

This case study is one of several produced by the **CLARA** network to coincide with the publication of the IPCC Special Report on Land. We're showcasing **CLARA** member climate solutions which demonstrate the **rights-based, low-emission development pathways** needed for reducing emissions while **promoting livelihoods** and **ecosystem integrity**.

Primary Forests Must be Protected and Restored For a Safe Climate

Wild Heritage calls for increased global forest protection and ecological restoration to tackle the interlinked climate and biodiversity crises



Organisations and individuals involved

Wild Heritage, Government of Costa Rica, Australian Rainforest Conservation Society

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Location

Global

FORESTS STORE MORE CARBON than is currently in the atmosphere (and more than known oil and coal reserves combined). Forests are a critical component of climate solutions because there is enough carbon in forests that if burned or otherwise released into the atmosphere, it would trigger dangerous warming, even if we eliminate fossil fuel emissions. However, less well known is that primary forests store far more carbon than production forests or plantations (30-70% more than production forests). In addition, as a result of their ecosystem integrity, primary forest carbon stocks are also the most stable and most resilient forest carbon stocks on the planet.

The combination of larger carbon stocks and greater stability makes primary forests by far the safest, lowest risk forest carbon investment. It is essential to ensure that climate finance is directed to maintaining primary forests free of disturbance. It is also essential to allow as much degraded natural forest to recover to a primary forest condition as possible. Even small fragments of primary forest are vitally important, as they provide the ingredients for natural regeneration of forests. Most natural regeneration of tropical forests occurs within a few hundred meters of primary forest.

Primary forest protection provides the most robust climate mitigation and adaptation outcomes and provides a cost effective and efficient pathway to deal with the two great crises facing life on Earth—the Climate Crisis and Biodiversity Crisis. It is no longer possible to ignore the linkages between these crises.

A range of activities are compatible with primary forest protection—from protected areas to indigenous and community conservation to payments for ecosystem service schemes. It is vital that climate funding shifts to primary forest protection, ecological restoration and natural regeneration. Improved logging practices or plantations will not generate the mitigation necessary to avoid 1.5°C of warming.

Testimony

Cyril Kormos, Executive Director, Wild Heritage

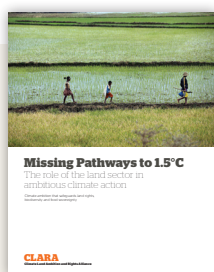
“Primary forests not only store the largest forest carbon stocks by far, these carbon stocks are also the longest-lived, most resistant and most resilient. Protecting primary forests is therefore the highest priority nature-based solution!”

Dr. Russell Mittermeier, Global Wildlife Conservation

“Primary forests maximize carbon stocks precisely because they still retain all of their biodiversity, or in other words, because they have “ecosystem integrity”. The biodiversity and climate change crises are therefore closely linked—we can’t solve either unless we protect the ecosystem integrity of primary forests.”

‘Missing Pathways’ to climate action

Last year, CLARA published the report ‘Missing Pathways’, identifying areas of global mitigation ambition rooted in land rights, restoration, agroecology, and food system change.



This example follows ‘Missing Pathways’ to climate action by...

Promoting the protection and regeneration of primary forests, in both their ecological richness and cultural importance for many local and indigenous peoples, as well as their ability to sequester and securely store carbon for centuries to millennia. With biodiversity decline (and resultant decline in ecosystem integrity) comes increased loss of ecosystem carbon stocks to the atmosphere and increased risk of further loss. This example focuses on the need for primary forest protection and ecological restoration through support for rights and livelihoods for local communities, and finance directed to non-industrial development pathways, ecosystem services, and protected areas of all governance types.

Transformational change in land management starts with respecting rights.



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