

# The Impact of Deforestation

Forests are not just trees — they are the lungs, habitat, and climate regulators of our planet.

They shelter over half of all land-based species, from pollinators to predators, and are home to three-quarters of the world's birds. Beneath their canopies, forests filter water, build soil, regulate rainfall, and prevent floods. They are sacred homelands and lifelines for millions of people, many of whom have protected them for generations.



But when forests fall, the climate unravels.

[Global Forest Watch](#)

Every tree lost sends carbon dioxide surging into the atmosphere, turning natural carbon sinks into dangerous carbon sources. Forest destruction now accounts for roughly 10% of all global warming — more than all the cars and trucks on Earth combined.

Stopping deforestation isn't just about saving biodiversity. It's about **survival** for ecosystems, for Indigenous communities, for future generations. And it's about **justice**, because those who contribute the least to deforestation often suffer the most from its consequences.

We can't fight climate change while continuing to destroy the very systems that keep our planet in balance.

This is not optional: There is no path to climate stability that doesn't run through the world's forests. We protect forests, or we lose everything.

## CAUSES

### Global Farming

- Cutting down forests to grow crops like soy or palm oil
- Clearing land to raise cattle
- Small farms expanding into forest areas

### Building and Development

- Expanding cities and towns
- Building roads and highways through forests
- Digging for resources like gold, oil, metals or critical minerals
- Building large dams for energy that flood forests

### Cutting Down Trees

- Logging for wood, paper, or fuel
- Clearing large areas all at once (called clear-cutting)

## Fires and Climate Change

- Setting fires to clear land for farming
- Hotter, drier weather making fires worse
- Pests and diseases spreading more because of climate change

## Money and Weak Rules

- High demand for cheaper products or food made from cleared land
- Weak laws or not enough enforcement
- Ignoring Indigenous land rights
- Powerful companies or developers pushing for profit

## Canada's Role

- Canada logs more intact primary forest than almost any other country.
- Most of this is legal, but still not counted as deforestation under Canada's reporting — it's labeled as "sustainable" even when old-growth forests are clear-cut.
- Canada is one of the world's top exporters of wood products, much of it from boreal forests.

## Extent of Logging in Old-Growth Forests

- British Columbia (B.C.): The province has approximately 13 million hectares of old-growth forests. However, only about 35,000 hectares support the largest, most carbon-rich trees. Despite this, logging continues in these areas, often under the guise of sustainable forestry practices. [The Narwhal](#)
- Ontario: In Ontario, analysis of forestry data from 2016 to 2020 revealed that about 30% of the certified boreal forests harvested were at least 100 years old, resulting in the loss of approximately 377 square miles of these older forests. [Reuters](#)
- Legal vs. Illegal Logging
- Legal Logging: Much of the logging in old-growth forests is conducted legally, with government-issued permits. However, this legal framework often overlooks the ecological significance of these forests, leading to substantial environmental degradation.

- **Illegal Logging:** While exact figures are challenging to determine, there are instances where logging occurs without proper authorization, especially in areas designated for protection or awaiting conservation status.

## Ontario's Role

- Forests are being cleared for highways (413, Bradford Bypass), urban sprawl, and resource extraction. [Ontario must act to prevent hidden deforestation, environmental group says | CBC News](#).
- Environmental education has been weakened, and forest protection policies rolled back.
- Logging in Ontario's north continues with limited consent from Indigenous communities. [Logging in Ontario's boreal forest unsustainable, study finds | The Narwhal](#)
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## The Bottom Line

Canada and Ontario may not lead in hectares lost, but they are key players in weakening global forest protection norms, and must be held accountable for the climate damage that follows. Canada markets itself as a forest steward, but exports the climate and biodiversity damage abroad. Ontario's policies are increasingly tied to short-term development at the cost of long-term ecological stability.

## Implications

The continued logging of old-growth forests, whether legal or illegal, has profound implications:

- **Carbon Emissions:** Old-growth forests act as significant carbon sinks. Their removal releases substantial amounts of carbon dioxide, exacerbating climate change.
- **Biodiversity Loss:** These forests are home to diverse species. Logging disrupts habitats, leading to declines in biodiversity.
- **Indigenous Rights:** Many old-growth forests are located on Indigenous lands. Logging without proper consultation infringes upon Indigenous rights and sovereignty.

