

Declaration on Intact Forests in the 21st Century

In June 2018, scientists, practitioners and members of the public gathered at Magdalen College, University of Oxford, to discuss strategies for protecting the world's remaining intact forests. The meeting defined intact forests as 'natural forests free from significant anthropogenic degradation'. Degradation reduces biodiversity, ecological function and the delivery of ecosystem services, and can be caused by industrial logging and other extractive industries, fragmentation by roads and agriculture, over-hunting and altered fire and flood regimes, among other pressures.

Many intact forests represent the bio-cultural heritage of indigenous and traditional peoples who have customary rights to these areas, and whose traditional management systems have often provided effective protection to them.

In the meeting the latest science was reviewed related to defining and mapping intact forests, their many values and the threats they face. We then discussed the management options, financial incentives and policy interventions available for maintaining intact forests into the future.

We hereby RECOGNISE that:

- 1) Intact forests provide a diverse array of values to society, including carbon storage and sequestration, production of atmospheric moisture, climate regulation, watershed protection, the livelihoods and survival of traditional cultures, the maintenance of human health and the protection of biodiversity;
- 2) Intact forests have intrinsic value in harbouring the inherited biological wealth of our planet and play a fundamental, irreplaceable role in supporting its healthy functioning; and
- 3) The protection of intact forests should be seen as one of a set of urgent and complementary global priorities for action on forests, which also include preventing deforestation and supporting forest restoration, protection of other forests important for biodiversity, and ensuring the sustainable use of forests designated for production;

We WELCOME:

- 1) Commitments by national and sub-national governments to maintain intact forests;
- 2) The adoption of measures to maintain intact forests, such as protected areas and indigenous territories recognized by legal or other means, spatial planning at national and sub-national levels, and mechanisms to reduce threats from commercial activities;
- 3) The use of climate finance, biodiversity finance and other forms of national and international funding to support measures to protect intact forests; and
- 4) The collaboration of governments, the private sector, civil society, local communities and the research community to develop tools and criteria to identify, maintain and monitor intact forest.

Despite these positive steps we are CONCERNED that:

- 1) Less than 20% of the world's forests are intact and this is declining at more than 0.7% per year, a rate which has accelerated in recent years;

- 2) Amidst the necessary attention that is given to frontiers of deforestation, the extensive but often less visible degradation of intact forests is being neglected;
- 3) Intact forests are insufficiently addressed by current policies and incentive mechanisms, with actions intended to address the drivers of degradation so far being inadequate to protect them; and
- 4) Globally, there is still insufficient policy focus on, and political support for, ownership and management of intact forests by the people who live in them, particularly indigenous and traditional peoples, many of whom face ongoing threats, harassment and other human rights abuses.

Therefore, by this Declaration, we CALL for:

- 1) All stakeholders to recognize the special importance of intact forests for the achievement of a wide range of environmental and social goals, and the need to minimise their loss and to avoid forest degradation more broadly.
- 2) The scientific community to work with communities and other stakeholders to refine and enhance existing frameworks for measuring and mapping intact forests, and improving understanding of their multiple values and vulnerabilities;
- 3) Greater attention be paid to the potential role of intact forests within international policy frameworks, including the UN Conventions on Climate Change and Biological Diversity;
- 4) National and local stakeholders, including indigenous and traditional peoples and local communities, supported by the international community, to work together to ensure the creation and implementation of equitably designed and effectively managed strategies for maintaining intact forests;
- 5) International policy makers and funding bodies to establish strong incentives and support for national governments, local communities and others to secure the immediate and lasting conservation of intact forest areas in their nations;
- 6) The business sector, including private and public finance institutions, to establish more effective safeguards and due diligence mechanisms to prevent the loss of intact forest, whilst also scaling up models of sustainable investment that protect intact forests; and
- 7) All stakeholders to respect human rights across all sectors of society, including the tenure rights of traditional forest peoples, when implementing these recommendations.