the coastal areas primarily because they are not as well adapted as other tree species to

deal with California's hot summers.

Dr James Johnstone from the University of Berkeley, who led the research, explained the team had examined tree rings and found signs that reduced fog has had an effect. "The evidence that you see in the tree rings is consistent with drought stress produced by drought reduction." Dr Johnstone thinks drought stress could affect the growth of new trees and the plants and animals that depend on the redwoods. But he notes that the negative impact on the tree population is, as yet, unproven. "We're concerned for certain, we expect some impact on the ecology but we don't have clear evidence that the redwoods are about to go extinct in the near term." "We need further analysis to find out whether the effects are as we expect," said Dr Johnstone.

news.bbc.co.uk

Brazil to build controversial Belo Monte hydroelectric dam in Amazon rainforest

The Brazilian government has given the green light to the construction of a controversial hydroelectric dam in the Amazon rainforest that environmentalists and indigenous activists claim will displace indigenous tribes and further damage the Amazon basin. Brazil's environment ministry granted the Belo Monte dam project an environmental licence late on Monday paving the way for tenders from companies interested in constructing the world's third largest hydroelectric plant, on the Amazon's Xingu river.

According to the Brazilian energy ministry the dam, expected to start production in 2015, will cost around R\$20bn (£6.8bn) and will eventually produce around 11GW of electricity. But environmentalists and indigenous leaders have strongly opposed the plans, which the government admits would see around 500 sq km of land flooded and activists believe would see thousands displaced. "We want to make sure that Belo Monte does not destroy the ecosystems and the biodiversity that we have taken care of for millennia," Megaron Tuxucumarrae, a leader of the Kayapo Indians said. "We are opposed to dams on the Xingu and will fight to protect our river."

The proposed construction of the Belo Monte dam in the Amazon state of Para is part of a major government investment drive to help the country keep up with soaring energy demand from a rapidly expanding economy, while curbing greenhouse

gas emissions. Hydroelectric power produces no direct carbon dioxide.

Brazil's environment minister Carlos Minc said the winning company would be forced to spend around \$800m (£501m) offsetting the environmental damage caused by the project. "There is not going to be an environmental disaster," he told Brazilian television. Minc denied Indians would be forced from their traditional lands by the dam. "Not a single Indian will be displaced. They will be indirectly affected, but they will not have to leave indigenous lands," he said.

Roberto Messias, head of Brazil's environmental agency Ibama, said that around 12,000 people were likely to be affected by the construction but that many of them currently lived in wooden riverside shacks and were likely to benefit from the dam's constructions. "Our studies show that today the population does not have adequate sanitation or healthcare. The conditions outlined in the licence are designed so that the local population have a superior quality of life ... at the end of the construction," he said, according to the Amazon paper *Diario do Para*.

Plans to build hydroelectric dams on the Xingu river have existed since the 1970s but have repeatedly failed to materialise, partly as a result of fierce pressure from environmental groups and activists, including the musician Sting.

www.guardian.co.uk

Ghana: Forest reserves in Ghana must be protected from mining, says cardinal

Mining companies must be blocked from extracting minerals from Ghana's few remaining forest preserves, said the head of the *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*. The former archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana, Cardinal Peter Turkson, said he recently wrote a letter to Ghana's president, John Atta Mills, urging him "to refuse to give in to a multinational company that is asking permission to start mining in one of the few remaining forest preserves" in Ghana.

During a talk at an Italian school of theology in Florence March 1, 2010, the cardinal explained that Ghana — once

called the Gold Coast — has long been targeted for mineral exploitation first by colonizing European nations and now by Western mining companies. Minerals used to be extracted using underground methods, which left much of the land "relatively undisturbed; however today the mining method is open-pit or strip mining and this totally destroys the land's natural surface," he said. He said he felt compelled to write the country's president to encourage him to protect the forest's natural habitat from mining, saying "indiscriminate mineral extraction destroys not only nature, but also human life and society."

www.catholicnews.com

Uganda: Norway to support tree planting

The Norwegian Private Forest Growers (NORSKOG) has signed a partnership with the Uganda Timber Growers Association (UTGA) to support commercial timber growing with the aim of protecting forests. The partnership was signed recently by NORSKOG director Arne Rora and the UTGA chairman, Robert Nabanyumya in Mpigi.

