

The Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes Integrated Program

The Issue

In the tropics, primary forests, or Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs),¹ store more carbon than any other forests. It is estimated that forest ecosystems soak up to a third of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, 84% coming from old and primary forests.² These forests are also irreplaceable in terms of biodiversity and are critical for other ecosystem services (water), and Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The conservation and sustainable management of the remaining IFLs has become crucial to combat global environmental degradation before it is too late. IFLs are also the cheapest solution to the twin crisis of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Remaining IFLs comprise only 20% of tropical forest area. Only 22% of intact forests are found in Protected Area Categories.³ Primary forests in the most extended tropical biomes continue to be lost or degraded at an alarming rate. In addition, the continuation of the carbon sink's role of IFLs is not guaranteed due to climate change and deforestation.

The drivers of deforestation and forest degradation are well known. Some depend on local specificities, including agriculture, logging, mining, and infrastructure development. These drivers are fueled by poverty, policy incoherence, weak capacities, or industrial businesses.

The Integrated Solution

The Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes Integrated Program aims to maintain the integrity of globally important and critical tropical primary forests. This, in turn, will maximize multiple global environment benefits, notably related to carbon and biodiversity.

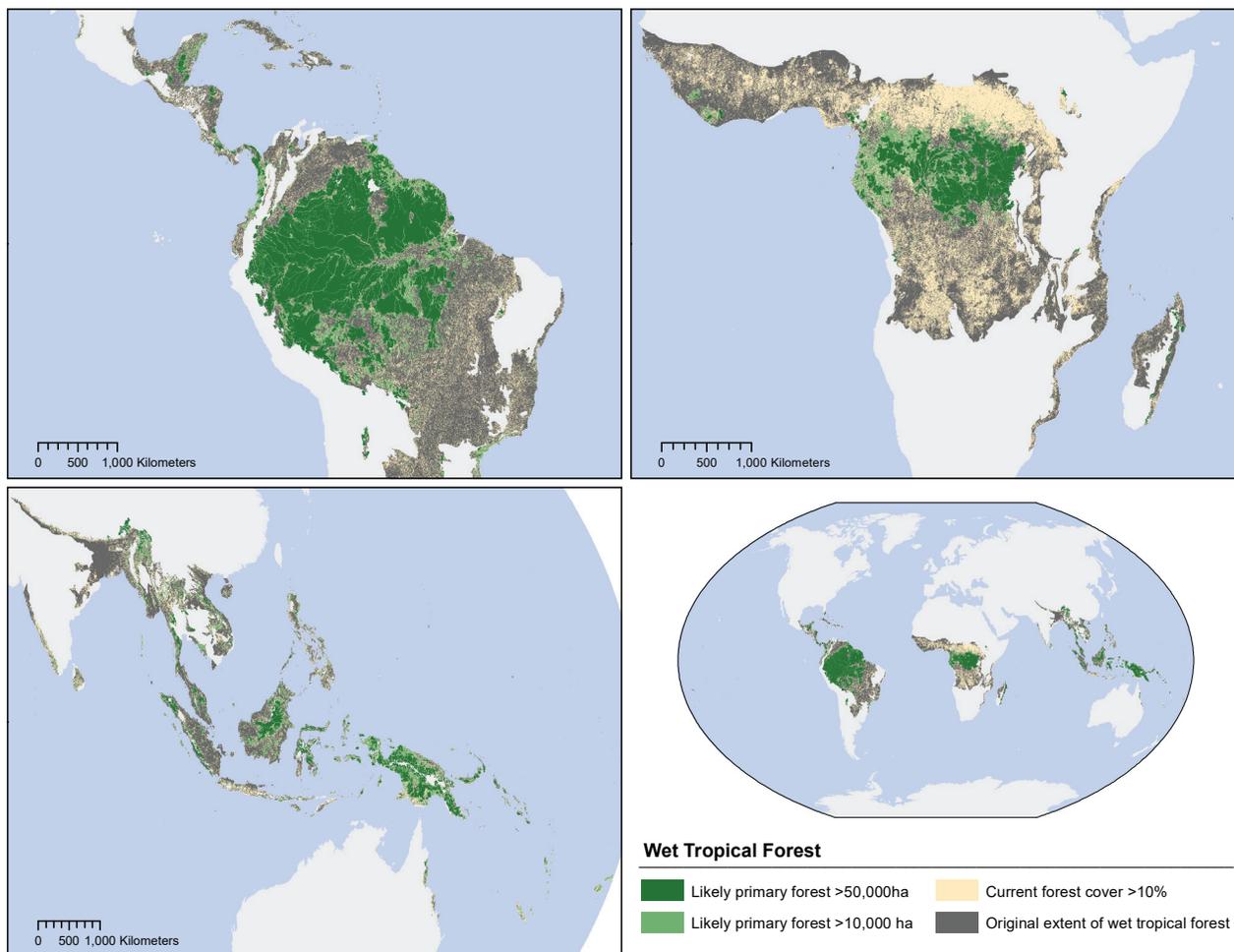
The Amazon and the Congo Basin are the two largest blocks of tropical forests in the world.⁴ These two basins are globally critical for biodiversity and carbon storage. They provide livelihoods and subsistence to communities that rely on forests and agriculture for their survival

