



Deforestation in Canada—What are the Facts?

Canada's rate of deforestation is very low. Natural Resources Canada's Canadian Forest Service closely monitors forest change and deforestation in Canada using a combination of satellite and aerial images, land-use records, and field inspections.

What is deforestation?

Deforestation is the permanent removal of forest cover from an area and the conversion of this previously forested land to other uses. In Canada, clearcutting or other harvesting practices are used as part of sustainable forest management to provide timber for producing paper or wood products. Natural disturbances such as fire and insects also cause forest cover change. None of these changes are considered deforestation because the area is replanted or regenerates naturally, renewing the forest cover.

A Snapshot of Deforestation in Canada

- Deforestation is not the same as harvesting for forestry purposes – deforestation is the permanent clearing of forests to allow a change to a non-forest land use such as agriculture.
- Deforestation affects less than 0.02% of Canada's forests each year.
- Canada's deforestation rate accounts for only about 0.3% of global deforestation.
- Mitigation is complex, requiring the involvement of many players. Integrated landscape management and other best practices are part of the answer, as is raising public awareness of the issue.

How much deforestation occurs in Canada?

Canada's 348 million ha of forest lands account for about 9% of the world's forests cover. In 2013, an estimated 45,900 hectares (ha) were deforested in Canada. Over the past two decades, the annual deforestation rate has remained fairly stable, except for occasional spikes caused by large hydroelectric projects. Overall, deforestation affects less than 0.02% of Canada's forests each year. A small portion of this deforestation is offset by increases in forest area that are due to afforestation (planting new areas of forest), averaging several thousand hectares per year.



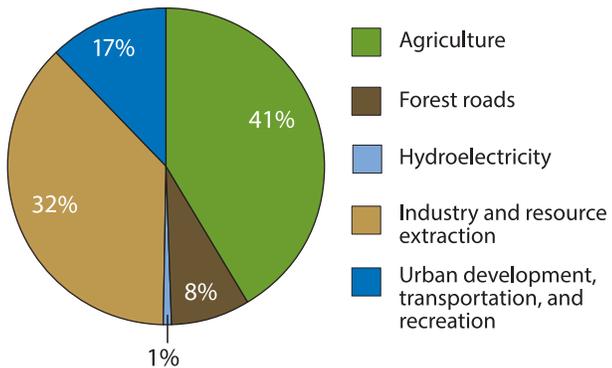
Area deforested for recreational usage (golf course) in Southern Ontario.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has estimated that globally, about 13 million ha of forest were deforested each year from 2000 to 2010—the area of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick combined. Therefore, deforestation in Canada represents only approximately 0.3% of global deforestation, far less than Canada's 9% share of the world's forests. Worldwide, deforestation is a major issue because it reduces biodiversity, affects water and soil quality, and is an important contributor to climate change. Although the rate of deforestation in Canada is quite low, slowing deforestation where possible contributes to Canada's efforts to reduce greenhouse gases.

What activities cause deforestation?

Using 2010 as an example, Canada's agriculture sector accounted for 41% of the deforestation (see chart), the result of forests having been cleared for pasture or crops. The remainder was caused by forestry; hydroelectricity development (1%), forest roads (8%), industry and resource extraction (32%) and urban development, transportation and recreation (17%).

Causes of deforestation in Canada for 2010



Monitoring the impacts of deforestation near Qualicum Beach, British Columbia.

How can we reduce deforestation in Canada?

Deforestation in Canada is driven by demand for resource development, economic growth and the need to build infrastructure. Efforts to reduce deforestation must therefore be balanced against other goals, such as expanding the economy, diversifying economic activities, and supporting employment and communities.

As a result, finding ways to reduce deforestation is challenging. There is a range of government policies and regulations that affect development, and these vary by sector and jurisdiction. Policies and regulations generally deal with other environmental, safety or economic issues—not deforestation. A further challenge is the lack of public awareness of deforestation.

Governments and industry are working to improve land management in Canada, which should reduce deforestation. Recognizing that we need a more comprehensive approach, provincial governments are increasingly using innovative practices such as integrated landscape management (ILM).

Integrated landscape management means planning land uses over an entire landscape and encouraging different land users to work together. For instance, ILM has been used in Alberta to coordinate forest clearing with oil sands development to ensure forest companies harvest timber from sites to be cleared for oil and gas and to prevent forest clearing for oil and gas development in newly replanted areas. British Columbia has also used ILM to encourage the various industries operating in forests to share roads rather than each building its own.

Deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions

The Canadian Forest Service estimates greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation for inclusion in Environment Canada's greenhouse gas *National Inventory Report*. Those estimates show that in 2013 deforestation caused less than 2% of the total greenhouse gas emissions in Canada. In comparison, deforestation worldwide results in about 10% of global human-caused emissions according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—most of this is in developing countries. Since Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions are less than 2% of global emissions, deforestation in Canada represents a very small proportion of global greenhouse gas emissions.

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