Rora said the partnership was aimed at developing UTGA for the provision of services to the private and public sectors for sustainable management and utilisation of plantation forests.

According to Nabanyumya, the association's objective is to make quality products that are acceptable on the international

market. He said the association supplied improved seedlings to its members and lobbied for information, experience on tree growing, and advocacy for better land tenure security.

During the function, Norwegian ambassador Bjorg Leite, said Uganda, being part of the global warming regions, needed to encourage more timber growers to protect forests. "People can use this project to earn some money," she added. Leite lamented that more than half of Uganda's forests had been cleared thus affecting climate, tourism and wildlife.

allafrica.com

Brazil Celebrates 72% drop in deforestation, credits it to Green Arch

An area of 247 square kilometers (95 square miles) of Brazilian rainforest was cut down in the months of October and November 2009, which may seem like a lot, but it was a significant drop in Amazon deforestation.

In fact, it was 72.5% less than in October and November 2008. For the minister of Environment, Carlos Minc, the numbers were good news. And they were based on satellite images from the National Space Research Institute's (Inpe) Real Time Deforestation Detection System (Deter).

The minister added that the satellite imaging had occurred during cloudless periods. "This time nobody can say we did not see the deforestation because of cloud cover," said Minc.

"These are also the first figures after Operation Green Arch was implemented in the 43 municipalities with the highest rates of deforestation," explained the minister. And the news was very good. During the first four months of the burning season, August, September, October and November, the reduction in deforestation was around 50% in the area.

The government says the drop in deforestation is due to joint inspection and control by the Environmental Protection Agency (Ibama), the Federal Police, Highway Police and the National Security Force.

Operation Green Arch is part of that effort but it also includes social assistance programs and attempts to provide local inhabitants viable alternative economic activities - that do not require chopping down trees.

Interestingly, the least amount of deforestation in the Amazon region that took place during October and November was in the state of Amazonas (a mere 33 square kilometers). The champion was the state of Pará (108 square km), followed by Mato Grosso (50 square km).

Amazonas is Brazil's largest state: 1.57 million square kilometers; bigger than France, Spain, Sweden and Greece together, and 2.25 times bigger than Texas.

If it were a country it would be the world's 18th biggest, coming in slightly larger than Mongolia. The population is 3 million. Pará is the second biggest state at 1.25 million square kilometers with a population of 6 million.

Minc says that at this rate Brazil will achieve its deforestation reduction goal before the year 2020, the year in the government's proposed National Climate Change Policy paper when the reduction was to be 80%. "We could be down 95% by 2020," declared Minc.

www.brazzilmag.com

Australia: Rees's plan to save redgums faces the axe

The decision of the former premier Nathan Rees to immediately end logging of the Riverina redgums has been reversed by the state government. It has opted for a five-year wind-down of logging, coupled with the establishment of national and regional parks that cover much of the contested area. But getting the necessary legislation through Parliament is expected to be difficult, with the Coalition, Shooters and Greens parties all indicating opposition. The state government said it would protect 107,000 hectares of Riverina redgums and set up an \$80 million support package with logging to be wound down over the next five years. Mr Rees proposed locking up the 42,000 hectares of the Millewa forest Riverina redgums in a national park, along with further unspecified areas along the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Lachlan rivers.

Environmental groups slammed the government for "chopping the promised area in half". The Greens want a total ban on logging while the Shooters are opposed to any halt to

logging. "This is clearly a deal with the Greens to win their preferences at next year's election," the Shooters MLC Robert Brown said of the government's proposal. "We'll vote against it, as will the Nationals and Liberals, I suspect." The Greens MLC Ian Cohen said: "Don't be surprised if I oppose it. It's a Labor-Nationals stitch-up. I am seriously unimpressed, and will be seeking advice. It's a pathetic compromise that leaves half of the magnificent Millewa Forest open for logging."

