Managing logging for biodiversity

Forest management should safeguard biodiversity as well as focusing on harvesting timber, a new report from South East Asia argues. Despite many initiatives such as codes of practice, criteria and indicators and certification schemes, guidelines and standards remain vague and lack quantitative targets.

Illegal logging, poor management and deforestation continue to cause severe environmental damage, including biodiversity losses and climate change. This affects the livelihoods of local communities who depend on forests. Legitimate operators who are trying to manage forests sustainably find it hard to compete with illegally produced timber. However, where forest governance is strengthened, policies to conserve and sustainably manage forests and reduce deforestation become much more effective.

Reduced impact logging (RIL) aims to achieve environmentally sound timber harvesting, and has gained broad acceptance in the tropics. However, RIL guidelines are mainly focused on sustainable timber production and a few environmental aspects such as soil and water, with less concern on plants and wildlife.

A new Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) report makes detailed recommendations to help forest managers using mechanised logging to take account of biodiversity conservation. The recommendations are linked to the different phases of the forestry cycle: planning, infrastructure, logging, post-logging and monitoring biodiversity. The report also covers issues related to hunting, fire, invasive species, domestic animals, traffic and logging and conservation for local people.

The report states that illegal logging, poor management and habitat destruction continue to be a cause for concern in the region, despite logging bans in a number of countries. However, some countries have made progress and in the past 20 years there has been a marked increase in the number of instruments and tools designed to enable, lead to and achieve sustainable forest management.

South East Asia's tropical rainforests contain high levels of biodiversity and fulfill important local and global ecological functions. As well as being a key area for plant and animal conservation, South East Asia also has strong demand for its timber, with a considerable proportion making its way to the EU.

The report's 104 detailed recommendations are based on the assumption that quite small adjustments to day-to-day forestry activities will substantially benefit wildlife in production forests. To ensure that forest biodiversity is managed according to ecological principles, the primary goals are:

1. To maintain large, well-connected forest landscapes (including unlogged areas) containing a range of local forest types, and to maintain the key landscape elements and wildlife resources.
2. To identify the major threats to forest wildlife and take steps to address them.


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