Addressing the challenges of old-growth forest logging requires a reevaluation of current policies and practices, emphasizing conservation, sustainable management, and respect for Indigenous rights.

## WILDFIRES

### Causes

#### Natural Causes

- Lightning strikes
- Volcanic eruptions
- Extreme heat and drought



#### Human Causes (Most Common)

- Campfires left unattended
- Cigarettes thrown on the ground
- Burning trash or debris
- Arson (fires started on purpose)
- Sparks from cars, trains, or power lines
- Equipment like chainsaws or lawnmowers

#### Climate-Related Causes

- Hotter temperatures
- Dry air and strong winds
- Long droughts caused by climate change

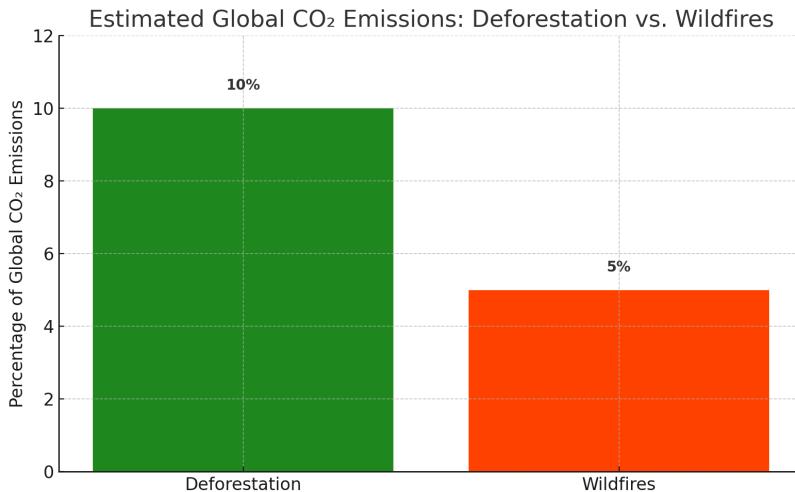
### Which Causes More Global Warming?

Factor	Deforestation	Wildfires
CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	✓ Around 10% of global emissions	⚠ Around 5%, but rising
Human-caused?	✓ Mostly caused by farming, logging, roads	⚠ Many wildfires are made worse by human activity
Destroys habitat?	✓ Very destructive, long-term loss	⚠ Can destroy habitat, but some forests recover
Long-term impact	✗ Trees are gone for decades or forever	⚠ Some forests can regrow, but not always

### Tied to climate change?

Directly worsens climate change

Made worse by hotter, drier weather caused by climate change



Deforestation is generally worse for the climate because it's long-lasting, often planned, and linked to industries that keep polluting.

Wildfires are also serious, and climate change is making them worse — but they can be more random, and some forests can bounce back.

### What You Can Do Personally

- Respect the rules and be very vigilant with fire and equipment when camping, hiking and on trails.
- Buy less, choose better: Avoid products linked to deforestation (like palm oil, soy-fed beef, and cheap paper or wood).
- Choose certified products: Look for labels like FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) or Rainforest Alliance.
- Eat more plant-based meals: Reduces demand for land used to raise livestock or grow animal feed.
- Use recycled and reusable materials: Especially paper and wood.

### Take Action as a Citizen

- Support Indigenous land rights: Indigenous communities are the best protectors of forests.
- Push for stronger laws: Contact elected officials to demand deforestation-free supply chains, protected forests, and climate policies.
- Oppose harmful projects: Speak out against new highways, pipelines, or mines that cut through forests.

- **Support lawsuits and climate justice cases:** Like *Mathur v. Ontario*—they hold governments accountable.

## Support Groups Making a Difference

- **Donate to or volunteer with climate or forest protection organizations**
- **Raise awareness:** Share trusted info on deforestation and climate links with your network, family, friends and neighbours.

## Educate and Organize

- **Host or attend local events** about forest protection and community tree plantings.
- **Bring it to schools, churches, clubs** - anywhere people can learn.
- **Use social media** to amplify forest issues and push for change.

Stopping deforestation is about changing systems **and** daily choices — and everyone has a role to play.