

THE MARBURG DECLARATION

The Urgent Need to Maximize Biodiversity Conservation in Forest Carbon-Trading

A joint communiqué of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC) and the Society for Tropical Ecology (GTÖ) during their joint annual meeting in Marburg, Germany, 26-29 July 2009

WHEREAS, tropical forests around the world are being destroyed at an alarming pace, currently averaging 10-15 million hectares per year—roughly equivalent to 50 football fields per minute; and

WHEREAS, tropical forests are among the biologically-richest ecosystems on earth, sustaining at least half of all plant, animal, and fungal species in an area spanning just 7% of the planet's land surface; and

WHEREAS, tropical forests perform an array of vital ecosystem services, such as storing large stocks of carbon in their living biomass and soils, reducing soil erosion and downstream flooding, and copiously releasing water vapor into the atmosphere that creates clouds and promotes life-giving rainfall; and

WHEREAS, tropical forests are home to an estimated 50 million indigenous forest peoples and provide livelihoods for large numbers of rural communities; and

WHEREAS, the rapid destruction of tropical forests produces about 20% of all human-caused emissions of greenhouse gases—the equivalent of 5 billion tons of carbon dioxide annually—which is a serious contributor to global warming; and

WHEREAS, tropical deforestation further promotes global warming by reducing the formation of clouds, which reflect much solar radiation away from earth; and

WHEREAS, current policy initiatives designed to use international carbon-trading to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation of tropical forests—termed 'REDD'—are rapidly gaining momentum and deserve strong political and public support; and

WHEREAS, at present rates of growth, international funding for REDD could soon dwarf all other spending for tropical conservation; and

WHEREAS, as presently structured, REDD funding will be focused largely on protecting areas that are most cost-effective for reducing carbon emissions, such as countries that have high deforestation rates and large expanses of relatively inexpensive forest land; and

WHEREAS, from a biodiversity-conservation perspective, the most urgent areas to protect are biodiversity ‘hotspots’—the last vestiges of forest in species-rich regions such as Madagascar, the tropical Andes, the island nations of Southeast Asia, Indochina, West Africa, the Brazilian Atlantic forest, and many smaller tropical islands—that contain large concentrations of endangered species threatened with imminent extinction; and

WHEREAS, many of the recognized biodiversity hotspots occur in areas that have been climatically stable over long periods of time, and if protected might become important refugia for wildlife facing serious climatic change in the future; and

WHEREAS, despite its potentially huge benefits for biodiversity protection, the costs of implementing REDD will often be greater in biodiversity hotspots because these forests are limited in extent and development and human-population pressures there are often intense;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation, the world’s largest scientific organization devoted to the study, protection, and wise use of tropical forests, and its sister European organization, the Society for Tropical Ecology, jointly urge the following:

- 1) That efforts to maximize the benefits of REDD for biodiversity conservation be a key priority during international negotiations of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, especially during its forthcoming meeting of the Convention of Parties in Copenhagen, Denmark; and
- 2) That nongovernmental conservation groups promote private funding strategies to increase the cost-competitiveness of carbon credits from the world’s most imperiled forests and ecosystems; and
- 3) That REDD initiatives also focus on reducing other immediate threats to tropical biodiversity beyond deforestation, such as overhunting, fires, and unsustainable logging; and
- 4) That efforts to promote biodiversity conservation via REDD are done in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of indigenous and local communities; and
- 5) That cost-benefit analyses be urgently conducted to help develop optimal strategies to simultaneously maximize the benefits of REDD for both reducing carbon emissions and protecting endangered biodiversity; and
- 6) That public and private donors to REDD schemes stipulate wherever possible that their funds are to be used not only to reduce carbon emissions, but also to help halt or mitigate threats to the most endangered forests and species on earth.