



War and Tropical Forests: Conservation in Areas of Armed Conflict

Edited by Steven V. Price
 New York: Food Products Press (Haworth Press), 2003. 219 pp.
 ISBN: 1-56022-098-8, \$49.95 cloth;
 ISBN: 1-56022-099-6, \$24.95 paper

This well-organized collection of essays represents the first systematic effort to determine the impact of war and civil strife on tropical forest conservation. Tropical forests are vastly important for the conservation of biodiversity in general, because they may be home to more than half the world's species. Moreover, these species are the most poorly known anywhere; even disregarding bacteria and other prokaryotic organisms and using the most conservative estimates, their associated plants, animals, fungi, and microorganisms consist of 4–5 million species, with no more than 1 in 10 even having been given a scientific name.

Although we all wish it were otherwise, civil strife and war have characterized our overcrowded world, with its unsustainable dreams of increased human consumption and prosperity. Almost all tropical forests occur in the less-developed nations, and they are being exploited ruthlessly by the citizens of these countries and especially by the seemingly insatiable desire for their valuable resources in the richer nations.

The need to conserve these forests and their biota continues both in war and in peace. Once they are gone, we have no way, ever, to get them back. So what strategies should be adopted by those who are devoted to conserving them? Building bridges is necessary in both war and peace, and as Annette Lanjou brings out so well, there is much room for collaboration among relief, conservation, and development organizations, which have methods, goals, and objectives in common. Jeff McNeeley, drawing on his vast experience in tropical conservation, emphasizes not only that armed conflict can often rapidly exhaust resources used by the combatants, but that peace—often accompanied by the nationalization of resources and the disenfranchisement of indigenous people—can be even worse. Bushmeat poaching may be

especially intense during armed conflict, and such animal populations may have no opportunity to recover. Often, relatively pristine natural areas are offered to the combatants once peace is attained, and intense exploitation often follows. David Kaimowitz and Angelica Fauné offer a particular fascinating account of the way this process has been working since the end of the civil war in Nicaragua.

Because many threatened forests lie along international boundaries, international cooperation will often be necessary to achieve a particular conservation objective. All countries except the United States, Iraq, and Iran have now ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity, which, as McNeely points out, affords a useful framework for international efforts in conservation, given the legal obligations of the countries that have adhered to the treaty.

Indonesia, where the military has exploited forests for timber, continues—as one of the world's outstanding megadiversity countries—to present problems that are especially intractable. Conservationists there, as Charles Barber and Kirk Talbot conclude, can be effective only if they link with development and reform advocacy groups.

In his case study of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where major conservation efforts were under way when the hostilities intensified, Andrew Plumtre discusses the importance of junior staff members, who often have the ability and the will to hold together conservation efforts even under extreme and dangerous situations. Unlike senior staff, they are likely to be well accepted by the population at large, including the combatants, and may then find ways to carry on with their work.

Whether legal remedies can be found on the cessation of hostilities is the subject of a concluding essay by Jay Austin and Carl Bruch. The concept is relatively new, but there have been some promising developments. Ultimately, dedicated conservationists must find ways to continue their efforts during periods of war and civil unrest; as they do so, they will find a considerable amount of wisdom in this interesting book, with all of its diverse approaches to the problems encountered.

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