

Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010

Main report



Primary forests account for 36 percent of forest area – but have decreased by more than 40 million hectares since 2000

On a global average, more than one-third of all forest is primary forest, i.e. forest of native species where there are no clearly visible indications of human activities and the ecological processes have not been significantly disturbed (Figure 7). Primary forests, in particular tropical moist forests, include the most species-rich, diverse terrestrial ecosystems. The decrease of primary forest area, 0.4 percent annually over a ten-year period, is largely due to reclassification of primary forest to ‘other naturally regenerated forest’ because of selective logging and other human interventions.

The area of planted forest is increasing and now accounts for 7 percent of total forest area

Forests and trees are planted for many purposes and make up an estimated 7 percent of the total forest area, or 264 million hectares. Between 2000 and 2010, the area of planted forest increased by about 5 million hectares per year (Figure 8). Most of this

FIGURE 7
Characteristics of the world’s forests, 2010

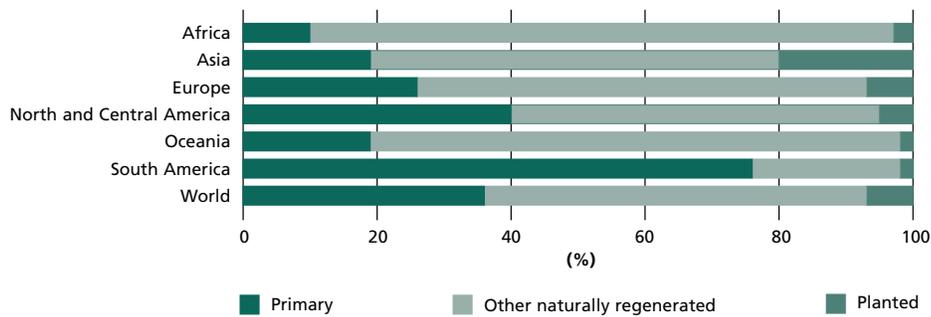
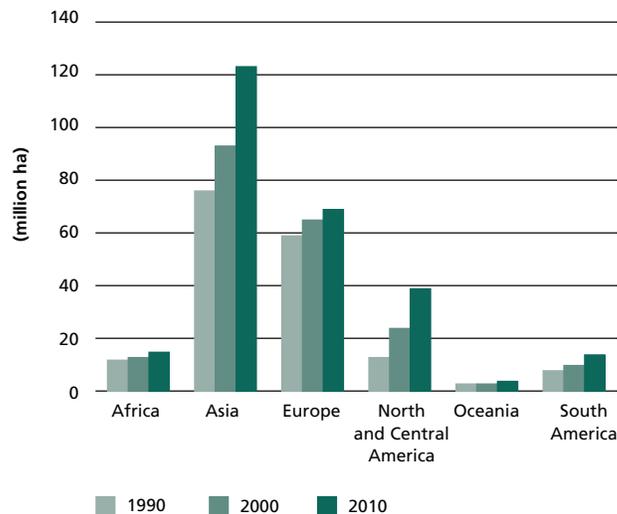


FIGURE 8
Trends in area of planted forests, 1990–2010



Legally established protected areas cover an estimated 13 percent of the world's forests

National parks, game reserves, wilderness areas and other legally established protected areas cover more than 10 percent of the total forest area in most countries and regions (Figure 11). The primary function of these forests may be the conservation of biological diversity, the protection of soil and water resources, or the conservation of cultural heritage. The area of forest within a protected area system has increased by 94 million hectares since 1990. Two-thirds of this increase has been since 2000.

Forest fires are severely underreported at the global level

While some forest ecosystems depend on fire for their regeneration, in others forest fires can be devastating and also frequently cause loss of property and human life. On average, 1 percent of all forests were reported to be significantly affected each year by forest fires. However, the area of forest affected by fires was severely underreported, with information missing from many countries, especially in Africa. Less than 10 percent of all forest fires are prescribed burning; the rest are classified as wildfires.

Insect pests and diseases, natural disasters and invasive species are causing severe damage in some countries

Outbreaks of forest insect pests damage some 35 million hectares of forest annually, primarily in the temperate and boreal zone. The mountain pine beetle has devastated more than 11 million hectares of forest in Canada and the western United States of America since the late 1990s – an unprecedented outbreak exacerbated by higher winter temperatures. Severe storms, blizzards and earthquakes have also damaged large areas of forest since 2000. Woody invasive species are of particular concern in small island developing states, where they threaten the habitat of endemic species. Information availability and quality continues to be poor for most of these disturbances.

Thirty percent of the world's forests are primarily used for production of wood and non-wood forest products

Close to 1.2 billion hectares of forest are managed primarily for the production of wood and non-wood forest products. An additional 949 million hectares (24 percent) are designated for multiple use – in most cases including the production of wood and non-wood forest products. The area designated primarily for productive purposes has decreased by more than 50 million hectares since 1990 as forests have been designated for other purposes. The area designated for multiple use has increased by 10 million hectares in the same period.

FIGURE 11
Percentage of forest area in protected areas by region, 2010

