

Life Is Hanging By A Thread **By Jane Goodall**



Recently the International Panel on Climate Change issued a report predicting an alarming array of impacts of climate change around the globe, including drought, floods, lower crop yields, threatened food security, wildfire and ocean acidification. It seems that no living thing in this web of life we are a part of will be unaffected by climate change. As a primatologist, I am particularly concerned by the prediction that 20 percent to 30 percent of species will face increased risk of extinction.

We know that a majority of the world's species live in rainforests, from many flagship species like elephants, tigers and chimpanzees to smaller species like insects and algae. Some play a role in curing human diseases, or may in the future.

These forests are threatened both by large-scale commercial exploitation and by rapidly increasing numbers of poor people who are destroying the forests to make charcoal or to open the land for subsistence agriculture. Some of the other effects of climate change predicted by the IPCC, such as drought and food insecurity, will only exacerbate the plight of these people.

A relatively new danger to these forests is the growing enthusiasm for biofuels. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, forest blocks that were previously reserved for conservation or sustainable forestry are being converted to sugar cane and palm oil plantations, whose output will be used as fuel for ethanol or biodiesel plants.

The irony of cutting down forests for biofuels is that forests store a significant fraction of the world's stocks of carbon. If these carbon-capturing trees are felled and burned — whether as firewood or to clear land — the oxidation of their carbon will release billions more tons of carbon dioxide.

The tropical rainforests of Africa, Latin America and South Asia are particularly important in this regard.

Tropical deforestation contributes 2 billion tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere annually, compared to approximately 6 billion tons from burning fossil fuels. Saving these forests would not only prevent the release of carbon currently stored in them, but it also would allow them to continue absorbing carbon in the future.

While population pressures cannot be quickly reversed, nor the businesses of logging and mining phased out, there is much we can do to save these forests. The core of a successful strategy involves working not only with national leaders, but also, and most important, with local people to raise living standards, especially in the areas near the forest preserves. By providing technical assistance to farmers to raise their incomes, education to young people, healthcare to families and economic investments in ecotourism, these rural communities can become the custodians of the forests, not their destroyers.

These strategies have other benefits as well: They promote local stability and security. Rural prosperity, education and effective public-health systems serve as natural defenses against outbreaks of pandemic disease, war, terrorism and political instability. By working with local people to save forests, we help to create stable communities that will surely improve global security.

The governments of the United States and other developed nations bear a special responsibility to promote these programs. Not only are Western nations the greatest consumers of oil, timber and other carbon-generating industries, they have the wealth to bring about change in poor developing countries. Relatively small increases in aid directed toward rural community development, especially through microcredit programs, can have an extraordinary impact on saving wilderness areas, including forests, and the array of life forms they sustain.

Only a few centuries ago, each of the developed nations on the continents of Europe, Asia and North America destroyed their own forests and many of the species inhabiting them in an unsustainable scramble toward wealth. Now only remnant forests remain on those continents.

The developed nations have an opportunity to enable developing nations to avoid making the same mistakes. By investing more in environmentally sustainable development, we can save valuable species, help prevent the escalation of global warming, and increase global security. Helping to preserve the forests of developing nations is in our interests, as well as theirs.

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Jane Goodall, Ph.D., is the founder of the Jane Goodall Institute <http://www.janegoodall.org> and a U.N. "Messenger of Peace."



After Homo Sapiens, What Next?

Pamela J. Peck, Ph.D., Cultural Anthropologist

"Any crisis is essentially a crisis of perception . . . It derives from the fact that we are trying to apply the concept of an outdated world view - the mechanistic world view of science - to a reality that can no longer be understood in terms of those concepts. We live today in a globally inter-connected world in which biological, psychological, social and environmental phenomena are all interdependent." Fritjof Capra, Physicist

http://www.paep.ca/en/CIYL/2002/doc/peck_homo_sapiens.pdf



Understanding Evolution

http://www.paep.ca/en/CIYL/2004/doc/ucberkeley_evolution.pdf



Global Bioethics

<http://www.paep.ca/en/CIYL/2006/doc/Global%20Bioethics%202006.pdf>



Science for Whom? The Role of Women in the Next Millennium

Ann B. Shteir, Ph.D., Professor, Humanities/School of Women's Studies, York University

http://www.paep.ca/en/CIYL/2002/doc/shteir_scienceforwhom.pdf

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Interview with Edgar Morin
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Our Planet
United Nations Environment Programme's magazine
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