The opposition also slammed the decision, saying that "on face value, we'll be opposing" the legislation because the government has ignored the local communities. "The only reason that the redgums in the Barmah-Millewa area are in a reasonable condition is because they have been actively managed by the forestry industry for the past 150 years," the opposition spokeswoman on natural resources, Katrina Hodgkinson, said.

www.smh.com.au

Europe: A warning on Europe's forests

Europe's forests have been expanding for the last 60 years. But the rate at which forests are growing in Europe is slowing, and forested areas face even more acute challenges in the future because of climate change, Janez Potocnik, the E.U. commissioner for the environment, warned today. "Europe's forests are a precious resource," he said at a news conference at E.U. headquarters in Brussels. "Their wide range of social, economic and environmental functions means that the stakes are high."

Mr. Potocnik's comments came as he issued a new discussion paper on how the E.U. could prepare for the effect of climate change on forests. Forest and wooded areas cover more than 40 percent of the European Union and account for 5 percent of the world's forests. They also represent an important so-called sink for absorbing carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas, removing about 0.5 gigatons of CO₂ each year compared with total annual emissions of greenhouse gases from industries across the bloc's 27 members equivalent to 5 gigatons of CO₂.

Mr. Potocnik said the state of Europe's forests was considerably healthier than in other parts of the world, where deforestation was under way and contributing to 12 to 15 percent of global CO₂ emissions. But he said that a host of demands were placing new pressures on forested lands in Europe, meaning that Europe's forests could become a source,

rather than a sink, for CO₂ emissions by 2020, according to the discussion paper. Those demands included increasing need for pasture to meet food needs, use of croplands to produce biofuels and conversion of land for urban development, Mr. Potocnik said. In the future, there will also be more demand for forest products from the renewable energy industry for biomass products to burn for heat and electricity.

To meet the E.U.'s binding target of generating 20 percent of energy from renewable sources by 2020, the largest contribution probably will come from biomass in agriculture, forestry and waste for heat and power generation as well as for transport fuels. That makes it important to create a suitably structured bio-energy market, which "could have a significant fire prevention role by giving an economic incentive to remove biomass that currently feeds wildfires in abandoned forests," according to the discussion paper.

But potentially the greatest threat to forests was from climate change, which Mr. Potocnik said had already driven up average temperatures in Europe by 1 degree Celsius in the past century and threatens to unleash deadly pests, set off more forest fires and destructive storms and alter the suitability of entire regions for certain types of forest.

greeninc.blogs.nytimes.com

West Africa sets out to protect dying mangroves

Salt is precious in poverty-stricken coastal West Africa, but conservation experts say efforts to extract it are laying waste to mangrove swamps, causing erosion and ravaging fish stocks. In Sierra Leone, one of Africa's poorest nations still recovering from a 1991-2002 civil war, lawmakers are preparing a bill to join a seven-nation charter to protect the region's mangrove forests. Conservation group Wetlands International says the initiative is

essential for West Africa to save the 800,000 hectares (2 million acres) of mangrove swamps it has left, less than a third of the 3 million hectares it started with.

The mangroves are falling prey to the artisanal salt industry because they are most readily available source of wood for fires used to boil up seawater and salt dust -- the preferred method of making salt. Environmental groups are trying to encourage salt producers to use other methods, including solar

drying, to reduce the strain on mangroves. "If the mangroves disappear, fishing will be in crisis," said Wetlands' West Africa coordinator Richard Dacosta. "The saltwater tide will invade river estuaries and coastal areas. Local communities on the coast will have to move."

The region's mangrove forests also suck up thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide, and so could be a way for West Africa to get a foothold in the \$136 billion carbon market. "Mangroves sequester large amounts of carbon and so reduce greenhouse gas emissions," Dacosta said.

