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**IMPACTS OF HUMAN-CAUSED FIRES
ON BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM
FUNCTIONING, AND THEIR CAUSES IN
TROPICAL, TEMPERATE AND BOREAL
FOREST BIOMES**



**Impacts of human-caused fires on biodiversity
and ecosystem functioning, and their causes in tropical,
temperate and boreal forest biomes**

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Foreword

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), was adopted in 1992 and entered into force in 1993. Its aims are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of biological resources, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. One of the major challenges facing the Convention on Biological Diversity is the communication of research results in a way that provides the policy makers, their advisors, the scientific community and other stakeholders with helpful insights.

Major factors leading to biodiversity loss are habitat loss and degradation, invasive alien species, overuse of resources and pollution. Due to the complexity of these factors, various approaches and strategies are being used to reduce biodiversity loss. All, however, require the best available scientific information that allows the development and implementation of sound management strategies.

The goal of the CBD Technical Publications Series is to contribute to the dissemination of up-to-date and accurate information on selected topics that are important for the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the equitable sharing of its benefits. A large and growing body of evidence has clearly established the need to disseminate synthesis publications relevant to CBD objectives and selected reports presented at CBD meetings.

The Technical Publications Series is intended to:

- Foster scientific and technical cooperation;
- Improve communication between the Convention and the scientific community;
- Increase awareness of current biodiversity-related problems and concerns; and
- Facilitate widespread and effective use of the growing body of scientific and technical information on conserving and using biological diversity.

The CBD Technical Publications Series comes at a time when the international community through the Conference of the Parties to the Convention has committed itself to achieving tangible results in all aspects of the sustainable management of biological diversity for social and economic purposes. We therefore believe that this series will be useful to the broader scientific community and those concerned with biodiversity management.

I am very pleased to make available to the scientific community and those actively involved in biodiversity management the fifth publication in the CBD Technical Series, addressing the impacts of human-caused fires on biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, and their causes in tropical, temperate and boreal forest biomes. It is my hope that this publication will broaden our understanding of the complexity of the issue and at the same time facilitate the implementation of remedial measures to reduce or halt biodiversity loss.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed in one-way or another in the preparation and production of this series.

Hamdallah Zedan
Executive Secretary

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Hamdallah Zedan
Executive Secretary

Impacts of human-caused fires on biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, and their causes in tropical, temperate and boreal forest biomes

Note by the Executive Secretary

Executive summary

The problems and negative impacts associated with large-scale uncontrolled forest fires have increased worldwide over the past two decades. By far the worst forest fires, in terms of burnt area, in recent times occurred in 1997-98. Estimates suggested that fires adversely impacted as much as 20 million hectares of forest worldwide. Despite the devastating picture evoked by media reports and the Internet in recent years, it is important to remember that fire is a vital and natural part of some forest ecosystems, and that humans have used fire for thousands of years as a land management tool. Similarly, the El Niño climate event that is often blamed for creating the drought conditions necessary for such large-scale fires is not a new phenomenon. However, in the latter part of the 20th century, changes in the man-fire dynamic and an increase in El Niño frequency, have led to a situation where fires are now a major threat to many forests and their biodiversity therein.

Tropical rain forests, in particular, which were once thought to be resistant to fires, are now experiencing large-scale fires due to unsustainable management practices. Temperate forests in the United States in which fire was deliberately suppressed for management and political reasons are now experiencing devastating wildfires due to an unnatural accumulation of fuel. Due to political and economic crises, boreal forests of Russia are experiencing some of the worst fires in decades.

Despite the sharp media focus, the position on international agendas and the many donor funded development and research projects, forest fires continue to be a problem in many countries. In addition, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the impact of fires on forest ecosystems and biodiversity. Out of the 36 fire projects carried out or ongoing in Indonesia, a country of great biological diversity, between 1983 and 1998, only one addressed biodiversity. However, the research community has fared slightly better, although few long-term studies exist outside North America.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) provides an adequate framework to address the negative impacts of human-induced fires on tropical, temperate, and boreal forest biological diversity:

- To achieve a reliable and operational system for national, regional and global forest fire monitoring and reporting to facilitate amelioration strategies (CBD Articles 5, 7, 17 and 18);
- To protect ecosystems vulnerable to forest fires and that are critically important for conservation at the national and global level, such as biodiversity hot spots and protected areas (CBD Article 8);
- To promote ecologically sustainable forest management, including environmentally sound expansion of plantations, elimination of illegal logging, and improvement of timber harvesting practices that reduce organic debris, and thus minimise unwanted fires (CBD Articles 11 and 12);
- To rehabilitate and restore degraded or burned forest lands (CBD Articles 8 and 10);
- To identify the processes and impacts of fires in vulnerable and globally significant ecosystems including tropical and boreal peat-land systems, and tropical woodlands (CBD Article 7);
- To train, educate and enhance public awareness in communities where fire is a major problem (CBD Articles 12 and 13);
- To assess more fully the impact of forest fires on aquatic and marine systems of tropical and boreal biomes (CBD Articles 7 and 12); and
- To improve and facilitate the exchange of information on the impact and contribution of forest fires to global climate change (CBD Articles 5 and 17).

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Executive summary	1
Table of Contents	3
1. Introduction	5
2. The major impacts of human-induced, uncontrolled forest fires on biological diversity and forest ecosystem functioning, and their underlying causes	7
3. Impacts of forest fires on tropical forests	9
3.1. Fire in tropical rain forests	9
3.2. Fire in tropical peat forests	11
3.3. Impact of forest fires on fauna in tropical forests	11
3.4. Direct and underlying causes of forest fires in tropical forests	12
4. Impacts of forest fires on temperate forests	14
4.1. Fire in temperate forests	14
4.2. Impact of forest fires on fauna in temperate forests	14
4.3. Direct and underlying causes of forest fires in temperate forests	15
5. Impacts of forest fires on boreal forests	17
5.1. Fire in boreal forests	17
5.2. Impact of forest fires on fauna	18
5.3. Direct and underlying causes of forest fires in boreal forests	18
6. Socio-economic impacts of forest fires	19
7. Forest fires and climate change	20
8. Proposals to address the negative impact of forest fires	21
References	23

1. Introduction

1. The negative impacts associated with large-scale uncontrolled forest fires have increased worldwide over the past two decades (Goldammer and Jenkins, 1990; Goldammer, 1999; Nepstad *et al.*, 1999 a, b; IUCN/WWF, 2000). By far the worst forest fires, in terms of burnt area, in recent times occurred in 1997-98 when as much as 20 million hectares of forest were impacted worldwide.

