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## **FAO Report Sounds Alarm on High Deforestation Rate in Mexico**

*by LADB Staff*

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A report from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) confirmed a troubling trend in Mexico: the rate of deforestation is among the highest in the world. The FAO report, published on March 13, listed Mexico among the countries whose forested area shrunk significantly during the five-year period between 2000 and 2005. Mexico experienced a decrease in wooded area of 0.4% during the period, following a decline of 0.5% in the 1990s. "The continuous loss of forested surface is a reason for concern even if the percentage is less than in some countries," said the FAO report.

The report said 10 countries account for 80% of the world's primary forests. "In this group, Indonesia, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, and Brazil recorded the greatest losses between 2000 and 2005," said the FAO.

The report noted that 57 countries experienced an increase in wooded area in 2000-2005, while 83 recorded a decline. Regions that are home to some of the wealthier countries North America, Europe, and Asia reported the greatest increases in forested area. In contrast, Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa recorded the greatest losses.

Within the North American region, the loss of forested area in Mexico was a stark contrast to an increase of 0.05% increase in forested area in the US during the five-year period, preceded by a gain of 0.12% in the 1990s. Canada reported virtually no change during both periods.

Former President Vicente Fox's administration sounded the alarm about the rapid rate of deforestation. In a report issued in 2001, the Secretaria del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) said Mexico was losing forests twice as fast as previously estimated as a result of fires, uncontrolled logging, and expansion of farms and ranches (see SourceMex, 2001-12-12).

A more recent report notes that the loss of forests near metropolitan areas is associated with the expansion of cities. Mexico state, adjacent to Mexico City, is losing almost 4,500 hectares of forests annually, reported the state's forestry agency Protectora de Bosques (Probosque). The report said 3,580 ha of forest, about 80% of the total loss, are cut down to make room for residential or agricultural developments or highways.

In contrast, only 448 ha of forests are lost to illegal logging and 224 ha to fires each year. "The common perception is that fires or logging or pests are the cause of deforestation," said Probosque director Jorge Rescala. "In our state, the most common cause is a change in land usage."

### ***Deforestation continues in monarch-butterfly habitat***

Mexico state is also the home of a portion of the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere, which is under siege because of illegal logging (see SourceMex, 2006-05-31). The majority of the butterfly's preserve is

located in Michoacan state. The concerns about the loss of habitat for the monarch butterfly have prompted authorities to hold regular forums to address the issue. In the fourth forum, held in the Michoacan capital of Morelia in mid-March, federal and state authorities acknowledged that they have been unable to stop illegal logging in the habitat. "We are developing a more comprehensive plan to address the problem," said Guillermo Velasco, Mexico state's environmental secretary.

Michoacan Gov. Lazaro Cardenas Batel suggested taking the process a step further through a cooperative effort by the US, Canada, and Mexico to protect the habitat. Monarch butterflies migrate to the region from the US and Canada during the winter months. One step, said Cardenas, would be for the three countries to pool their resources to increase protections in the winter nesting grounds of the butterflies.

The governor also recommended that the Mexican federal and state governments and international foundations make a greater effort toward improving the living conditions of residents of communities adjacent to the habitat. Many of these residents, the vast majority of whom are poor, receive payments from illegal loggers in exchange for their assistance in taking trees from the area. About 500,000 people reside in the areas near the monarch habitat. Omar Vidal Pinzon, director of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), said his organization was attempting to reverse this trend.

The WWF helped create the Monarch Fund, which has devoted more than US\$6.5 million since 2000 to work with local communities and agricultural cooperatives to protect the habitat, increase reforestation efforts, and promote ecotourism. Without the fund, said Pinzon, the loss of habitat would have been much greater.

### *Government launches tree-planting campaign*

President Felipe Calderon's administration acknowledged that deforestation and other types of land degradation remain a major concern. "In Mexico, 47% of the land is experiencing some sort of degradation, ranging from a slight degree to extreme desertification," Ramon Cardoza, an official with the Comision Nacional Forestal (CONAFOR), said at a conference in Argentina on desertification. Cardoza said the government has allocated US\$150 million annually to address the problem. "This is insufficient," said Cardoza. "We intend to improve."

The Calderon administration has also taken steps to promote reforestation efforts in Mexico. In late February, Calderon launched the Proarbol campaign, which intends to plant 250 million trees in Mexico this year. The program will initially target areas with the greatest levels of deforestation, with funds distributed primarily to low-income communities and communal farms. "Proarbol is going to benefit more than 13 million Mexicans who reside in 20,000 ejidos and other communities around the country," said Calderon.

The president said the program is also a signal that Mexico intends to take steps to help reverse global climate change, as trees capture and hold carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. "With Proarbol, we hope to contribute to reducing the effects of climate change," Calderon told reporters. (Sources: [www.foromonarcamichoacan.gob](http://www.foromonarcamichoacan.gob); Milenio Diario, 02/21/07; El Universal, Excelsior, 02/21/07, 03/14/07; Associated Press, Notimex, Spanish news service EFE, 03/14/07; La Jornada, 03/14/07, 03/15/07; El Economista, 02/21/07, 03/16/07; Reforma, 02/21/07, 03/14/07, 03/20/07)

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