
[Comments on WWF's "Forests for life" campaign](#)

We have received the following comments on WWF's campaign from Paul Romeijn, Director of Treemail (E-mail: info@treemail.nl, Web: <http://www.treemail.nl>). We believe that this is an important contribution to the forest debate and that it is useful to share it with our readers. These are the comments:

An international campaign to increase the proportion of forests under protection, to at least ten percent of the forest surface in each country, has been launched by the World Wildlife Fund: the FORESTS FOR LIFE campaign. This initiative has involved HRH Prince Philip, who has personally and directly asked heads of states around the world to join in.

According to WWF's advertising material:

"Since the launch of WWF's Forests For Life Campaign, 20 countries have responded to WWF's call..."

"...it is ironic that it is WWF who has achieved more in six months by encouraging these governments to take responsibility for their forests than the entire inter-governmental process has over the last five years."

"Recent research shows that over half of the world's forests have already disappeared, and that 94 per cent of the remaining forests are unprotected"

The conservation and sustainable management of most of the remaining forest heritage is certainly one of the most important priorities of humanity. The attempt to encourage people and countries to increase the area of forest under protection is commendable, and deserves everyone's support.

Nonetheless, this does not justify the use of distorted or misleading information to achieve such a goal. Nor does it imply that the definition of an arbitrary figure for the minimum amount of forests that should be under protection, such as the 10% in question, is an acceptable, or even convenient, strategy.

WWF does not provide any justification for the definition of its 10% target. I have often discussed this subject with some of the key people involved within the organization. My impression remains that it is simply an arbitrary figure that appears achievable. But it lacks scientific or even statistical justification.

Whether this is a justifiable approach is questionable. In an analysis of the forestry sector for the Amazon Cooperation Treaty in 1993, we found that it would be not only possible, but necessary, to set aside at least half of remaining Amazon forests in a network of protected areas, with an additional 20 percent under management for the production of timber and non-wood products.

It could also be argued that the amount of forests under protection should be conceived as part of a permanent national forest heritage, covering at least 20 or 30 percent of the national surface of each

country. But such an approach would leave many countries, including some European countries, in a compromising position.

One possible undesirable consequence of the 10% target proposed by WWF is that some countries may limit themselves to it. WWF, Buckingham Palace, and the rest of the figures behind this goal, would then be forced to recognize such decisions as acceptable, investing such countries with a green seal of approval. I wonder whether this is a desirable, or even convenient, objective.

In any case, the international campaign launched by WWF is based on two assumptions:

* Ten percent is a minimum acceptable surface for the forest surface that should be set aside under protection.

* The present proportion of global forests under protection is six percent (6%).

Global Forest Cover

The total surface covered by forests around the world is, according to FAO, in the order of 34 million square kilometers (1990 figures). We would then need roughly 3 and a half million hectares of forests under protection worldwide, to satisfy the numerical objective in question.

According to FAO, the total surface of protected areas, including but not restricted to forest areas, was in 1990 some 8 million km², of which nearly 60% were totally protected (IUCN categories I and II, and 40 percent partially protected (IUCN categories III, IV and V).

According to the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) the total surface of forests worldwide is almost 40 million km², based on its 1997 assessment, as published at its web site. The total area of *forests* under protection was, also according to WCMC, 4 million km², equivalent to 10 percent of the total forest surface.

WCMC refers to forests under protection included in protected areas, under IUCN categories I thru VI (see WCMC forest maps).

One tempting conclusion from these figures could be that half of all protected areas world-wide are covered by forests. The other could be that there is no need for an international campaign to set aside at least 10% of forests under protection, for such figure has already been achieved at the global level.

But WWF insists that "...94 per cent of the remaining forests are unprotected". The area of forest under protections would then need to be approximately doubled.

Where is the difference, and how is this difference explained or presented to the general public, to which WWF's campaign is mainly addressed?

The statistical information presented by WWF at its FORESTS FOR LIFE CAMPAIGN website is unfortunately plagued with algebraic mistakes. It is significant, though, that the maps and tables found there also carry the WCMC logo, and it is explained at the foot of each table, that the information presented there was "...Compiled for the WWF 'Forests for Life' Campaign by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre".

Discriminatory Approach

WWF makes an obscure and discriminatory approach to the figures on the proportion of forest under protection, upon which the campaign is based.

For northern countries, the figure is based on the total area of "forest and other woodlands", taken from the FAO "Forest Resource Assessment 1990". Nonetheless, FAO does provide figures for the area of *forests* in each of these countries. They are available in the same document where WWF obtained the figure for "forest and other woodlands". There is no explanation for this awkward approach, but the consequence is highly significant, resulting in major reductions in the proportion of forests under protection.