2. Despite the devastating picture evoked by media reports and the Internet in recent years, it is important to remember that fire is a vital and natural part of some forest ecosystems, and that humans have used fire for thousands of years as a land management tool. Similarly, the El Niño climate event that is often blamed for creating the drought conditions necessary for such large-scale fires is not a new phenomenon. Nineteenth century reports describe droughts in South-east Asia with the 1877/78 El Niño episode as one of the most severe on record (Kiladis and Diaz, 1986; Allen *et al.*, 1989; Harger, 1995 a, b; Trenberth and Hoar, 1997). However, in the latter part of the 20th century, changes in the man-fire dynamic and an increase in El Niño frequency (Brookfield *et al.*, 1995), have lead to a situation where fires are now a major threat to many forests and the biodiversity therein. Tropical rain forests, in particular, which were once thought to be resistant to fires, are now experiencing large-scale fires due to unsustainable management practices (Kauffmann *et al.*, 1988; Woods, 1989; Uhl and Kauffmann, 1990; Holdsworth and Uhl, 1997; Cochrane *et al.*, 1999; Nepstad *et al.*, 1999 b). Temperate forests in the United States in which fire was deliberately suppressed for management and political reasons are now experiencing devastating wildfires due to an unnatural accumulation of fuel (Agee, 1993).

3. As a result of the impact of large-scale forest fires in the 1980s and early 1990s, the issue has been forced onto the international agenda. In Agenda 21 at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

in Rio de Janeiro, fires were mentioned as one of the many threats to forests. In the same year, the Bandung Fire Conference held in Indonesia provided the impetus for three long-term fire projects in Indonesia (BAPPENAS, 1992). As a direct result of the 1997-98 forest fires the seriousness of the issue and the associated problems initiated ten internationally funded projects or assessments (Dennis, 1999). Furthermore, the Rome Declaration on Forestry of March 1998 made special mention of forests fires thus keeping the issue on the international agenda.

4. Despite the sharp media focus, the position on international agendas and the many donor funded development and research projects, forest fires continue to be a problem in many countries. It is also interesting to note the differing foci of this attention. In the Indonesian context, research showed that many of the early donor-assisted fire projects focussed on doing something practical about the problem such as fire prevention, control and management without a thorough understanding of the underlying causes or the long-term ecological impacts (Dennis, 1999). Across boreal, temperate and tropical biomes, researchers have extensively investigated the ecological impact of fires on forest ecosystems (Goldammer 1990; Goldammer and Jenkins, 1990; Goldammer and Furyaev, 1996; Goldammer *et al.*, 1996). By comparison, the attention, which has been paid to the impact of fires on forest biodiversity, is less comprehensive and more case-specific, especially for the tropics. For example, out of the 36 donor-assisted fire projects carried out or ongoing in Indonesia, a country of great biological diversity, between 1983 and 1998, only the Worldwide Fund for Nature specifically addressed the impact on biodiversity.

5. This paper will bring together the results of a literature study on the main impacts of human-induced, uncontrolled fires on forest biological diversity and forest ecosystem functions in tropical, temperate and boreal forests.

Based on the findings, a number of proposals to address the negative impacts of these fires are presented. The document is based on the review prepared by the Center of International Forestry Research (CIFOR) commissioned by the Secretariat to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

2.

The major impacts of human-induced, uncontrolled forest fires on biological diversity and forest ecosystem functioning, and their underlying causes

6. Globally, no reliable, consistent and comprehensive statistics about the annual distribution and extent of forest fires exist. However, the FAO in its latest decadal forest resources assessment (FRA 2000) (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2001) includes forest fire statistics for the first time. The "Global Forest Fire Assessment 1990-2000" within the FRA 2000 is being prepared by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and is now in the final stages of production (personal communication, Johann G. Goldammer, Head, Global Fire Monitoring Center, August 2001). This assessment will provide a much needed, comprehensive source of information.

7. Clearly, obtaining global forest fire statistics is a difficult task; often governments in developing countries do not have sufficient human or technical resources to carry out the assessment. Official government forest fire estimates can vary widely from non-official sources. This is well exemplified by the burnt area estimates for the Indonesian fires of 1997-98. The Ministry of Forestry stated that 263,000 ha of forestland burned in 1997 and 550,000 ha in 1998 (State Ministry of Environment, 1998). Based on satellite image analysis, and in some cases field checks, a combined group of non-government organisations came up with different estimates; the most widely cited of which is 4.7 million hectares of natural forest impacted by fire (Asian Development Bank, 1999).

8. Confusion over forest fire terminology is also widespread. "Forest fires" was commonly used to describe the Indonesian and Amazonian fires but a large percentage of these fires were not in forests. Media reports, in particular, did not distinguish between fires in forests and fires in non-forest. In many countries, land managed by the forestry department will be called forest land regardless of whether it is still forested or not, therefore fires occurring in these areas will be not necessarily be true forest fires but perhaps scrub fires. Such confusion makes it difficult to com-

pare and contrast forest fire statistics. Apart from the need for increased clarity on the type of vegetation burned, there is also a need for improved information on the degree of the fire damage caused to forest. Keeping these distinctions clear makes a great difference both in assessing the damage and the prospect for recovery, the social and economic cost of the fires, and in understanding the causes.

9. Fire can be a natural and important disturbance in many forests but in others it can cause devastation. Some ecosystems, such as the Mediterranean shrublands and many pine forests, are fire dependent, and their continued existence depends on the periodic occurrence of fires (Chandler *et al.*, 1983). In some forests, fire is deliberately used as a management tool (prescribed burning) to maintain ecosystems, allow regeneration and clear debris. Although some forest fires occur naturally, a combination of human activity, fuel availability, and climate accounts for the majority of fires. In temperate and boreal forests, lightning can be an ignition source but in the moist tropics the contribution from lightning is insignificant. In boreal and temperate forests management practices, which deliberately suppress fires, have created a situation where catastrophic fires are now a major problem. The vast majority of fires in the tropics are set intentionally for land clearing and conversion, swidden agriculture and arson and as such are land use fires, not forest fires. In the past two decades, extended and frequent droughts coupled with increased pressures on land and unsustainable forest use, especially in the tropics have led to an increase in catastrophic fire events.

10. In terms of the impact of large-scale uncontrolled fires, at a global scale, they can influence the chemical composition of the atmosphere and the reflectivity of the Earth's surface. At the regional and local scale, forest fires change biomass stocks, alter the hydrological cycle with knock-on effects for marine systems such as

coral reefs, reduce visibility to near zero, impact plant and animal species functioning and detrimentally impact the health and livelihoods of the human population (Goh *et al.*, 1999; Schwela *et al.*, 1999). Smoke from fires can significantly reduce photosynthetic activity (Davies and Unam, 1999).

