

Media Coverage

RAINFOR Project to Study Global Carbon Balance - 30th November 2007

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RAINFOR Project to Study Global Carbon Balance

Leeds and Oxford, UK — The Universities of Leeds and Oxford, in partnership with researchers across Latin America, today announced the launch of a new project through the Amazon Forest Inventory Network (RAINFOR) to increase our scientific understanding of the global carbon balance and quantify the role of tropical forests in climate change through the 21st century. This will help position forest ecosystem services on a firm scientific foundation with the public, policy-maker, conservation, and scientific communities.

According to Professor Oliver Phillips (Leeds University), co-founder of the RAINFOR network, "Tropical forests not only have more species than any other ecosystem, but they also play a key role in the global carbon cycle. These ecosystems store and cycle vast quantities of carbon, heat, and water, so relatively small changes will affect the climate of the planet as a whole. Amazonia contains most of the world's remaining rainforest so understanding its carbon balance is vital, but its behavior remains contentious, even for that portion of the region not undergoing rapid land use change." Phillips further added, "Meanwhile, and in spite of this poor level of understanding, there is considerable momentum for including tropical forests as part of a global climate change control strategy."

Established in 2000, the RAINFOR network has been developing a monitoring baseline for the whole Amazon system. This new phase will improve knowledge of the carbon balance of tropical forests by linking experienced researchers and students alike in a collaborative effort to take the pulse of the world's greatest forest. Determining the carbon trapped within the Amazon basin will help inform policy and economic discussions regarding incentives for avoiding the release of large forest carbon stocks into the atmosphere.

Scientist Daniel Nepstad, Woods Hole Research Center and Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazonia, adds that "This project will allow us to extend the network into the Southeastern Amazon, right into the heart of the region of greatest deforestation and vulnerability to climate change."

RAINFOR's project will offer scientifically-robust data on current discussions about economic incentives and payments for avoided deforestation ("REDD") within the global carbon market. RAINFOR co-founder Professor Yadvinder Malhi (University of Oxford) stated, "The research being conducted by RAINFOR will improve understanding of the global carbon balance and the role and vulnerability of tropical forests in moderating or accelerating climate change. It will also improve the science capability among eight South American countries for monitoring the carbon balance of their forest ecosystems and soils."

The project includes a core plan to develop a sustainable, long-term forest monitoring network that will increase the physical infrastructure and support the development of South American scientists in a position to take on research

leadership of carbon process and soil studies across the 6 million square kilometer region.

Malhi noted that if the role of carbon cycles in tropical rainforests are more clearly understood from a scientific viewpoint, substantial new funding opportunities for tropical forests conservation may exist.

Funding for RAINFOR's four-year project to quantify the role of tropical forests in the global carbon balance and future climate change was provided by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

ABOUT AMAZONIA

At 6million km², the Amazon forest covers an area 25 times as great as the United Kingdom (or 15 times the size of California), and spans nine countries of which the largest is Brazil. This region contains about one fifth of all species on earth, one fifth of all carbon in the earth's biomass, and is home to several million people. Water vapor from the region helps nurture agriculture further south, including the biofuel crops which power millions of cars. Each year Amazon forests cycle 18 billion tons of carbon - more than twice as much carbon as the combined emissions of all fossil fuels burnt in the world - so a small change in the net balance of the Amazon forests and soils would have a significant affect on the speed with which carbon dioxide is increasing in the earth's atmosphere. Earlier RAINFOR research has shown that forests have actually stored extra carbon over recent years, enough to slow the rate of climate change, but this subsidy from nature may now be under threat from climate change itself. Careful, on-the-ground monitoring of forests across the region is essential to assess this threat, and to better understand the global climate benefits that Amazonia provides.

ABOUT RAINFOR

The Amazon Forest Inventory Network (RAINFOR) is an international network that has been established to monitor the biomass and dynamics of Amazonian forests. The network emphasizes cross-cutting integrative science to help develop a new generation of scientists with diverse interests and cross-disciplinary skills. We are also fostering the development of young scientists, botanists and field technicians, providing interactions and opportunities to start and establish their careers, and eventually move into research leadership. RAINFOR is a broadly-based consortium, jointly led by Leeds (Phillips and Lloyd) and Oxford (Malhi), with partners across South America as well as in other European countries and North America. Previous funding has come from the European Union, the Max-Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry, the National Geographic Society (US), the Royal Society (UK), the Leverhulme Trust, and especially the UK Natural Environment Research Council.

For more information, visit <http://www.rainfor.org>

Contact information:

Professor Oliver Phillips: o.phillips@leeds.ac.uk | +44 113 3436832

Professor Yadvinder Malhi: Yadvinder.malhi@ouce.ox.ac.uk | +44 1865 285188