

Bush Administration spurns 'ecological sustainability' as a guiding principle for forest management

One of the first acts of the new Secretary for the US Department of Agriculture (Ann Veneman) was to withdraw regulations for forest management that established 'ecological sustainability' as the foundation for forest practices. This decision returns the US Forest Service to 1982 regulations, which favor extractive uses of forests, often at the expense of biodiversity and of the maintenance of key ecological processes. The rules that have been rescinded were the result of an almost two-year study by a committee of 13 preeminent scientists (<http://www.fs.fed.us/news/science/>). This change in forest service regulations is much more than a tizzy among bureaucrats – the changes could have a profound impact on the ecology of vast areas within the USA. By law, the US Forest Service is required to revise its 155 forest plans every 10–15 years, and >150 million acres of national forest and grasslands are due for plan revisions within the next five years. Obviously, the regulations that guide these revisions will dictate how the land is used and abused well into the future.



One key argument used to justify rescinding the Committee of Scientists recommendations is the charge that the concept of 'ecological sustainability' is ill defined and immeasurable, and hence should not be used to manage forests. This is yet another case of policy makers mistaking scientific discussion surrounding a concept for a lack of acceptance of the concept itself. *PK*

Society of Conservation Biology to open a European section

Although the Society of Conservation Biology (SCB) is nominally an international society, it has had a primarily North American membership since its inception in 1987. Efforts are now under way to remedy this provincialism. In particular, coinciding with the 16th Annual Meeting of SCB in Canterbury, UK, a European section of SCB will be launched. The purpose of the European section will be to serve as a contact network for pan-European conservation biologists, to advocate the inclusion of science in European biodiversity policy and management, and to promote conservation within the European Community. European scientists are encouraged to join SCB (<http://conbio.net/SCB/Information/Membership/>) and register to become voting members of the nascent European section by notifying europe@conservationbiology.org.

Nominations to form a European steering committee will be accepted until March 2002, and a vote among European members will then determine the composition of that committee (with the constraint that no country will have more than two members on the 12-person committee). It is hoped that this internationalization of SCB will eventually extend well beyond Europe, with an African section likely to be the next international section organized. *PK*

Immense logging deal to sustain war in the Congo

Under a deal brokered to support a bitter armed conflict, a vast expanse of African rainforest is being slated for industrial logging. According to reliable media reports, 34 million ha of forest – an area 1.5 times the size of the UK – will be logged in the Congo Basin. The basin sustains nearly half of the surviving tropical rainforests of Africa and was recently identified by the United Nations as one of the most biologically important ecosystems on the planet.

This remarkable recent deal was struck between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and a logging corporation that is controlled by the Zimbabwean army and

Forestry Commission. In exchange for the immense timber lease, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has pledged to help the DRC defeat rebels in the eastern part of the country.



The tropical rainforests of Africa have already come under severe pressure in recent decades, with industrial logging and commercial hunting being two of the greatest threats. Labyrinths of roads bulldozed by loggers often lead to a dramatic influx of hunters, who kill chimpanzees, gorillas, duikers, and many other wildlife species.

Natural resources (including timber) in Africa are increasingly being plundered to support armed conflicts. At least six African countries, including Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, have bartered military support to the DRC in exchange for the right to exploit valuable gemstones, minerals, or timber in the Congo Basin. In the past few years, the DRC has also granted extensive timber leases – some encompassing >1 million ha – to German, Malaysian and Chinese corporations. *WFL*

Australian ecologists are world's best predictors of extinction risk

Australian ecologists have taken first, second, third and fourth place in an international contest that challenged scientists to estimate extinction risks from population data describing four 'virtual' species. The data, provided over the Internet, offer glimpses of complete species scenarios that were created via computer simulation. All contestants were given the same data and