11. Apart from the effect on forest vegetation, fire can have a significant impact on forest vertebrates and invertebrates. In forests where fire is a natural part of the system, species are adapted to a natural fire regime and can benefit from the aftermath of a fire. However, in forests where fire is not a natural disturbance, or where man suppresses the natural fire regime the impact on species can be negative. The direct effect of fire on forest fauna is death. Indirect effects of fires are far reaching and longer term and include stress, loss of habitat, territories, shelter and food. Fires can also cause the displacement of territorial birds and mammals, which may upset the local balance and ultimately result in the loss of wildlife, since displaced individuals have nowhere to go. Loss of food trees reduces the carrying capacity of the forest, causing overall decline in species that rely on fruits for food, this is especially true in tropical forests. The destruction of standing cavity trees as well as dead logs on the ground affects most small mammal species and cavity-nesting birds (Kinnaird and O'Brien, 1998). The loss of key organisms in forest ecosystems, such as invertebrates, pollinators and decomposers, can significantly slow the recovery rate of the forest (Boer, 1989).

12. The majority of impacts of uncontrolled, human-induced fires on forests ecosystems are generally negative. From an ecological standpoint, any positive impacts would depend entirely on location, timing, intensity, and frequency of fires. If fire was a natural part of the ecosystem and a human-induced, uncontrolled fire happened to coincide then the impact could be consistent with ecological requirements and therefore positive. From a human perspective, if peo-

ple have been using fire in a landscape for many years to maintain or manipulate specific values and an uncontrolled, human-induced fire took place, it may do what people would have intended and be consistent with human intentions. There may also be opportunistic, short-term benefits for people to take advantage of. In situations where fire is not a natural or not normally a human-induced part of the ecosystem the impacts would be neutral or negative. However, fire-induced change is not automatically negative to all things and all people, although the positive aspects may be specific to sub-groups of plants or animals.

3. Impacts of forest fires on tropical forests

13. In the tropics, fires occur every dry season in savanna woodlands, monsoon forest and tropical pine forests. The focus of this paper will be forests, not woodlands, but it is important to note that dry season fires in the understorey occur regularly and frequently in savanna woodlands such as the miombo of tropical Africa (Trapnell, 1959; Kikula, 1986; Frost, 1996). In the tropical rain forests large-scale fire is not a natural disturbance, but in the past two decades it has become an increasing threat. These forests have been particularly badly impacted by fires since the early 1980s. Some of the most notable examples will be described here but a more detailed description can be found in "The Global Review of Fires" (IUCN/WWF, 2000), specifically for Indonesia in Goldammer (Goldammer, 1990; Goldammer *et al.*, 1996), and for the Brazilian Amazon in Nepstad *et al.* (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a). In 1982-83, fires affected up to 5 million hectares of forests in Borneo (Lennertz and Panzer, 1983; Malingreau *et al.*, 1985; Leighton and Wirawan, 1986; Woods, 1987; Woods, 1989) while in the same years, in West Africa, notably in Côte d'Ivoire, 60,000 ha of forest were destroyed (Oura, 1999). In 1997-98, as much as 4.7 million hectares of natural forest burned in Indonesia, mainly in Sumatra and Borneo, and 1.5 million hectares of forest burned in northern Brazil (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a). In 1998, forest fires also burned in Venezuela, Colombia, Surinam and Guyana. Fires returned to the region in 1999, including Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay. In the same year, Central America and Mexico were also badly affected by fires with as much as 1.5 million hectares of forest damaged, affecting many protected areas. The United Nations considered the 1997-98 fires in Indonesia and Brazil so bad that they dispatched United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Teams to carry out assessment missions (UNDAC, 1998c; UNDAC, 1998a). Forest fires hit Ethiopia in March 2000, the first big fires since 1984. The threatened, afro-montane forests and moist tropical forests were badly damaged with as much as 53,000 ha of Bale National Park

destroyed (Goldammer, 2000). The extent of the forest fire statistics presented here are necessarily limited, for a more comprehensive picture consult Goldammer (1990).

14. Seasonal fires occur in the monsoon and dry semi-deciduous forests of continental and South East Asia. These fires occur in the dipterocarp forests of Thailand or in the case of Myanmar and Laos, in natural teak forests. Tropical pine forests (*Pinus merkusii*) and bamboo forests are also affected by fire. The combination of human activities and seasonally available flammable fuels (grass-herb layer, fallen leaves) allows the spread of surface fires. Tree species exhibit adaptive traits such as thick bark, ability to heal fire scars, re-sprouting capability, and seed characteristics. The ecological importance of these annual fires on forest formations is significant. Fire strongly promotes fire-tolerant species, which replace the species potentially growing in an undisturbed environment. For example, data collected for Thailand between 1984 and 1986 showed that about 21% of the forestland was affected by fire annually. By 1992 the burned area had dropped to 15% or ca. 1.9 million ha. In Thailand, 5% of forestland is plantations, which are twice as prone to fires as natural forests (Royal Forest Department, 1992).

3.1. Fire in tropical rain forests

15. Wildfires in most undisturbed, tall, closed-canopy, tropical rain forests are virtually impossible because a moist microclimate, moist fuels, low wind speeds and high rainfall create nearly non-flammable conditions (Kauffmann *et al.*, 1988; Kauffmann and Uhl, 1990; Holdsworth and Uhl, 1997; Cochrane and Schulze, 1999; Nepstad *et al.*, 1999 a, b). However, during severe droughts, as experienced during El Niño years, rain forests may become more susceptible to fire. Evidence from the Amazon and Indonesia support the theory that since the Pleistocene intermittent drought conditions have created the conditions for forest fires in long-return intervals (Sanford *et al.*, 1985; Uhl *et al.*, 1988;

Goldammer and Seibert, 1989). However, a shift in the general perception that fires were not a significant threat to this forest type has come about since 1982-83 when an intense drought and accompanying fires destroyed large areas of the tropical forests of Borneo and in West Africa. During the past two decades the increased commercial exploitation of forests, apart from degrading forests and making them more fire prone, has also led to an increased use of fire in clearing tropical forests for agricultural expansion and plantations.

16. Fires in the tropical rain forest can be generally classified as forest surface fires and deforestation fires (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a). In tropical peat swamp forests, a third type of fire, the ground fire can occur when peat layers ignite. The forest surface fires, which are often deceptively small and slow moving, ignite the organic debris lying on the forest floor. The principle forest damage comes not through the destruction of organic matter on the forest floor, but through the overheating of tree stems and lianas (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a) which eventually causes the death of these plants, often months or years later. Depending on the intensity of the fire it can kill virtually all seedlings, sprouts, lianas and young trees because they are not protected by thick bark. The most important tree family in Borneo, the *Dipterocarpaceae*, is adversely affected by fire due to its thin bark, high content of flammable resin, and a lack of resprouting capability (Whitmore, 1990). However, in lightly burnt forests dipterocarps can regenerate (Leighton and Wirawan, 1986). Conversely, the deforestation fire, which is more common in disturbed forest, can vary in intensity and burn standing trees, at its worst completely burning the forest leaving nothing alive but bare soil. This type of fire should not be confused with fire in forest conversion, which includes pre-fire treatment – clearfelling, drying and igniting the prepared conversion plots.

