

## 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

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(and the timber, minerals, and petroleum they contain) has sharply increased in recent years while managing them is a drain on the treasury. Since the 1920s, for example, the 505 million acres administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service have appreciated 22-fold, and are now worth some \$500 billion.

Clawson notes that the 200-year history of federal land use policy has been one of constant change. Until the early 19th century, the focus was on acquisition. A period of disposal through homesteading (which continued until 1934), sales, and land grants for colleges and railroads followed. Beginning with the creation of the first National Forests (then called "forest reserves") in 1891, the emphasis shifted to "reservation." Then came an era of simple management. By the late 1960s, growing pressures from business, environmentalists, and recreation seekers made federal land everybody's business.

Among the new directions under consideration today are land sales ("privatization"), turning over large tracts of public lands to mixed public-private management companies, or greatly expanding Washington's practice of leasing out land (up to 25 percent of it would find takers). Clawson dismisses the western "Sagebrush Rebellion" demand that land be given to the states. They have, he says, "a proven record of failure" as stewards of natural resources.

One way to help resolve today's land-use disputes among competing interests, Clawson suggests, is to grant long-term "pullback" leases for certain tracts. A lumber company, for example, would receive a lease, but conservationists (or anybody else) would have the right to claim up to a third of the land on the same terms.

The United States has evolved a sophisticated mix of public and private uses of its land. Public land can be privately used; most private land is publicly regulated. Today's challenge, says Clawson, is to find a better mix to satisfy business, environmentalists, and the public.

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**ARTS & LETTERS**


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*John Cheever*  
*As Novelist*

"Cheever's Failed Paradise: The Short-Story Stylist as Novelist" by Adam Gussow, in *The Literary Review* (Fall 1983), Fairleigh Dickinson University, 285 Madison Ave., Madison, N.J. 07940.

The short stories of John Cheever (1912-82) are among the best of our time. Yet in spite of his literary gifts, argues Gussow, a Columbia University critic, Cheever was never able to write a truly successful novel.

Cheever was born into an old New England family that was down on its luck, and into an age whose values were torn apart by World War I. His sense of family contributed to the strong moral tone and nostalgic idealism that mark his work, while the influence of the "Lost Genera-