For Canada, for example, the total forest area is 24.7 million km², but the area of "forest and other woodlands" is almost 45.3 million km². Using the latter figure as a reference point, the proportion of forests under protection gets reduced by almost half, making the need to increase the area under protection look more urgent. In the case of the US, this procedure ends up in a reduction of the proportion of forests under protection by about a third. This is the approach taken by WWF.

On the other hand, WWF's figures for tropical countries are not based on the area of "forest and other woodlands", as in the case of northern countries. This might have been expected, for the sake of consistency and comparability. Not is it based on the area of "forests" provided by FAO. It is based on the area of *natural* forests, as published by FAO in its "Forest Resources Assessment 1990".

In principle this is not a major problem, for the difference between the total and the natural forest surface is not particularly significant for most tropical countries. The objective seems to be to leave out plantations from the calculations.

Fair enough. I personally favor the natural forest surface as the most appropriate base on which to make a case for an increase in the proportion of forests under protection. But if we agree on leaving out plantations from the calculations, why does WWF apply this rule only to tropical countries, and not to industrial countries? Might it be because a large proportion of existing forests in many an industrial country would be classified as plantations?

Should we base these calculations on the natural forest area for all countries, without discrimination, the results might be painfully embarrassing for many European countries. For example, the total forest surface of the UK accounts for about 10% of the national surface. But the surface of natural forests may not reach as much as one percent (1%) of the national surface, even with some stretch of the imagination. This is the home of the President of WWF, Prince Philip, as well as the headquarters of the "Forest for Life" Campaign.

I am not aware of reliable and readily available figures for the natural forest surface of most temperate countries, as is the case for tropical countries. The FAO "Forest Resource Assessment" does not provide such figures. There are justifications for this. Nonetheless, the absence of such figures does not justify the discriminatory approach taken by WWF.

The World Conservation Monitoring Center Figures

Even though WCMC is quoted by WWF as the source of its figures on protected areas, WCMC has gone ahead with the publication of its own numbers on the subject. As mentioned above, in global terms, 10 percent of all forests are already classified by WCMC as "protected forests", for a total of 4

million km². This might seem to deflate the whole purpose of WWF's campaign.

The situation gets even more confusing, and possibly embarrassing, when one looks at regional or national figures:

REGION.....PROTECTED FORESTS % (1)

South America.....	10
Central America.....	10
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	10
Asia/Pacific.....	10
Africa.....	9
North America.....	8
Russia.....	2
Rest of Europe.....	8
All Europe (2).....	3
WORLD	10

(1) This is the amount of protected forests as a proportion of the total forest surface (WCMC)

(2) Including Russia

From this perspective, it seems that all tropical regions have already reached the 10% level of forests under protection, with a small effort pending from Africa. The region that would really need to shape up is the least expected: Continental Europe, with an average of only 3% under protection.

This is, of course, as deceiving a picture as that presented by WWF. A comparative look at some country statistics may be a bit more significant:

PROPORTION OF FORESTS UNDER PROTECTION, ACCORDING TO WWF AND WCMC

COUNTRY.....	WWF	WCMC
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Brazil.....	0.4	5.1
Colombia.....	16.5	10.9
Venezuela.....	31.8	56.2
Ecuador.....	0.2	24.9
Indonesia.....	9.1	21.20
Malaysia.....	4.8	10.83
Canada.....	0.5	7.3
USA.....	20.8	10.1
Germany.....	0.3	24.8
United Kingdom.....	ZERO	20.7
Switzerland.....	1.4	12.6

WWF refers to "forest and other woodlands" for industrial countries, to "natural forests" for tropical countries, and to protected forest areas under IUCN categories I to III.

WCMC refers to the total forest area for all countries, and to IUCN categories I to VI for the protected forest area.

Furthermore, WWF refers to the forest area statistics published by FAO, while WCMC refers to its own forest area statistics. These do not necessarily match. For example, the global figure from FAO is 34 million km², while WCMC says it is 40 million km². For North America (USA plus Canada) the FAO figure for the forest surface is 4.5 million km², while WCMC gives a little bit more: 8.5 million km².

In the comparison above it can be observed that WWF's figures in almost all cases significantly diminish the proportion of forests under protection.

If this is not confusing and frustrating enough, let me just mention that the figures published by WWF in its GLOBAL FOREST REPORT 97 (printed version), highlighting the "Forest for Life Campaign", also highlights that "94 per cent of the remaining forests are unprotected".

But strangely enough, it comes to the same figure based on the surface of "closed forests". Closed forests represent less than half of the total surface of natural forests in tropical Africa, and two thirds of the natural forest surface of tropical Asia.

It is hoped that some other organization will take a closer look at these figures, to provide a more reliable picture of the present state of protected forests worldwide. Much needs to be clarified, including indicators of the effectiveness of protection, and the minimum forest area that should be maintained in each country or region.