17. The level of pre-fire forest disturbance has a strong correlation with susceptibility to fire. In general, most investigators of the 1982-83 fires in Borneo found that fire intensity and damage sustained was significantly higher in logged-over forest with the degree of fire-damage related to the logging intensity and residual debris on the forest floor (Lennertz and Panzer, 1983; Leighton, 1984; Mackie, 1984; Malingreau *et al.*, 1985; Wirawan, 1987; Woods, 1987; Woods, 1989; Wirawan, 1993). Researchers also noted that the fires in the forest had a significant negative impact on the seed-bank, seedlings and saplings, which did little to assist the recovery of the original species (Woods, 1987; Woods, 1989). Logging activities often lead to a build up of woody debris on the forests floor and an opening of the canopy. As a consequence the forest generally "dries out" and light tolerant species such as grasses and shrubs colonise the forest floor.

18. One of the most important ecological effects of burning is the increased probability of further burning in subsequent years, as dead trees topple to the ground, opening up the forest to drying by sunlight, and building up the fuel load with an increase in fire-prone species, such as pyrophytic grasses. The most destructive fires occur in forests that have burned previously (Cochrane *et al.*, 1999). Many of the forests that burned in Borneo in 1982-83, or during the following El Niño droughts, burned again in 1997-98 (Hoffmann *et al.*, 1999). The consequence of repeated burns is detrimental because it is a key factor in the impoverishment of biodiversity in rain forest ecosystems.

19. The post-fire assessment of the 1982-83 in Indonesia fires provided some qualitative assessments on regeneration potential of forests affected by fire (Schindele *et al.*, 1989). The degree of expected recovery of the forest depended on the intensity of burning. For the undisturbed primary forest it was stated that full recovery of the forest could be expected within a few years (Schindele *et al.*, 1989). However, in the dis-

turbed forests, the prognosis for recovery in the presence of fire was not positive. In lightly disturbed burnt forest, the potential for recovery was good, but not without the help of rehabilitation methods. In moderately disturbed burnt forest, it was unlikely that there would be timber production for at least 70 years and in heavily disturbed forest it would take hundreds of years to return to a typical rainforest ecosystem in the absence of fire.

20. There has been little success with post-fire rehabilitation of tropical rainforests. Following the 1982-83 fires in Indonesia, Schindele *et al.* (1989) proposed a number of rehabilitation measures such as afforestation, enrichment planting, timber stand improvement and encouragement of natural succession. However, there has been little success or commitment to rehabilitation of post-fire forests in East Kalimantan. The Sustainable Forest Management Project in East Kalimantan emphasised the importance of natural regeneration and mixed planting of native species, forest protection from further disturbance, and community participation for successful rehabilitation and management of post-fire forests (Sustainable Forest Management Project, 1999). The Indonesian Ministry of Forestry and Estate Crops introduced salvage logging as a management and financing tool in forest areas burned in 1997-98 (Sustainable Forest Management Project, 1999). Salvage logging gives companies the right to remove dead timber from severely burned logged-over forest or burned primary forest. There is some concern that salvage logging activities may adversely affect the course of vegetation succession (Nieuwstadt *et al.*, In prep), while there are strong indications that the practice is misused on a large scale to cut the still living trees in burnt areas.

21. In terms of the ecological impact of fires in tropical rain forests, the replacement of vast areas of forest with pyrophytic grasslands is probably the most negative impact. These

processes have already been observed in parts of Indonesia and Amazonia (Turvey, 1994; Cochrane *et al.*, 1999; Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a). What was once a dense evergreen forest becomes an impoverished forest populated by a few fire-resistant tree species and a ground cover of weedy grasses (Cochrane *et al.*, 1999). In north Queensland in Australia, it has been observed that where the aboriginal fire practices and fire regimes were controlled rain forest vegetation started to replace the fire-prone tree-grass savannas (Stocker, 1981).

3.2. Fire in tropical peat forests

22. Tropical peat forests deserve special mention, as drainage of these peatlands makes them particularly vulnerable to fire, especially ground fires, which produce noxious smoke (Asian Development Bank, 1999; Rieley, 2001). Peat land fires produced a significant proportion of the smoke generated by Indonesian fires of 1997. Within the last 10 years tropical peat forests in Southeast Asia declined by 9.5 million hectares, much of which went up in smoke (Rieley, 2001). Peat mainly burns with a non-flaming processes and is generally a very low-intensity combustion process. It produces high emissions of particulate matter, CO, and other compounds of incomplete combustion (Schwela *et al.*, 1999), which makes it particularly detrimental to respiratory health (Goh *et al.*, 1999). 1997 saw some of the severest peat swamp forest fires ever known in the region. Fires penetrated into the dried-out surface peat to a depth of up to 1.5 metres, and between 750 million and one billion tonnes of carbon were released into the atmosphere from Indonesia alone (Asian Development Bank, 1999; Rieley, 2001).

3.3. Impact of forest fires on fauna in tropical forests

23. There are still few in-depth studies of the effect of fires on tropical rain forest biodiversity. One can draw on a number of case studies that took place after the fires in 1982-83 and 1997-98 in Indonesia. The 1982-83 fires in Kutai National

Park, East Kalimantan resulted in widespread mortality of reptiles and amphibians (Leighton, 1984; MacKinnon *et al.*, 1996). Fruit-eating birds such as hornbills declined dramatically and only insectivorous birds, such as woodpeckers were common due to abundance of wood-eating insects. Rabinowitz (Rabinowitz, 1990) reports that burned dipterocarp forest in Thailand is impoverished of small mammals, birds and reptiles, and that carnivores tend to avoid burned over areas. In Borneo, the orang utan (*Pongo pygmaeus*) suffered a 33 % decline in its population decline due to the 1997-98 forest fires (Rijksen and Meijaard, 1999). In Sumatra, Kinnaird and O'Brien (Kinnaird and O'Brien, 1998) reported fire damage in the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park during the fires of 1997. The loss of fruit trees reduced the fruit availability to a large number of omnivorous species, such as primates and squirrels, Sun Bear (*Ursus malayanus*) and civets as well as ungulates such as mouse deer (*Tragulus* sp.) and muntjac (*Muntiacus* sp.). The reduction in densities of ground squirrels and tree shrews suggested that rodent densities in general declined which adversely affected the food supply for small carnivores such as the leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*). The destruction of tree cavities effected birds and mammals such as tarsiers, bats, and lemurs. Finally, the extensive fires destroyed the leaf litter and its associated arthropod community, further reducing food availability for omnivores and carnivores (Kinnaird and O'Brien, 1998). For other tropical rain forests there is a paucity of published information of the impacts on animal biodiversity. Following surface fires in the Brazilian Amazon, there was a decline in slow-moving animals, frugivores and much of the litter fauna (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a).

