

## RESOURCES &amp; ENVIRONMENT

## *The Imperiled Tropical Forests*

"The Tragedy of our Tropical Rainforests" by Peter Jackson, and "A Strategy for Preserving Tropical Rainforests" by Ira Rubinoff, in *Ambio: A Journal of the Human Environment* (No. 5, 1983), Pergamon Press, Headington Hill Hall, Oxford OX3 OBW, England.

The forests that now blanket the tropics are being cut down at the rate of about 30 acres each minute. If the trend continues, half of the earth's remaining tropical forest area (already less than two-thirds of the original) will disappear by the year 2000.

Wholesale clearance of tropical forests began when European planters began colonizing Latin America in the 17th century, writes Jackson, a freelance journalist. Sugar and rubber plantations still cover vast expanses of land once occupied by rainforest. Today, "shifting cultivators," small-scale forest farmers numbering 150 million worldwide, are responsible for half of new losses as they slash plots out of the forest, then move on when the thin soil wears out.

Logging has occurred in 13 percent of the world's tropical forests, with four-fifths of the timber output used locally for firewood. And local demand for wood will jump threefold by the turn of the century, even as rapid population growth in the Third World brings new settlements to the countryside. Brazil, for example, is offering peasants homesteads in the Amazon Basin.

Once a tropical forest is cleared, the soil simply dries up and blows away, often making the loss irreversible. Further widespread clearance could threaten up to half of the earth's estimated 10 million species of plants and animals and alter the planet's climate.

To save the earth's rainforests, Rubinoff, of the Panama-based Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, advocates an international Tropical Moist Forest Reserve, to encompass 10 percent of the remaining forests in 1,000 scattered blocks of at least 100,000 hectares (247,000 acres) each. Financed by a progressive tax on countries with an annual per capita gross national product of over \$1,500, the program could collect more than \$3 billion a year. An organization such as the World Bank could channel funds to nations willing to protect their forests.

Self-interest, not charity, Rubinoff maintains, should motivate developed nations to finance the forest reserves as insurance against the permanent loss of a vital planetary resource.

## *Opening Up Public Lands*

"Reassessing Public Lands Policy" by Marion Clawson, in *Environment* (Oct. 1983), Heldref Publications, 4000 Albe-marle St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016.

The federal government, which owns 34 percent of the land in the United States, is going to have to alter the way it manages its property.

Change is inevitable, writes Clawson, a Senior Fellow Emeritus at Resources for the Future, chiefly because the value of federal properties