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Eighty per cent of Malaysian Borneo degraded by logging

A study just published in the journal *PLOS ONE* has found more than 80 per cent of tropical forests in Malaysian Borneo have been heavily impacted by logging.



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The collaborative research team from the University of Tasmania, University of Papua New Guinea, and the Carnegie Institution for Science in the US documented the full extent of logging in the region using a Landsat analysis system to reveal the vast and previously unmapped extent of heavily logged forest.

The high-resolution satellite imaging uncovered logging roads in Brunei and in the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo through converting satellite images of seemingly dense tropical forest cover into highly detailed maps of deforestation and forest degradation.

Analysis of satellite imagery collected from 1990 and 2009 over Malaysian Borneo showed approximately 226,000 miles (364,000 km) of roads constructed throughout the forests of this region.

Nearly 80 per cent of the land surface of Sabah and Sarawak was impacted by previously undocumented, high-impact logging or clearing operations. This finding contrasted strongly with neighbouring Brunei, where 54 per cent of the land area maintained intact unlogged forest.

Team leader Jane Bryan from the University of Tasmania said: 'There is a crisis in tropical forest ecosystems worldwide, and our work documents the extent of the crisis on Malaysian Borneo.'

'Only small areas of intact forest remain in Malaysian Borneo, because so much has been heavily logged or cleared for timber or oil palm production. Rainforests that previously contained lots of big old trees, which store carbon and support a diverse ecosystem, are being replaced with oil palm or timber plantations, or hollowed out by logging.'

Co-author of the study Phil Shearman from the University of Papua New Guinea said: 'The extent of logging in Sabah and Sarawak documented in our work is breathtaking.

'The logging industry has penetrated right into the heart of Borneo and very little rainforest remains untouched by logging or clearfell in Malaysian Borneo.

'Brunei provides a stunning contrast. Most of Brunei's forests are still intact, as a result of largely excluding the logging industry from its borders.

'The situation in these tropical forests is now so severe that any further sacrifice of intact ecosystems to the logging industry should be off the table.'

Source: Carnegie Institution/EurekAlert!

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