



# Boreal Forest

## Sakhalin, Russia

Mixed deciduous and evergreen needle-leaf trees dominate the boreal forests of Sakhalin Island, just off the eastern coast of Russia. The tremendous natural reserves of the boreal forests serve as “carbon sinks” that help to regulate global climate. Boreal forests are also home to a unique collection of plants and animals, including rare and endangered species such as the Amur Tiger. Fire is a natural and often vital component in maintaining the health of boreal forests. But since the 1950s, the frequency of fires has increased on Sakhalin Island as its forests have been subjected to rapid exploitation and disturbance in

the acquisition of lumber, oil, coal, and peat. As people have moved into the region in greater numbers, the risk of fires started by trains, cars, trash fires, and wood stoves has increased greatly. These satellite images show the impact of forest fires on Sakhalin Island. In 1998, roughly 300 intensely hot fires burned an area nearly the size of Luxembourg. Three people died and nearly 600 were made homeless by a very rapidly moving crown fire that consumed the town of Gorki within a few hours. The 1999 image very clearly shows the extent of the fire damage to the island’s forests near the end of that year.