3.4. Direct and underlying causes of forest fires in tropical forests

24. Fire is an important tool for preparing land in the tropics. For numerous reasons, humans cause the vast majority of forest fires in the tropics. In terms of direct causes, there are four main

anthropogenic causes of forest fires in the tropics; land clearing with fire, fire being used as weapon in land tenure or land use disputes, accidental or escaped fire, and fires connected with resource extraction (Tomich *et al.*, 1998; Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a; Barber *et al.*, 2000; Applegate *et al.*, 2001). Land development strategies, such as ranching in Amazonia (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a), or pulp or oil palm plantations in Indonesia (Barber *et al.*, 2000; Applegate *et al.*, 2001) use fire for land preparation and have significantly contributed to forest fires in recent years. In addition, small holder farmers use fire in the preparation of land for permanent crops or swidden agriculture. These land clearing fires often escape the intended area of burn, especially during El Niño years, and burn nearby forests. Arson is a major cause of fire in many resource rich areas, where land is either scarce for agricultural production, and/or where there is resource conflict over tenure or access rights (Applegate *et al.*, 2001). In Indonesia, it was found that arson was particularly evident in areas of natural forest on fertile soils, and areas where large landholders had obtained land for large-scale plantations, such as oil palm (Applegate *et al.*, 2001).

25. A study in Indonesia identified six major underlying causes of fires, many of which are similar to findings for other tropical forests (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a; Applegate *et al.*, 2001). Firstly, inappropriate and uncoordinated land use allocation creates the situation where forests are converted to non-forest use such as plantations. Land tenure issues were found to be one of the most common causes of forest fires in Indonesia (Applegate *et al.*, 2001). These problems arise in a number of situations; when informal land tenure security promotes site occupation and forest conversion, where there is no incentive for local communities to control unwanted fires for which they have no responsibility and receive no benefit, where there are overlapping land claims between local communities, migrants, large communities, large companies and forest managers, and where there is a

lack of a transparent legal system to address land claims and traditional communal rights. Shifts in demographic characteristics resulting from large-scale migration also lead to forest fires due to a lack of commitment to the new location and inexperience with the use of fire in a new environment. Forest degrading practices resulting from inappropriate timber harvesting practices can be an underlying cause of forest fires, for example large-scale drainage systems in swamps that lower the water table and provide increased access (Rieley, 2001). Financial incentives/disincentives created through increased profitability of alternative land use (e.g. coffee, small holder rubber, oil palm, rubber, timber, cattle ranching) and perverse development processes and mechanisms can indirectly cause forest fires (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a; Applegate *et al.*, 2001). Inadequate institutional capacity resulting from lack of capability, resources and political will to monitor and deal with encroachment and other illegal activities in forest areas can lead to forest fires. Finally, inadequate forest management plans and facilities to prevent and suppress accidental or escaped fires in plantations and natural forest can lead to fires.

4. Impacts of forest fires on temperate forests

26. According to FAO, the United States had the highest annual number of reported fires in the 1990s (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2001), although this may be more due to reporting procedures than actually having the highest number of fires. In 1998, as much as 5 million hectares of forest were affected in the United States and Canada (IUCN/WWF, 2000). The states of Idaho and Montana were particularly affected in 2000, and much of Montana was declared a disaster area. US officials said that "brush" fires raging across 11 western states were the worst in 50 years and that there were more than 60,000 fires, which burnt nearly 2.9 million hectares of land (GFMC, 2000).

27. In much of temperate Europe, forest fires are negligible. However, the Mediterranean Basin is an exception. Between 1989 and 1993, 2.6 million hectares of forest and woodland were destroyed by fire in the Mediterranean (Xanthopoulos, 2000). Both the number of fires and burnt area are believed to have doubled since the 1970s, though some increase is thought to be due to better and more accurate forest fire monitoring (IUCN/WWF, 2000). The worst affected countries are France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece. At present, the Mediterranean experiences 50,000 fires a year, which burn an estimated 600,000 hectares (Economic Commission on Europe/FAO, 1999). Severe fires occurred in 1998 and 2000, exacerbated by extremely hot, dry weather. Data for 1998 show that 127,940 hectares of coniferous forest burned in Spain, 70,027 hectares in Italy, of which 8,483 hectares was broadleaved forest, and 109,967 hectares of forest and woodland in Portugal (Economic Commission on Europe/FAO, 1999).

4.1. Fire in temperate forests

28. Fires are a natural and important disturbance in many temperate forests. This is seen in plant adaptations such as thick bark, which enables a species to withstand or resist recurrent low intensity fires, while less well-adapted associates perish. Some tree species, notably the Jack

Pine (*Pinus banksiana*) and Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta*), have serotinus (late-opening) cones. While closed, these cones hold a viable seed bank in the canopy that remains protected until fire affects the tree. After fire, the cone scales open releasing the seed into a freshly prepared ash bed. Many plant species have the ability to re-sprout after being burned, either from the rootstock or the stem (Agee, 1993). Mountain ash, a eucalypt of temperate Australia, also requires a site to completely burn and be exposed to full sun for the species to regenerate prolifically (IUCN/WWF, 2000). Forest flammability is high in the Mediterranean Basin and most plant communities are fire prone. *Quercus ilex* is resistant to mild fires and woodlands recover without any major floral or structural change (Trabaud *et al.*, 1980). If fire is neither frequent nor intense, open cork oak (*Q. suber*) forests can be maintained without management.

4.2. Impact of forest fires on fauna in temperate forests

29. With regards to the effect on biodiversity, in Portugal, it was found that the current fire regime probably contributed to maintaining the bird diversity at the landscape level (Moreira *et al.*, 2001), while in Israel, species richness in certain areas was the highest 2 - 4 years after a fire followed by a decrease over time (Kutiel, 1997). In North America, fire suppression in some areas, has contributed to the decline of grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) numbers (Contreras *et al.*, 1986). Fires promote and maintain many important berry-producing shrubs and forbs, which are important food source for bears, as well as providing habitat for insects and in some cases carrion. In the 1998 Yellowstone National Park fires, Blanchard and Knight (1990) stated: "*The most important apparent immediate effect of fires on grizzly bears was the increased availability of some food items, especially carcasses of elk.*" In largely non-forest environments of Australia, detrimental fire regimes contributed to the extinction of two of the three bird species and three of the four subspecies that have disap-

peared from Australia since European colonisation (Woinarski, 1999). Of the threatened species (typically associated with non-forest environments) that have had fire studies undertaken on them in Australia, almost all show clear preference to very low fire frequencies and certain intensities that may not be currently prevailing. Not all species suffer from fire, however, for instance, grass-layer beetle species in Australia's savannahs showed remarkable resilience to fire, although fires affect abundance, species and family richness. This particular research suggested that fire management should be more mindful of fire frequency rather than intensity (Orgeas and Andersen, 2001). Similarly, in an area where frequent burning occurs on a broad scale, preserving a range of microhabitats can make a substantial contribution to conserving biodiversity (Andrew *et al.*, 2000).