Beyond the large intact biomes, some regions are also home to smaller patches of primary forests. These are vital as biodiversity refugia and can serve as a cornerstone for ecological restoration efforts in fragmented landscapes. The Indo-Malaya region, Papua New Guinea, Mesoamerica, and the Guinean forests of West Africa include such vital primary forests and are therefore also targeted by the program.

Expected Outcomes

At the global level, the program will contribute to better conservation of primary forests, providing information and visibility of IFLs in the climate and biodiversity agendas. It will give particular attention to their definition, mapping, sustainable management, and financing. Several platforms should be targeted to catalyze the engagement of multiple stakeholders at global, regional, national, and local levels. This would enable the needed changes in governance models, policies, financial frameworks, information, and social systems. Beyond governments, the targeted stakeholders should include the private sector and various platforms involved in forest protection, sustainable use, and finance.

At the sub-regional level, countries will be invited to work together to increase and strengthen the protection



Map by Hugh S. & Mackey B. (Griffith University), from various sources: Turubanova et al. (2013), Potapov et al. (2017) & FAO Global Ecological Zones (2012).

and governance of IFLs. They will tackle the drivers of deforestation at the landscape and jurisdictional levels. This could include, for instance, developing land use planning instruments at various levels and finding innovative ways to promote integration. Beyond the establishment and improved management of protected areas, the program will consider other effective area-based conservation measures.

Countries will have the opportunity to develop Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), corridors, and coordinated landscape management to improve connectivity at the transboundary or regional level.

The roles and empowerment of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as marginalized groups including women, will be central. This will require robust safeguard systems.

The Global Environment Facility is the world’s largest funder of biodiversity protection, nature restoration, pollution reduction, and climate change response in developing countries. **In June 2022, donor governments pledged \$5.33 billion to the GEF for its next four year operating period (GEF-8). Much of the funding will be delivered through a set of 11 integrated programs that address multiple environmental threats at once.**

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- 1 Potapov et al. (2017). The last frontiers of wilderness: tracking loss of intact forest landscapes from 2000 to 2013. *Science Advances*, 2017; 3:e1600821.
- 2 Funk et al (2019). Securing the climate benefits of stable forests, *Climate Policy*, 19:7, 845-860.
- 3 Mackey et al. (2015). Policy Options for the World’s Primary Forests in Multilateral Environmental Agreements, *Conservation Letters*, 8(2), 139-147.
- 4 UNEP (2021). Emissions Gap Report 2021: The Heat Is On – A World of Climate Promises Not Yet Delivered. UNEP Nairobi.