

Activists recommend "natural climate solutions" to save Earth

By Damian Carrington, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.08.19

Word Count 770

Level 810L



African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), Odzala-Kokoua National Park, Cuvette-Ouest Region, Republic of the Congo. Photo by: Education Images/UIG via Getty Images

Two disasters facing the environment are well known: climate change and vanishing wildlife. The restoration of natural forests and coasts could tackle both of these, according to a group of campaigners. They worry, however, that this remedy is being missed.

Climate change, or global warming, is the gradual heating of the Earth. Scientists believe it is happening due to the use of fossil fuels. Fossil fuels are natural fuels, like oil, gas and coal. Burning them creates greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide. Greenhouse gases trap heat in Earth's atmosphere. This causes temperatures to rise.

Removing Carbon Dioxide From The Air

Animal populations worldwide have fallen by 60 percent since 1970. To scientists, this suggests that a sixth mass extinction of life on Earth is under way. Meanwhile, experts are trying to figure out what will be needed to avoid the worst impacts of global warming. Carbon dioxide will very likely have to be removed from the atmosphere.

Restored natural forests and coasts would address both of these problems. Trees and plants suck carbon dioxide from the air as they grow. This happens as part of the process called photosynthesis.

At the same time, trees and plants provide essential habitat for animals.

The group wrote a letter to the Guardian newspaper . They pointed out two threats to the world's existence. These are climate breakdown and ecological breakdown. These threats are developing "with terrifying speed." It has the writers very worried about our planet.

Rebuilding Ecosystems

They have an idea for a solution. They call this solution "thrilling but neglected." It is called natural climate solutions. It involves saving animals, ecosystems and the climate all at once.

Public figures, scientists and authors have signed the letter. Teen activist Greta Thunberg and the climate scientist Michael Mann have signed their names. So have authors Margaret Atwood, Naomi Klein and Philip Pullman. Environmentalist Bill McKibben and TV chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall have joined the effort.

Other well-known figures joined as well. The letter was begun and organized by George Monbiot. He is a writer for the Guardian newspaper.

The group emphasizes that natural climate solutions are not an alternative to other responsible measures. For example, energy, transportation and farming must switch quickly to fuel that reduces greenhouse gases. This is called decarbonization. Both natural climate solutions and decarbonization are needed, the campaigners say.

Nature Is Our Best Bet

The United Nations announced a "Decade of Ecosystem Restoration" at the start of March. "The degradation of our ecosystems has had a devastating impact on both people and the environment," said Joyce Msuya. She is the head of the U.N. Environment Program. Environmental degradation is the destruction of the environment. "Nature is our best bet to tackle climate change and secure the future."

Scientists have estimated how much greenhouse gases must be reduced by the year 2030. A big question has been how to reduce it. New research has suggested a solution. About a third of greenhouse gases could be reduced just by restoring natural habitats. Such solutions, however, have attracted just 2.5 percent of the money for tackling greenhouse gases.

The best way to do this is restoring forests. This is especially true in areas of the tropics where forests were cleared. Natural climate solutions must not compete with the need to feed the world's growing population, the letter says. These solutions must be implemented only after talking with local communities.

Conserving wildlife can help restore habitats as well, the group says. What would happen if the populations of rhinos and elephants were boosted in Africa, and Asia? The seeds of trees that have a high carbon content would be spread. Research shows that more wolves lead to greener forests. Fewer plants get eaten by moose. This is because wolves eat moose.

Research shows that coastal habitats can soak up carbon the fastest. Mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass beds are most effective. Here, carbon can be absorbed and stored 40 times faster than in tropical forests. Peatlands must also be protected and restored, the group says. Peatlands are a special type of wetlands. They get their name from the peat soil, or dead plants, upon which the wetland habitat grows. Peatlands store one-third of all soil carbon globally. This is the case even though peatlands cover just 3 percent of the world's land.

Backing Natural Climate Plans

A website called Natural Climate Solutions has been launched. It calls on governments to back such "natural climate" plans.

"Our aim is simple," said Monbiot. They hope to spark global enthusiasm for lowering greenhouse gases by restoring ecosystems. Few people realize the true value it can have, he says.

Quiz

1 Read the section "Nature Is Our Best Bet."

Which sentence from the section shows why natural climate solutions can help stop global warming?

- (A) Environmental degradation is the destruction of the environment.
- (B) Scientists have estimated how much greenhouse gases must be reduced by the year 2030.
- (C) About a third of greenhouse gases could be reduced just by restoring natural habitats.
- (D) Peatlands must also be protected and restored, the group says.

2 Read the section "Rebuilding Ecosystems."

Which selection from this section supports the conclusion that natural climate solutions are just one way to help climate change?

- (A) They have an idea for a solution. They call this solution "thrilling but neglected."
- (B) It is called natural climate solutions. It involves saving animals, ecosystems and the climate all at once.
- (C) Teen activist Greta Thunberg and the climate scientist Michael Mann have signed their names.
- (D) For example, energy, transportation and farming must switch quickly to fuel that reduces greenhouse gases.

3 Read the paragraph from the article.

Two disasters facing the environment are well-known: climate change and vanishing wildlife. The restoration of natural forests and coasts could tackle both of these, according to a group of campaigners. They worry, however, that this remedy is being missed.

Which statement summarizes the paragraph?

- (A) Campaigners solved climate change and vanishing wildlife by restoring forests and coasts.
- (B) Campaigners are looking for more remedies to the problems of climate change and vanishing wildlife.
- (C) Restoring forests and coasts does not need to be accomplished quickly to be effective.
- (D) Restoring forests and coasts could help solve climate change and vanishing wildlife.

4 Read the paragraph from the article.

Conserving wildlife can help restore habitats as well, the group says. What would happen if the populations of rhinos and elephants were boosted in Africa and Asia? The seeds of trees that have a high carbon content would be spread. Research shows that more wolves lead to greener forests. Fewer plants get eaten by moose. This is because wolves eat moose.

HOW does this paragraph support the MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) It shows that scientists are trying to preserve the moose population.
- (B) It explains a reason why conserving wildlife can help the environment.
- (C) It shows that scientists are studying how seeds of trees are spread.
- (D) It describes how the habitats of some animals are disappearing.