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Rainforests 'still at great risk'



Most of the world's managed rainforests are still in great jeopardy with only 5% being treated in a sustainable way, a new report has said.

Each year 12m hectares of the forests are cleared for agriculture and other development, the International Tropical Timber Organisation report says.

Forests will continue to be lost unless there is better management, it adds.

But it also points to many improvements and says an area about the size of Germany is now being well managed.

'Collective failure'

The report surveyed 814 million hectares (two billion acres) of rainforest designated by governments in 33 nations as being under sustainable management.



It says in addition to agriculture and development problems, millions more hectares are being degraded through illegal logging and poor land use.

The report, Status of Tropical Forest Management 2005, says there has been a collective failure to understand that forests can generate

considerable economic value without being destroyed.

In countries like Nigeria and the Philippines there is now relatively little natural forest left, the report says.

In other countries like Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, progress to protect the rainforests has been disrupted by armed conflicts.

Too often, say the authors, government promises to protect these tropical forests have not been matched by actions on the ground.

On the plus side, the report says in countries like Bolivia, Ghana and Brazil notable improvements have been made to develop sustainable practices such as harvesting timber in a way that does not destroy the forest.

Report co-author Duncan Poore said there was "good news" but it was "very fragile".

"It is a starting point. It shows where things ought to go. But there is no knowing if they will," he said.

Another author, Alastair Sarre, said it was a major improvement that 36m hectares of rainforest were now being properly managed compared to less than one million in 1988.