4.3. Direct and underlying causes of forest fires in temperate forests

30. Throughout the 20th century humans have inadvertently or deliberately changed the fire regimes of temperate forests. In the United States, where prescribed burning was once popular, pressure groups organised around the U.S. Forest Service have steadily led to the suppression of fires on federal land. This has come with an increasing economic and ecological cost. Many commentators on fire in the U.S would echo the following statement by Stephen Pyne (1997), a renowned fire historian; "*Today there is a maldistribution of burning – too much wildfire, too little controlled fire.*" The scale of the devastation caused by recent fires in the United States has added fuel to the 20-30 year old "burn, no-burn" debate. The attempted removal of fire from the environment has seriously upset many biotas as well as compromised the prospects for future fire protection. Concerning this, Pyne aptly wrote: "*Biodiversity can be lost as surely through fire exclusion as through fire excess*". After the fires of the past few years, experts agree that successes in controlling forest fires over the past 50 years have left a large amount of deadwood in

the forests, providing potential fuel for large-scale wildfires. In North America, data collected by the National Interagency Fire Centre for the years 1991-97 show that lightning, debris burning and arson are consistently the three main causes of fire in the United States (IUCN/WWF, 2000). In Australia, manipulation of fire, either explicitly or by default, is the main landscape management tool in many environments and most conservation areas. Inappropriate fire regimes (too much or too little) are the main threat to many vulnerable and endangered birds (Garnett, 1992), and other biota, such as plants (Leigh *et al.*, 1984).

31. In the Mediterranean, there are few landscapes that have not been altered by the human activities of grazing, cutting, coppicing, terracing and burning. However, many of them are now abandoned or altered. One outcome of this altered pattern has been a general increase in the quantity and flammability of fuels. An additional significant factor has been the extensive establishment of pine and eucalyptus plantations for sawlog and pulpwood production. These highly flammable monocultures have sustained many of the large wildfires (Goldammer and Jenkins, 1990). An important element in the wildfire problem in the Mediterranean has been the unprecedented occurrence of arson, as many as 95% of the fires in 1989 could have been deliberately set (Goldammer *et al.*, 1990). The specific reasons for such activities are difficult to determine but some of the reasons may be the availability of burnt lands for construction of tourist resorts, revenge or people dissatisfied by the government establishment of plantations and suppression of traditional activities (Goldammer and Jenkins, 1990). In Greece, an increase in fires since the 1980s can be attributed in a large part to the activity of people near the forest edge. New roads and an increase in car ownership offer easier access to the forest. In the hot summer months, people leave the cities and seek cooler spots along the coast or in the mountains, increasing the risk of accidental fires

(Xanthopoulos, 2000). In Algeria, one underlying cause of fire is conflicts between local inhabitants and forest authorities. People who have been penalised for illegal wood cutting or grazing start forest fires as an act of revenge. Madoui (Madoui, 2000) suggests that this is the cause of the majority of forest fires. In the period 1907-1957, fires that occurred due to negligence (smoking, camp fires, honey collecting) accounted for as much as 52% of forest fires. In the period 1977-1991, this figure dropped to 18% with unknown causes accounting for 82% of fires.

5. Impacts of forest fires on boreal forests

32. Some of the largest fires in the world occur in boreal forests. In 1987, in north-eastern China 1.3 million hectares were destroyed by a single fire (Di and Ende, 1990). The largest area of boreal forest lies in the Russian Federation and fires are a common annual event (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001). In 1915, forest fires were estimated to have destroyed 14 million hectares of closed forest in Russia (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001). In 1998, which was an exceptionally dry year, approximately 2 million hectares of forests burned in the Eastern Russia region of Khabarovsk near the border with China and on Sakhalin Island (UNDAC, 1998b). However, recent estimates from satellite imagery conclude that 7.2 million hectares of forestland (defined as State Forest Land and may include unforested areas) burned in the Asian part of Russia, of which 1 million hectares were crown fires (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001). Very dry conditions also prevailed in Canada where 4.5 million hectares of forest burned. Nearly ten years earlier in 1989, as much as 7.6 million burned in the Canadian boreal forests (Canadian Council of Forest Ministers, 1998). For a more comprehensive description and discussion of fires in the boreal Eurasia one should consult the definitive monograph on the subject (Goldammer and Furyaev, 1996).

5.1. Fire in boreal forests

33. Fire, often with high intensity, is the major natural disturbance mechanism in boreal forests. Fire return times in natural forests varies greatly, from as little as 40 years in some Jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*) ecosystems in central Canada, to as long as 300 years depending on climate patterns (van Wagner, 1978). In NW Europe the normal fire frequency on a given site is usually 40-200 years in natural conditions. In Sweden, it has been estimated that about 1% of the forest land burned yearly before systematic suppression of fires started in the late 19th century (Zackrisson, 1977). Most boreal conifers and broad-leaved deciduous trees suffer high mortality even at low fire intensities owing to canopy architecture, low

foliar moisture and thin bark (Johnson, 1992). Some pines (*Pinus banksiana*, *P. resinosa*, *P. monticola* and *P. sylvestris*) have thicker bark and generally greater crown base and height, and old tall trees can often survive several fires. The disturbance regime of fire creates succession patterns responsible for the mosaic of age classes and communities. Natural wildfire pattern are dependent on a variety of variables (frequency and intensity of the fire, vegetation type, and the site factors such as slope, elevation, tree species, and age class). It is important to note that fire refuges exist in some parts of the forest on moist sites with local humidity, where fire may absent for several hundred years. Fire refuges are vital to the forest because many species may survive only in such areas, and then supply a seed source to recolonize the burned areas (Ohlson *et al.*, 1997).

34. Generally, the ability of post-fire boreal forest to regenerate is high but frequent high intensity fires can offset this balance. Due to the extreme severity of the 1998 fires in the Russian Federation, more than 2 million hectares of forest have lost the majority of their major ecological functions for a period of 50-100 years (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001). On the contrary, in the natural forests of the northern and sparsely stocked taiga and forest tundra, particularly on permafrost sites, surface fires occurring at long-return intervals of 80 to 100 years represent a natural mechanism that prevents the transformation of forests to shrubland or grassland (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001). Exclusion of fire induces the build-up of organic layers that prevents melting of the upper soil and rise of the permafrost layer, resulting in impoverishment of forests, decreasing productivity, and conversion to marshes. Severe fires have had a significant negative impact on plant biodiversity. Southern species that are at the northern edge of their geographic range are particularly vulnerable. For example, in Primorsky Krai (the Russian Federation), the richness of 60 species of vascular plants, 10 fungi, 8 lichens and 6 species of mosses resulted in negative change during the

previous decades, mostly due to human-induced fires and fragmentation of forests (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001).

