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Forests continue to fall to expanding agriculture, even as world leaders agree to save them

At COP26, 141 countries, holding more than 90 percent of the world's forests, pledged to save and restore the planet's forests through sustainable agriculture, conservation, protection, trade policies and financial strategies. The agreement is nonbinding.

Forests cover nearly a third of Earth's land and are home to much of the world's biodiversity. As significant carbon sinks, they play a key role in reducing excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Only about half of remaining forests are relatively intact — of large size with little human influence — and their loss continues at a rapid rate. In 2020 the planet lost about 100,000 square miles of forest, 16,000 square miles of which were intact humid tropical forests. About half of those were replaced by agriculture, such as cattle ranching, soybean farming and oil palm plantations.

Where forests are included under COP26 declaration X - Once-heavily forested countries not signing the declaration Areas covered by agreement Intact forests Historical extent of forests; since converted Degraded forests; to agricultural, industrial and urban use significant human influence In the past 30 years forest cover has improved in the boreal tundra woodlands of Canada and Russia. However, the forests are experiencing wildfires that In Southeast Asia, 80 percent of are growing in frequency deforestation is and intensity. driven by large-scale industrial agriculture. Equator Since 1992, the After Indonesia largest negative signed the forest change in tree cover protection agreement, has occurred in the the country's Although Brazil signed the band of tropical environment minister forest protection agreement. rainforests covering stated that development President Jair Bolsonaro's the Amazon basin, there should not stop "in the policies have encouraged farmers Central Africa, Indonesia name of zero deforestation." and ranchers to cut down tropical and Papua New Guinea. forests. Deforestation there has Africa's annual rate of net risen to its highest levels in more forest loss since 2010 is the than a decade. highest of any continent -

and is accelerating.