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Forces against deforestation, continued

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A second form of demand-side conservation is zero-deforestation agreements, or trade embargos, in which an industry, retailer or producer agrees to not buy a commodity from newly deforested lands.

Such agreements typically evolve in response to a consumer campaign against a company, often initiated by an activist organization. Large retail brands are sensitive to consumer pressure – something non-governmental organizations, and in particular Greenpeace, have capitalized on.

“Through embarrassing and dramatic ad campaigns, Greenpeace has moved these industrial and retail giants to change their business practices,” says Gibbs. “And when they change, it affects the entire supply chain, all the way down to those farmers on the ground clearing forest.”

In 2006, for example, all of the major U.S. and Brazilian soy traders came together in response to pressure from McDonald’s and Burger King, which were first targeted by Greenpeace, and agreed to have zero deforestation in their soy supply chain in the Amazon. The industry set up a monitoring system to ensure no deforestation was occurring, which now allows for a better understanding of all land use dynamics.

Facing similar pressure, the major cattle producers and meatpackers of Brazil – a major exporter of beef and leather – approved a zero deforestation agreement in 2009 after it was revealed that cattle raised on deforested land were being used for leather by major global retailers and shoe brands, and for beef sold by mainstream grocers. Each participating cattle company now has a monitoring system in place, and Gibbs says rancher and meatpacker behavior has improved “by leaps and bounds.”

Direct effect

That these demand-side initiatives address the drivers of deforestation gives them an advantage over REDD, according to Gibbs.

“That’s been one of the major criticisms of REDD – that it provides funding that goes through government, which may or may not reach the people that are actually doing the clearing,” she explains. “These demand-side efforts are directly going after the companies that control the deforestation dynamics.”

“I can talk about the positive sides of REDD – it has the world’s attention focused on deforestation and it has evolved science dramatically in terms of our ability to measure carbon stored in trees and understand land use trends and drivers. But it has not changed things thus far in any major way,” she continues. “These demand-side efforts are revolutionizing industries in a remarkably quick way. We’ve seen a huge shift.”

For the first time in Brazil, forest remained standing while production increased rapidly.

“It’s the first time that there were incentives and pressure to increase yields rather than simply expand,” she says. “Now there are reasons to invest in fertilizers and in improving the lands to produce more.”



Holly Gibbs interviews oil palm plantation owners in Malaysian Borneo. Producers of the major commodities traded from the Amazon are now altering their practices to avoid forest clearing.

From 2004-12, deforestation rates in Brazil dropped by 75 percent, going from the highest ever recorded to the lowest. Credit is due to a confluence of factors, Gibbs says: demand-side conservation agreements, REDD and its perception that land owners will receive money to leave forest standing, and low profitability for soy and cattle during global economic downturns.

But as profits from Brazilian soy and cattle rose to extremely high levels during the recent U.S. drought, the trend remained positive for forest conservation.

“Brazil’s cattle ranchers and soy farmers can make more money now than they could in a long time, and they still haven’t increased the rates of deforestation,” Gibbs says, “indicating that this combination of domestic pressure, outside organization pressure and changing macroeconomics have significantly altered business practices for these two sectors.”

Environmentally, Gibbs says, the best-case scenario would be to have much more efficient, optimized use of land to meet global demands while reducing supply chain waste and deforestation. But producers need to be able to sustainably increase yields – something currently lacking in the equation.

“As we push for a reduction in deforestation, we also need to be jumping ahead,” she says. “It will be critical that we

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Also in this issue

Carbon capacity

In the exchange that is the carbon cycle, people give and land and oceans take away. The outcome of this transaction is a critical factor

Conservation everywhere

I recently returned from a trip to southern India, where I conduct a long-running research project on human interactions with nature in agricultural

Remembering Charlotte Zieve and her support of service learning

The legacy of Charlotte Zieve can be seen in the beaming, binocular-cloaked faces of middle schoolers and their mentors, in the student volunteers

Urban energy program a triple-win for Milwaukee

For some residents of Milwaukee, winters will not be as cold and drafty as those in recent memory. While the lakefront city is accustomed to harsh

Modeling with impact

Climate models, one could argue, speak in generalities. These powerful computer simulations support confident assertions about future global trends,

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watch that pathway closely to avoid unintended consequences. If these tools are effective, we transform how the industries operate and how agriculture is occurring.”

Give and take

In the end, Gibbs says, perhaps the closest thing to a perfect solution for tropical deforestation is some combination of carrots and sticks, where the financial incentive of a carbon initiative like REDD provides the added motivation to comply with a demand-side request.

That kind of synergy seems to hold promise. REDD is meant to address the full landscape of deforestation, whereas demand-side efforts target a single industry. Each could potentially reduce the monitoring costs of the other.

And because a carbon market is unlikely to compete with more profitable commodities like soy and oil palm, Gibbs says, demand-side efforts could target those latter markets, “while REDD could come in and capture a much broader swath, fundamentally changing how the whole country plans and manages its agricultural and forest landscapes.”

In the meantime, REDD remains in perpetual negotiation and many questions remain. Naughton believes the Nelson Institute is especially well suited to find answers, with researchers working at all scales, from understanding indigenous peoples’ rights to examining land use change and global carbon dynamics.

“This kind of issue, where we’re trying to make a more effective and more just system of rewarding folks for saving forest, takes the expertise both of someone with local proficiency and someone who can connect the big picture,” she says.

Speaking of REDD

To better understand the role of land governance within forest carbon management programs, in October 2011 the Nelson Institute Land Tenure Center (LTC) and Department of Geography hosted a two-day workshop in Madison. Thirty researchers and on-the-ground practitioners from a range of countries prioritized for REDD presented the results of pilot projects and discussed the social and environmental impacts.

Several Nelson Institute alumni working on the frontlines of tropical forest conservation were part of the workshop: **Amy Duchelle** (Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development M.S. ’03), **Margaret Holland** (Land Resources M.S. ’04, Ph.D. ’09), **Arlyne Johnson** (CBSD M.S. ’93, LR Ph.D. ’00), and **Brian Robinson** (Environment and Resources Ph.D. ’11).

Case studies from the workshop were **compiled into a 112-page report**, produced by the UW Cartography Lab, to help guide policy makers in improving the equity and efficacy of REDD. Results were also shared at the 2011 U.N. climate change conference in Durban, South Africa, and a set of complementary research papers were prepared for a forthcoming special issue of the peer-reviewed journal *World Development*.

“The Nelson Institute, in this exercise, is doing what it is so wonderful at – acting like a network,” says **Lisa Naughton**, a professor of geography and past LTC director who helped to lead the workshop and co-edited the resulting publication with **Cathy Day**, a Ph.D. candidate in geography.

The workshop and publication were funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under a five-year, \$5 million grant secured in part by **Matt Turner**, a professor of geography and former LTC director, and **Adrian Treves**, associate professor of environmental studies.

Through the grant, LTC is also working with several research partners to study the interface between environment, government and poverty, with REDD becoming a focus of this work.

“Instead of just saying these things almost never work and they usually are really risky for the poor; rather, this cluster of folks and my colleagues said, yes, REDD is complicated and it’s risky – here are some lessons and here’s why,” says Naughton. “So, can this kind of effort be made responsible? What would it look like? What would you do to try to make the money flow to the rightful owners in a more responsible way?”



[View the report produced from the REDD workshop in Madison \(PDF\) »](#)

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