

Saving Rainforests Solution to Saving Polar Ice Caps

In December 2015, news that the ice at the Arctic ice cap was melting sounded an alarm for the whole planet. The temperature on December 30th, 2015 was about 1°C or 33°F. That is slightly above the freezing level and about 28°C (50°F) above average. The question on everyone's mind was, "What can we do to stop the devastating effects of global warming?"

Today, many scientists believe that the answer to fighting climate change and saving the polar ice caps is half a world away, in the tropics. Tropical forest conservation and restoration could become a large part of the solution to the global warming challenge. Reducing carbon emissions, as many of the world's nations have promised to do, is essential. However, it is also necessary to eliminate excess carbon from the atmosphere at the same time. That is exactly what rainforests do. Tropical rainforests can immediately and significantly reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) at a surprisingly low cost. Since rainforests can reduce the effects of global warming the world should step up conservation efforts. The natural regrowth and protection of hundreds of millions of acres of degraded rainforest would result in massive absorption of carbon as the trees grow. While it is crucial that we rely less on fossil fuels, the reality is that rainforest protection can happen much more quickly.

Rainforest conservation also has an economic advantage to fighting global warming. One acre of Amazon rainforest stores up to 180 metric tons of CO₂, but can be protected for just a few dollars. That means for the same cost as one hamburger or a cup of coffee each of us could save an area of forest about the size of four football fields and safely store about 725 metric tons of CO₂. To understand what this means, the annual emissions of a typical passenger vehicle in the United States is less than 4.5 metric tons of CO₂.

Rainforest conservation has additional benefits as well. Rainforests provide the world with a much of its oxygen and fresh water. For example, the Amazon River contains 20% of the world's fresh water and that helps to keep the planet's tropical ecosystems running smoothly. A healthy rainforest also protects animals such as elephants, tigers, orangutans and thousands of other species. In 10 years, rainforest conservation can help seedlings grow as high as 15 meters. This means the rainforests natural bio-diversity will begin to be restored in two to three years.

