

FORESTETHICS >> Endangered Forest Overview

WHAT ARE ENDANGERED FORESTS?

Endangered Forests are the most valuable forests on the globe, forests that would be irreparably harmed by industrial resource extraction. In practical terms this means these forests are “NO GO” and “NO BUY” forests. These forests comprise a large proportion of the world’s remaining old-growth, primary and ancient forests in tropical, temperate and boreal zones.

These forests should be protected from industrial-scale resource extraction so that they may continue to provide the many goods and services they supply in their natural state, and to maintain biological diversity in forest ecosystems.

The definitions of Endangered Forests are meant as a tool and guidance for consumers of wood and paper products. The protection of Endangered Forests complements certification of logging operations under the Forest Stewardship Council.

THERE ARE FOUR CATEGORIES OF ENDANGERED FORESTS:

- Intact forest landscape mosaics,
- Naturally rare forest types,
- Forest types that have been made rare due to human activity, and
- Other forests that are ecologically critical for the protection of biological diversity.

WHERE ARE ENDANGERED FORESTS?

All forested regions of the world contain Endangered Forests. While the definition of Endangered Forests has been drafted and is currently being readied for extensive peer review, maps are only under development. Until scientists agree upon precise maps, buyers and producers of wood products must adopt the precautionary principle and refrain from further fragmentation of potential Endangered Forests.

The majority of intact (frontier and near-frontier forests), i.e., large areas of undeveloped forests that retain their natural functioning, remain in Canada (25%), Russia, (26%) the Amazon basin (~21%), Central Africa (~5%), Alaska (2%), Papua New Guinea (1%), Chile (1%) and Indonesia (4%). Only 20% of frontier forests remain today globally.

Naturally rare forest types include interior temperate rainforests in British Columbia, Canada, and the native araucaria forests of Chile. Anthropogenically rare forest types (i.e., forest types that have been significantly reduced in their natural range by human activity) predominate in the US and many other highly populated regions of the world. Examples include remaining natural areas of longleaf pine and Mississippi Lowlands Forests of the Southeastern US.

HOW WERE THE ENDANGERED FORESTS DEFINITIONS DEVELOPED?

Representatives of ForestEthics, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Greenpeace, the World Resources Institute and the Rainforest Action Network consulted with a broad array of stakeholders to draft the first Endangered Forest Definitions, released in April 2001. A second draft and maps based on the definitions are being developed.

HOW DO I TAKE ACTION ON ENDANGERED FORESTS?

The Endangered Forest definitions are meant as a guide to buyers of forest products. They help buyers understand if a region has fully protected its forests, and guide buyers away from purchases sourced from forests that should be maintained in their natural state. We advise buyers to consult with ForestEthics, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Greenpeace, the World Resources Institute or the Rainforest Action Network on how to take immediate and long-term action to eliminate purchases of Endangered Forest products.

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