Mangroves swamps are the amongst the most diverse ecosystems on earth, scientists say. A barrier between the land and sea, they are the nurseries of the ocean, where many species of fish and shrimps breed and their young thrive. Birds roost, snakes seek out prey, monkeys scavenge in them. They are also a buffer against coastal erosion in a region where much of the population lives in low-lying areas.

On the outskirts of the village of Fobo, 50km (30 miles) south of Freetown, a crab scuttles across mud in the mangrove forest while oysters cling to its roots. Vast areas have already been cleared to make way for rice fields in the nutrient-rich soil. But the local salt industry is by far the biggest threat. For generations, villagers have scraped "salt dust" from the soil,

added seawater, and boiled it over wood stoves.

Marie Kano, head of the salt producers association, said many of the mangrove trees used for fuel have already gone. "We don't have any wood left now," she said. "My children, sister and father ... all used to cook salt. But because there is no wood anymore, they all left and went to town." Access to wood has become a luxury for those with canoes. A small canoe-full of wood costs up to 70,000 leones (\$17.50) and is enough to make 10kg (22 lbs) of salt, worth about the same amount of money. Salt panners are barely breaking even.

The West African Mangrove Initiative aims to help nations coordinate efforts to rehabilitate the mangroves, said Mohamed Mansaray of Sierra Leone's forestry department, by replanting trees and providing alternatives to wood. Following a pilot project in neighboring Guinea, the initiative plans to introduce solar powered salt extractors. Pouring saltwater onto a flat, open tarpaulin to about 1 cm deep, the salt crystals are then left to dry out in the sun. "I would definitely use this method, as it doesn't use costly wood," said Kano, after seeing a demonstration.

www.reuters.com

South Africa: Trade and Industry speeds up afforestation

Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies wants funding from the Land Bank and Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) in place by the end of the next financial year to fund a massive afforestation programme in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Conservative estimates in a 2005 study identified 100000ha for new forestry in the Eastern Cape and 39000ha in KZN with smaller parcels in Limpopo and Mpumalanga concluding that the industry had the potential to create 15600 jobs.

The forestry products industry ranks among the top exporting industries in the country and its exports in 2008 totalled R14.8-billion which, after deducting forest product of R11.3-billion – meant a net foreign exchange earning of R3.5-billion, a contribution of some 15% to the country's trade balance.

The Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP), released by Davies last week, notes that most of the forests are on communal land where "a number of value-added opportunities can be explored for smaller growers" currently supplying their timber to big companies for pulp and paper mills. IPAP says that opportunities exist to expand the small-scale milling industry and to use jungle wattle that would otherwise go to waste for charcoal production.

The action plan says the issuing of water licences has become "a serious obstacle for forestry development" and communities are unable sometimes to afford the required environmental impact assessment. It wants a national task team in place by the end of June to oversee the afforestation

process and for the Department of Water and Environmental Affairs (DWEA) to have conducted reserve determination and hydrological surveys for targeted catchments within the same time frame. By the end of September, Trade and Industry will have appointed facilitators to mobilise communities and "provide capacity for them to apply for water use licences issued by DWEA and access capital".

Funding for the EIAs will be provided by Asgisa EC and Trade and Industry. Davies is also looking at charcoal manufacturing enterprises in the Eastern Cape and KZN using jungle wattle – an alien species. He points out the market requires low levels of capital inputs, limited technical knowledge, uses unskilled workers and is labour-intensive. "The project has the potential of increasing participation in the rural areas, employment creation and skills transfer."

IPAP wants Asgisa EC to undertake the required EIAs in identified areas by the end of June and for the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) to train and register 12 cooperatives in communities with an interest in charcoal production within the same timeframes. The National Empowerment Fund and IDC must also provide funding for the enterprises by the end of September. IPAP is also looking at the biomass sub-sector for SMMEs and a feasibility study will be undertaken before the end of this year as well as a business plan developed before the end of March next year.

www.weekendpost.co.za



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