5.2. Impact of forest fires on fauna

35. The number of the rare and critically endangered Amur (Siberian) tigers (*Panthera tigris altaica*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), and moose on large areas burned in 1976 in the Amur River basin Eastern Russia decreased from 1972 to 1997 by 20-50 times (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001). Much of the area affected by the 1998 fires is prime Amur tiger habitat, it is estimated that only 400 individuals remain in the wild. Estimates from the 1998 fires suggest that mammals and fish were badly affected; mortality of squirrels and weasels reached 70-80 %, boar 15-25%, and rodents 90% (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001). Increased water temperatures and high carbon dioxide levels adversely affected salmon spawning (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001). In North America, moose are occasionally trapped and killed by fire (Gasaway and Du Bois, 1985). However, fire generally enhances moose habitat by creating and maintaining seral communities, and is considered beneficial to moose populations (MacCracken and Viereck, 1990). The beneficial effects of fire on its habitat is estimated to last less than 50 years, with moose density peaking 20 to 25 years following fire (LeResche *et al.*, 1974). Extremely large, hot, and fast-moving wildfires can force moose to temporarily abandon their home ranges (LeResche *et al.*, 1974). The effect of fire on gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) habitat is best defined by how fire affects grey wolves' prey. Beaver (*Castor canadensis*), moose, and deer are fire-dependent species, requiring the plant communities that persist following frequent fires (Kramp *et al.*, 1983). Similarly, now absent from the old-growth forests of Minnesota, caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) were once an important prey for grey wolves. These forests do not provide sufficient food to sustain other ungulates for grey wolves to prey on. Due to fire exclusion, these old-growth forests have increased, checking

ungulate populations and consequently limiting gray wolf populations (Heinselman, 1973). Fire was once thought to be detrimental to caribou because it destroys the slow-growing lichens formerly considered primary caribou food. Many believe that fire is beneficial to caribou in the long-term (Klein, 1982). There is no dispute that fires can kill important lichen species and that these lichens can take a minimum of 30 years to recover. However, there is dispute over what constitutes recovery, and lichen reestablishment does not always lead to caribou recovery.

5.3. Direct and underlying causes of forest fires in boreal forests

36. Although fire has long been used as a land-clearance tool in Russia, the political and economic crises are said to be the main underlying causes of recent large-scale fires (IUCN/WWF, 2000). Due to job scarcity and insecurity people are turning to the forests for income. Hunting, poaching (the market price for the pelt of an Amur Tiger is US\$30,000), fishing, illegal logging (occurring at an unparalleled rate) and collection of forests products such as berries and mushrooms has increased significantly. These activities have led to a large increase in the number of people in the forest, which has exacerbated the risk of accidental fires. Authorities believe that 70-85% of fires are anthropogenic, and west of the Urals this figure rises to 100% (IUCN/WWF, 2000). In addition, the government does not have the human or financial resources to enforce regulations, monitor and manage forests and prevent fire. In Canada, data collected from 1981 to 1995 indicate that lightning causes some 42% of forest fires. These fires, however, burn approximately 85% of the total forest burned each year. Interestingly, it has been reported that people are responsible for starting two thirds of forest fires in Canada (Todd and Kourtz, 2000).

6. Socio-economic impacts of forest fires

37. Many of the costs of forest fires to society are difficult to quantify in monetary terms because they involve ecological processes and services that are not traded in the marketplace but that sustain the production of food, fibre, and other commercial products. There are a number of estimates available for the economic impacts of fires and smoke from various fire events. It is not easy to compare and contrast these estimates as different methodologies are used and many include forest and non-forest fires. This is major drawback in collecting meaningful fire data for producing global evaluations.

38. The economic losses from the 1997-98 Indonesian fires were conservatively estimated at US\$9 billion (Asian Development Bank, 1999). Breaking this figure down into its forest-related components shows that timber losses from natural forests reached US\$ 2 billion, lost growth of natural forests was calculated at US\$377 million, loss of non-timber forest products reached US\$586 million, loss of flood protection was estimated at US\$400 million, and the cost of erosion and siltation totalled US\$1.5 billion. The cost of carbon emissions was estimated at 1.4 billion, based on a figure of US\$10/t C. In the Amazon, total timber losses resulting from surface fires exceed several million dollars per year, and may reach tens of millions when large areas of un-logged forest catch fire because of drought induced fire susceptibility (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a). The economic losses associated with forest fire may be much more significant for small holders than large holders as they depend on the forest for a wide range of services and uses (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a).

39. Few estimates are available for the economic impact from temperate and boreal forest fires. Timber companies owned a quarter of the land burned in 1998 in the U.S, and timber losses were estimated to exceed US\$300 million (IUCN/WWF, 2000). The cost to fight the fires was US\$130 million (IUCN/WWF, 2000). Preliminary estimates for the 1998 fires in the

Russian Federation, suggest that timber losses might reach 400-500 million cubic metres, about 4 times the current level of harvest in Russia. Some regions have now lost their potential for industrial tree harvesting (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001).

40. Smoke and "haze" from forest fires produce some of the most visible costs to society. People suffer respiratory problems, which puts pressure on meagre medical facilities in many tropical countries. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Health (Nepstad *et al.*, 1999a) twice as many patients are admitted to hospital each month due to respiratory problems during the peak of the burning season, than during other months. Estimates suggest that between 20 million and 70 million people were adversely affected by smoke from the Indonesian fires and at least 40,000 people were hospitalised both in Indonesia and neighbouring countries (Barber and Schweithelm, 2000; Asian Development Bank, 1999; Glover and Jessup, 1999; Schwela *et al.*, 1999). Smoke reduces visibility, provoking transportation accidents and airport shutdowns. This often leads to transboundary smoke pollution, which provokes international indignation (ADB, 1999; Goh *et al.*, 1999; Schwela *et al.*, 1999).

7. Forest fires and climate change

41. Forest fires are a significant source of emitted carbon, which exacerbates global warming as well as being an irreplaceable carbon sink. Substantial amounts of carbon have been released from forest clearing at high and mid-latitudes over the past centuries and in the tropics during the latter part of the 20th century. From 1850 to 1998, approximately 270 (+/- 30) Gt C has been emitted as carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from fossil fuel burning and cement production (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2000). About 136 (+/- 55) Gt C has been emitted as a result of land use change, predominantly from forest ecosystems (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2000). Estimates vary, but biomass burning is now recognised as a significant source of CO₂ and is generally considered to contribute between 20 and 40% of total CO₂ emission worldwide (IUCN/WWF, 2000). Carbon released into the atmosphere from biomass burning in tropical forests was estimated at 212 Gt C from vegetation and 216 Gt C from the soil (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2000). This figure is much lower in the temperate forests, where only 59 Gt C is held in vegetation and 100 Gt C in the soil. The largest carbon stocks are in boreal forests, where 88 Gt C is in vegetation and 471 Gt C in the soil. Some estimates are available for specific fire events. Direct emissions of carbon during the 1998 fires in the Russian Far East totaled 172.8 million tons, of which forest fires emitted 133.8 million tons (Shvidenko and Goldammer, 2001). During the 1997-98 fires in Indonesia, between 750 million and one billion tonnes of carbon were released into the atmosphere from peat swamp clearing and burning alone (Asian Development Bank, 1999; Rieley, 2001). One estimate calculates that fires from all the world's tropical forests in 1998 released 1-2 billion tonnes of carbon, which is equivalent to one third of the emissions from fossil fuel burning worldwide (IUCN/WWF, 2000).

