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WRI Global Forest Watch 2026: 4.3 Million Hectares of Tropical Forest Lost Annually

3 May 2026 · **ENVIRONMENT** · **GS3**

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WRI Global Forest Watch 2026: 4.3 Million Hectares of Tropical Forest Lost Annually

3 May 2026 · 4 min read · 2 tags

WHY IN NEWS

The **World Resources Institute (WRI)** released its **Global Forest Watch (GFW) annual report** (data for 2025, released April-May 2026). Key finding: **4.3 million hectares** of tropical primary forest are still being lost every year — equivalent to the area of **Denmark** — at a rate of **11 football fields per minute**. While this is a **36% decline** from the 2024 peak, the pace remains far above what is needed to meet the **Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration** commitment of halting deforestation by 2030.

KEY FIGURES

METRIC	FIGURE
Annual tropical primary forest loss (2025 data)	4.3 million hectares
Equivalent area	Size of Denmark
Rate	11 football fields per minute
Change from 2024	-36% decline (improvement)
Brazil’s change (non-fire losses)	-41% reduction
Still above Glasgow target pace	+70% faster than 2030 goal requires
Global deforestation goal	Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration (COP26, 2021) — halt deforestation by 2030

WHAT IS PRIMARY TROPICAL FOREST?

Primary tropical forest refers to naturally regenerated forest of native species with no clearly visible signs of human activity. It is the most ecologically valuable forest type because:

- Stores the most **carbon** per hectare

- Contains the greatest **biodiversity** including **endemic** species
- Cannot be replaced by plantations in terms of ecosystem function

Once primary forest is lost, the carbon stored over centuries is released, and the ecosystem services — water regulation, species habitat, soil retention — are severely degraded. **Secondary forest** (regrowth) stores far less carbon and supports less biodiversity.

WHY THE DROP IN 2025 DATA?

The 36% decline from 2024 is primarily attributed to **Brazil's performance**:

- **Brazil** achieved a **41% reduction** in non-fire primary forest loss in 2025 under President **Lula da Silva's** stricter enforcement of the **Amazon Fund** and **IBAMA** (Brazil's environmental protection agency) after the reversal of Bolsonaro-era policies.
- Brazil accounts for approximately **40%** of all remaining tropical primary forest.
- The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Indonesia also saw slight improvements.

However, **fire-related losses** and losses in other parts of Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon) offset some gains.

STILL FAR FROM GLASGOW GOALS

Despite the improvement, the world is not on track for the **Glasgow Leaders' Declaration** — signed at **COP26 (Glasgow, November 2021)** by over 140 countries (representing 90% of the world's forests) to **halt and reverse deforestation by 2030**. Current loss rates are **70% higher** than the Glasgow trajectory requires.

Key obstacles:

- ① **Agricultural expansion** — palm oil, soy, beef, cocoa still drive deforestation in Southeast Asia, Amazon, and West Africa
- ② **Fire** — deliberate burning for land clearance, plus climate-change-driven wildfire
- ③ **Weak governance** — enforcement gaps, corruption in forest departments
- ④ **Commodity supply chains** — international demand drives local deforestation; forest-risk commodities reach EU, US, China markets

INDIA AND FOREST COVER

India's **deforestation profile** is distinct from tropical rainforest countries:

- India's forest cover = approximately **21.76% of geographic area** (State of Forest Report 2023, FSI)
- India's target = **33%** of geographic area under forest/tree cover (National Forest Policy 1988)
- India is one of the **few countries** that has seen net increase in tree cover — though environmentalists dispute “tree cover” methodology (plantations vs. natural forest)

India's relevant commitments:

- **NDC target** — create an additional carbon sink of 2.5–3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030
- India is a signatory to the **Glasgow Leaders' Declaration** but with caveats on implementation constraints

KEY INSTITUTIONS — FORESTS

BODY	ROLE
WRI (World Resources Institute)	US-based global research NGO; publishes Global Forest Watch
Global Forest Watch	WRI's near-real-time forest monitoring platform using satellite data
UNFCCC	Climate convention under which Glasgow Declaration was signed
FSI (Forest Survey of India)	GoI body — State of Forest Report every 2 years
National Forest Policy, 1988	India's core forest policy document — 33% cover target
Van Mahotsav	Annual tree-planting campaign in India — July first week
Green India Mission	Part of National Action Plan on Climate Change — expand forest cover

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS3 — Environment & Ecology	Tropical forests, deforestation, biodiversity loss, carbon sinks
GS3 — Climate Change	Glasgow COP26, REDD+, India's NDC forest targets
GS2 — International Relations	India's forest diplomacy, Glasgow signatory, Green Climate Fund

Mains Keywords: WRI Global Forest Watch, tropical primary forest, Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration, COP26, deforestation, carbon sink, REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), India’s NDC, National Forest Policy 1988, 33% cover target, FSI State of Forest Report

Prelims Facts Corner

ITEM	FACT
WRI Global Forest Watch release	Annual (2025 data released 2026)
Annual tropical forest loss	4.3 million hectares (2025)
Rate	11 football fields per minute
Change from 2024	-36%
Brazil improvement	-41% non-fire losses
Remaining above Glasgow target	+70% above required pace
Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration	COP26 (Nov 2021) — halt deforestation by 2030
India’s forest cover	~21.76% (State of Forest Report 2023, FSI)
India’s target	33% (National Forest Policy 1988)
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation — UNFCCC mechanism

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