



# FORESTS FOREVER

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## **More fuel to the fire: Human activity causing climate change**

*International report leaves little room for uncertainty*

“There have always been many good reasons for not destroying our forests,” said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever, an environmental group in San Francisco dedicated to protecting the forests of California.

“To that long list we can add one more item: don’t destroy forests because they help us in our efforts to slow, and eventually reverse, global warming.”

Up to now, a dwindling number of global warming skeptics have been able to point to relatively minor disagreements among climate scientists as a way of putting off any decisive action that would slow or halt climate change.

The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), however, provides no ammunition to global warming deniers. The report is the result of unanimous agreement by its more than 2,000 scientist-contributors, and leaves little doubt about the human role in causing climate change, which the report calls “extremely likely.” (The phrase “extremely likely” indicates a 90-percent certainty.)

While fossil fuel burning is the largest problem, deforestation is named by the report as an important contributor to global climate change.

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The role played by forests in the global carbon cycle is complicated. “That forests sequester carbon dioxide is well known,” Hughes said. “But proposals that would allow certain forest-management practices to count toward a nation’s carbon emissions budget lack reliable ways to measure the effect of plantation forestry on atmospheric carbon dioxide.

“Better management of the forests we have will have more beneficial effect on the global warming fight than planting monocultures.”

The IPCC report establishes definite connections between higher average temperatures due to an increase in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases and local effects such as increased strength and frequency of hurricanes.

Changing weather patterns will have— and probably already have had— a tremendous effect on California, impacting our water supply by diminishing the Sierra snowpack (source of much of the state’s water). Rising sea levels will push salt water upstream, destabilizing the Sacramento Delta and further reducing the flow of fresh water to the rest of the state.

Wildlife— both flora and fauna— will be displaced as their habitats are changed by global warming. Many species will not be able to migrate to suitable habitat, either because roads, farms, and cities will block their path, or because suitable habitat will no longer exist.

California in recent years has already seen an increase in wildfires and forest insect infestations. Specific fires, insect attacks, and the drought that has contributed to them may be difficult to tie directly to global warming, but the report leaves little doubt that if nothing is done these problems will worsen.

“This country already has the tools and the technology to fight global warming,” Hughes said. “What we have lacked to this point is the political will to effect change. The clarity and certainty found in the IPCC report are alarming, but that should not be its only result. Concern has to be translated into action; our political establishment needs to educate itself on the issues and move aggressively to address them.

“The destruction caused by global warming will be greater the longer we wait to do anything about it,” Hughes said. “And if we wait until the changes are advanced much further it may be impossible to reverse them.”