

Deforestation

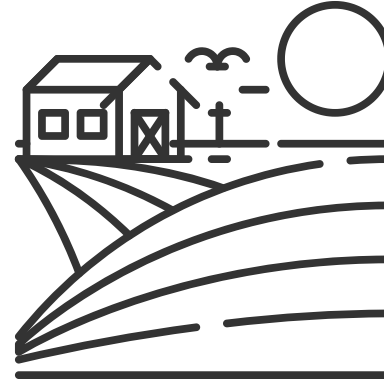
What Is It?

The permanent loss of forest cover without replanting or replacing trees in the same location.



Why Is It Done?

Deforestation is mainly done to convert land for agricultural production and livestock grazing. It also occurs for housing, infrastructure, and commercial purposes.



What Is Its Impact?

Permanently clearing trees can lead to soil erosion, desertification, and increased greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere, as well as displacing wildlife. However, it can also provide valuable economic opportunities.



How Does It Work?

1. Deforestation begins with a natural forest either being selected by people or subjected to a natural process such as a disease or wildfire.
2. Human-led deforestation begins with selecting an area and determining a greater economic purpose for the land than tree coverage. Natural deforestation may result from migrating insects, disease, weather, or other natural disasters.
3. Loggers may clear the forest and use the wood for buildings, commercial products, or biomass to produce energy.
4. Once trees are removed, stumps are also removed or ground out. Fire may also be used to clear out trees.
5. The cleared land is then developed for its intended purposes, which may be agricultural, commercial, or another use.

Space



While natural forests and trees have been permanently cleared across the U.S. to make way for agriculture, commerce, transportation, infrastructure, and housing, there has been no net tree loss in the U.S. and Canada in 30 years. Forest coverage has even increased in the U.S. in that time.

Point

- Most deforestation is the result of human activity.
- Deforestation disrupts a natural environment and displaces wildlife.
- Cutting down trees releases sequestered carbon and reduces the supply of natural carbon absorbers.
- Heavy paper usage and lack of recycling can lead to significant tree loss.
- Permanently converting land from forest to another purpose is deforestation, no matter where or how small an area.

Counterpoint

- Natural deforestation can occur from droughts, fires, parasites, storms, and more.
- Cleared land becomes usable in other ways, for example, enabling food production to serve communities.
- Clearing forests is needed for harvesting other natural resources, including renewable energy, such as wind and solar projects.
- Not all tree loss is deforestation. Demand for paper products sends market signals to plant more trees.
- Planting trees elsewhere can offset local tree loss, neutralizing the global atmospheric impact of local deforestation.



Did You Know?

The United States hosts about eight percent of the world's forests, including approximately 760 million acres of permanently protected land through private stewardship, public parks, trusts, and other agreements that can never be converted.

What's Next?

With space being finite but populations growing, the U.S. will need to feed and house more people every year. One innovative solution is building up not out. Within agriculture, there are movements toward innovative techniques such as vertical farming, hydroponics, and more. Plant-based and lab-grown meats also seek to reduce grazing land needed for livestock.