



Source name

The Hill Times (Ottawa, ON)

Source type

Press • Newspapers

Periodicity

Bi-Weekly or Tri-weekly

Geographical coverage

National

Origin

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Opinion

What does the COP26 agreement to stop or reduce deforestation mean for Canada?

Madhur Anand

p. 26



Canada’s commitment to end deforestation by 2030 is complicated by the fact that deforestation is driven by a growing global population, agricultural production, and increasing per-capita food consumption.

Recently, more than 100 world leaders attending the COP26 climate sum-mit have promised to end deforestation by 2030, Canada among them. While this commitment shows promise, it will be challenging to achieve.

Canada is rich in forests, with over 347 million hectares and approximately nine per cent of the world’s forests. Canada does not lose a lot of forests to deforestation nationally; only less than half of one per cent of Canada’s total forest area (around 34,300 ha per year [2018]). However, this is complicated by the definition of the term “deforestation,” which, according to Natural Resources Canada, means a permanent change in land cover from forest to other land uses, such as agriculture or urban development, but does not include areas of forest harvest.

To be clear, while Canada has signed this pledge, it does not indicate a pledge to cease or even reduce their timber harvest, even in critical old growth areas

Positive change and leadership on Canada’s part will involve not just focusing on the forest sector here, but all sectors that involve the import of products that result in deforestation elsewhere, says Madhur Anand. Photograph courtesy of Pixabay

such as the Fairy Creek stand. These old-growth forests thus require protection by measures other than this new agreement. Replanting harvested forests may not ensure carbon neutrality, as is assumed to be the goal, since the definition of deforestation is limited to just land-use change. It should be noted that Canada was not among the five countries who signed a pledge to provide \$1.7-billion in support for Indigenous People’s conservation of forests and land rights. This is despite the importance and need to look at interweaving Indigenous values and ways of knowing into conservation and land management.

Canada’s commitment to end deforestation by 2030 is further complicated by the fact that deforestation is driven by a growing global population, agricultural production, and increasing per-capita food consumption. Our research into the impacts land-use changes indicates that increases in global food consumption during the past five decades are greatly attributable to the westernization of diets in developing countries. While con-

© 2021 The Hill Times (Ottawa, ON). All rights reserved. The present document and its usage are protected under international copyright laws and conventions.



sidering and combating the indirect effects of deforestation, Canadian policy-makers need to be aware that our biggest impacts might not be at home.

In addition to pledging to end deforestation by 2030, Canada was also a member of The Global Forest Finance Pledge, committing to “provide support for climate mitigation and adaptation and to help address the systemic drivers of forest loss, and enable the conservation, sustainable management and restoration of forests in ODA eligible countries.”

One of the major systemic drivers of forest loss is the need to feed growing populations, with our global food consumption patterns relying too much on converting lands where forests naturally grow into areas for grazing cattle, or growing crops such as palm, soy, or for pulp production. While we may not be converting much of Canada’s forest to agricultural lands, by having high demand for foods and goods that do, Canada is indirectly responsible for forest loss.

For me, what is key is that this is being seen as a global issue. It’s not enough just to protect our own forests because we depend on forests (or the land they occupy) elsewhere for food and other products. So, the fact that trade is included in this deal is essential. Positive change and leadership on Canada’s part will involve not just focussing on the forest sector here, but all sectors that involve the import of products that result in deforestation elsewhere (agriculture, mining etc.). It is essential that Canadian decision makers hold to the goal of this pledge, to ensure that our forests are not simply used for ‘deforestation credits’ elsewhere, but that real change is made

to ensure that forests are thriving.

Like many wicked environmental problems (e.g., climate change impacts, habitat and biodiversity loss, emerging infectious diseases and invasive species) we need to have global collaboration.

Madhur Anand is the director of the Guelph Institute for Environmental Research at the University of Guelph.

The Hill Times