

## A fifth of the world's mangroves gone in 30 years

**Jeremy Hance**  
mongabay.com  
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A new report by the United Nation Environment Program (UNEP) and the Nature Conservancy has found that mangrove forests are being lost at staggering rates worldwide: since 1980 one fifth of the world's mangroves have been felled.

Mangroves, which grow in saline coastal habitats, are disappearing four times faster than other forests. They are being destroyed largely for aquaculture, agriculture, and coastal development worldwide. According to the report, even surviving mangroves are often degraded.

As mangrove forests disappear worldwide (at a rate of 0.7 percent a year), researchers are beginning to understand their full importance. The forests serve as nurseries for a variety of marine fish, underpinning global fisheries and providing additional food security in some developing nations. In addition, they store large amounts of carbon and provide buffers against erosion.

Mangroves are also habitat to a number of unique land-based species, such as the mangrove hummingbird (*Amazilia boucardi*) in Costa Rica or the greater sheath-tail bat (*Emballonura furax*) from the island of New Guinea.

"Given their value, there can be no justification for further mangrove loss," Emmanuel Ze Meka, head of the International Tropical Timber Organization, which helped fund the report, told Reuters.

Recent studies have shown that mangroves also save both property and lives in the face of fierce tropical storms. During the devastating 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, regions with mangroves suffered less damage than those without.

In all it is estimated that mangroves provide at least \$1.6 billion in ecosystem services annually, yet despite their importance the new UNEP report shows that societies are failing to stem their loss.



Mangroves in Indonesia cleared for aquaculture and farming. Photo by: Rhett A. Butler.

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