




# Deforestation

"Human-driven and natural loss of trees"





As the world seeks to slow the pace of climate change, preserve wildlife, and support billions of people, trees inevitably hold a major part of the answer. Yet the mass destruction of trees—deforestation—continues, sacrificing the long-term benefits of standing trees for short-term gain.





## General context

Forests still cover about 30 percent of the world's land area, but they are disappearing at an alarming rate. Since 1990, the world has lost 420 million hectares or about a billion acres of forest, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations—mainly in Africa and South America.

We need trees for a variety of reasons, not least of which is that they absorb not only the carbon dioxide that we exhale, but also the heat-trapping greenhouse gases that human activities emit. As those gases enter the atmosphere, global warming increases, a trend scientists now prefer to call climate change.



From 2002 to 2020, there was a total of 64.7Mha humid primary forest lost globally, making up 16% of its total tree cover loss in the same time period. Total area of humid primary forest decreased globally by 6.3% in this time period.





# Why it matters and what can be done

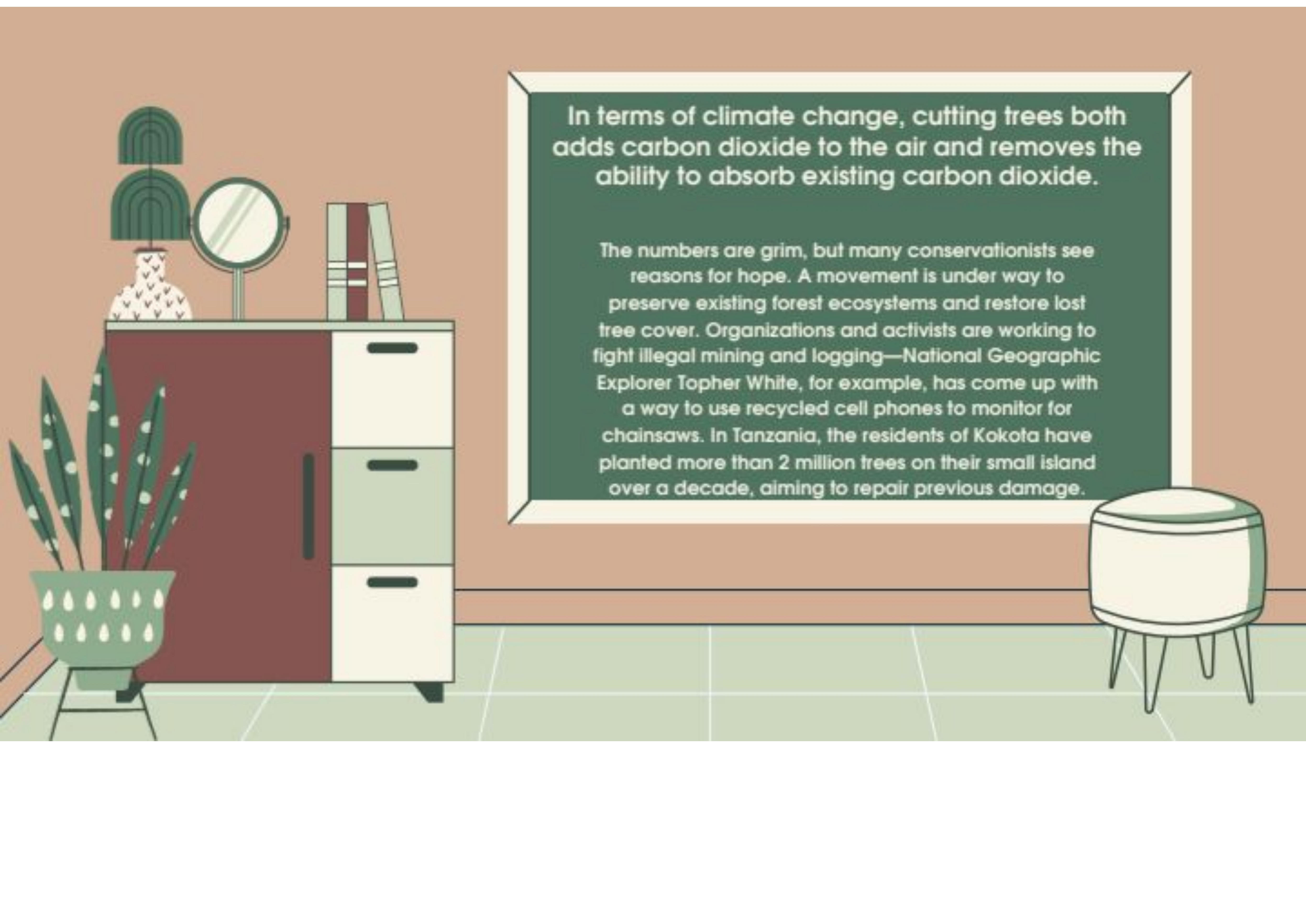
Deforestation affects the people and animals where trees are cut, as well as the wider world. Some 250 million people living in forest and savannah areas depend on them for subsistence and income—many of them among the world's rural poor.



Some 250 million people living in forest and savannah areas depend on them for subsistence and income—many of them among the world's rural poor. Eighty percent of Earth's land animals and plants live in forests, and deforestation threatens species including the orangutan, Sumatran tiger, and many species of birds. Removing trees deprives the forest of portions of its canopy, which blocks the sun's rays during the day and retains heat at night. That disruption leads to more extreme temperature swings that can be harmful to plants and animals.





An illustration of a room with a desk, a plant, and a stool. The desk is dark red with a white drawer unit on the right. On top of the desk are two green umbrellas, a round mirror, and two books. To the left of the desk is a potted plant with green leaves and white spots, sitting on a green stand. To the right of the desk is a white stool with four thin legs. The background is a solid brown color.

In terms of climate change, cutting trees both adds carbon dioxide to the air and removes the ability to absorb existing carbon dioxide.

The numbers are grim, but many conservationists see reasons for hope. A movement is under way to preserve existing forest ecosystems and restore lost tree cover. Organizations and activists are working to fight illegal mining and logging—National Geographic Explorer Topher White, for example, has come up with a way to use recycled cell phones to monitor for chainsaws. In Tanzania, the residents of Kokota have planted more than 2 million trees on their small island over a decade, aiming to repair previous damage.

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