42. Climate change predictions by Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, published in February 2001, concludes that forest fires will become an increasing problem in many forest biomes. The globally averaged surface temperature has increased by 0.6 +/- 0.2°C over the 20th century and average air temperature is projected to rise to 1.4 to 5.8°C by 2100 relative to 1990 (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2000). In Latin America, it is expected that large forest areas will be affected as a result of projected changes in climate. Climate change could add an additional stress to the adverse effects of continued deforestation of the Amazon rainforest. This impact could lead to biodiversity losses, reduce rainfall and runoff within and beyond the Amazon basin and affect the global carbon cycle. Forest fires are predicted to increase in North American forests. Reduced soil moisture during the summer will increase drought stress and the incidence of wildfires. Flannigan and van Wagner (1991) and Stocks and Lynham (1996) both underscore the fact that fire may be the driving force in changing the boreal forest under rising temperature. The severity of fire is also likely to increase as Fosberg et al. (1996) showed that the current worst 10 percent of moderate fires in Russia and Canada would be classified as extreme fire ignition and severity potential in the future. Tropical forests are expected to warm by 2°C above 1970s levels by the mid-21st century, with larger effects in continental interiors (UNEP-WCMC, 2000). Inter-annual variability in large-scale climate events such as El Niño may act to exacerbate rainfall extremes. Goldammer and Price (1998) predict that land use and climate under conditions of global warming will result in a high wildfire risk in tropical rain forests and tropical dry forests (Goldammer and Price, 1998).

8.

Proposals to address the negative impact of forest fires

8.1. To achieve a reliable and operational system for national, regional and global forest fire monitoring and reporting to facilitate amelioration strategies (CBD Articles 5, 17 and 18) through:

- Inter-agency/inter-sectoral collation and storage of comparable datasets on the extent, impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity, and socio-economy, costs, and direct and underlying causes of forest fires worldwide;
- Identification of a suitable institution and an operational strategy for a clearinghouse on worldwide forest fires data; and (this is currently underway under the ISDR-IATF WG IV on Wildland Fires (personal communication, Johann G. Goldammer, Head, Global Fire Monitoring Center, August 2001))
- Promotion and encouragement of participation of all stakeholders in providing data to the clearinghouse. The Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC) already systematically collects global fire statistics and allows free and open access. Instead of suggesting a new clearinghouse, it would be more appropriate to support and strengthen the GFMC.

8.2. To protect ecosystems that are vulnerable to forest fires and are critically important for conservation of national and global biodiversity, such as biodiversity hot spots, and protected areas (CBD Article 8) through:

- Identification and development of appropriate fire management regimes for protected areas and biodiversity hot spots under most threat from fire in tropical, temperate and boreal forest biomes;
- Recognising local communities and multi-stakeholder interests in the use of forests, develop appropriate fire management plans in and around locations of high biodiversity value; and
- Recognising that important forest biodiversity also exists in timber production forests or out-

side the protected area system, develop sets of standards for the preparation of environmentally sound and sustainable management plans (including fire management) that take account of biodiversity conservation and local community needs.

8.3. To encourage community participation and involvement in fire management, prevention and suppression plans (CBD Articles 8 and 10) through:

- Promotion of community involvement and education about forest and land fires;
- Promotion and encouragement of policies that create and support community managed forests;
- Management and development of fire use to improve outcomes and reduce the incidence of agricultural fires burning beyond the area of intention;
- Mandating and equipping natural resources managers, in partnership with communities and relevant stakeholders to prepare and implement integrated fire management plans that promote a balance between fire prevention, response and restoration, and discourage strategies that rely too heavily on fire-fighting as the primary means to deal with forest fire;

8.4. To promote ecologically sustainable forest management, including environmentally sound based expansion of plantations, elimination of illegal logging, and improvement of timber harvesting practices to reduce organic debris to minimise unwanted fires (CBD Articles 11 and 12) through:

- Development of appropriate sets of standards for the development of tropical plantations (timber, oil palm, rubber) taking full account of biodiversity conservation and local community needs;
- Development of a strategy to facilitate the adoption of improved timber harvesting

practices by timber companies, local communities, and local government in the tropical and boreal forest biomes;

- Identification of the economic instruments and incentives that encourage improved fire management by land users.
- Identification of why policies and regulations have not been effective in reducing the large-scale catastrophic in places such as Indonesia, Russian Far East, USA, Amazonia and the Mediterranean.

8.5. To rehabilitate degraded or burned forest lands (CBD Articles 8 and 10) through:

- Identification of methods and mechanisms to support local communities to develop remedial and income generating activities in degraded areas;
- The identification of impediments to adoption of rehabilitation processes and activities in degraded and burnt forestland in the tropics and boreal biomes.
- Identification of the economic instruments and incentives that will lead to the adoption of rehabilitation processes and activities in burnt forestland.

8.6. To identify the processes and impacts of fires in vulnerable and globally significant ecosystems including tropical and boreal peat land systems, and tropical woodlands (CBD Article 7) through:

- Identification of peat lands in the tropical and boreal biomes which are under threat from forest conversion and fire, their extent and characteristics;
- Estimation of the contribution of the respective peat land forest and tropical woodland fires to global carbon emissions; and
- Identification of the underlying causes of fires in peat land forests.

8. 7. Training, education and public awareness in communities where fire is a major problem. (CBD Articles 12 and 13).

- In many areas where local communities live in and around forests, fire is a major threat to health, livelihood and forest ecosystems. There is therefore a need to develop an awareness of both the negative and positive impacts of the use of fire in these areas. This will require the use of a range of scientific and technical inputs presented in an easily accessible format, e.g. mass media and village forums;
- Build awareness among policy makers, the public and the media as to the underlying causes of forest fires, their associated societal and economic costs and the importance of addressing these in a systematic fashion.

8.8 To assess more fully the impact of forest fires on aquatic and marine systems of tropical and boreal biomes (CBD Articles 7 and 12) through:

- Assessment of the impact of smoke and increased run-off and sedimentation on tropical coral reef ecosystems;
- Assessment of the impact of smoke and increased run-off and sedimentation on boreal aquatic ecosystems.

8.9. To improve and facilitate the exchange of information on the impact and contribution of forest fires to global climate change (CBD Article 5). This could include participation in international climate change fora such as the UNFCCC and IPCC. Using improved information developed under 8.1. and 8.6. above. The aforementioned ISDR-IATF WG IV on Wildland Fires will serve the conventions, including UNFCCC/IPCC and CBD etc. (personal communication, Johann G. Goldammer, Head, Global Fire Monitoring Center, August 2001).

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