

ISSUE BRIEF

# International Forest Conservation: A Survey of Key Staff in the 112th Congress

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## **Resources for the Future**

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# International Forest Conservation: A Survey of Key Staff in the 112th Congress

Peter T. Jenkins and Michael Wolosin<sup>1</sup>

## Executive Summary

Tropical deforestation threatens a number of values important to Americans. Tropical forests—whether in the Americas, Asia, or Africa—provide habitat for vast proportions of Earth’s wildlife and plant diversity. The rainforests of the Amazon, the Congo Basin and Southeast Asia, as well as tropical deciduous forests, peat swamp forests, and other carbon-rich regions, provide global ecosystem services, producing oxygen, increasing freshwater recycling, and sequestering carbon (deforestation and forest degradation now represent about 15 percent of the global carbon emissions contributing to climate change). Intact and healthy forests are critical to reducing poverty for local communities through sustainable economic growth; conversely, the economic gains from “mining” forest resources are short-lived and accrue to the already wealthy and powerful. Deforestation abroad also has a negative impact on the U.S. economy and jobs, as domestic producers of globally traded forest and agricultural commodities—including timber, soy, beef, and oil seeds—face competition in global markets from the products of unsustainable and often illegal deforestation abroad, with recent estimates of lost opportunity for U.S. producers as high as \$10 billion per year.

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Although the United States has been engaged in tropical forest conservation efforts for decades, the past few years have seen renewed interest and investment in forest protection policies within the context of both domestic and international climate policy. Cap-and-trade and other climate policy instruments appeared to present an opportunity to direct attention and resources to forests at a scale matching that of current deforestation. Including forests in these instruments was proposed as a way to (a) achieve low-cost greenhouse gas emissions reductions while technological advances reduce the cost of alternative energy sources and (b) lower the cost of a climate program at any given emissions reduction goal. Sweeping political changes in the 112th Congress have made comprehensive greenhouse gas legislation unlikely in the near future. For now, U.S. investments in forest conservation will not be dramatically increased through economic incentives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But the reasons for slowing and reversing this loss are as strong as ever, and tropical forests can't wait—the forest policy vacuum should be filled.

The objective of this report is to understand the drivers of decision making on tropical forest conservation policy. Our hope is that this report will aid Congress by clarifying the political landscape surrounding this issue. In particular, we identify motivation behind support for, and the feasibility of, policy options to provide the funding and attention needed to reduce deforestation. We also hope that this information will aid a variety of stakeholders in formulating legislative and funding proposals and identifying information gaps. In study design, this report echoes the February 2009 Resources for the Future (RFF) report, *International Forest Carbon in Congress: A Survey of Key Congressional Staff*. This new report assesses a much broader range of policy options than the carbon emissions/climate change focus of the 2009 report; however, the results of the two surveys are compared to the extent possible.

Over three weeks in February 2011, we interviewed 29 staff members of both parties and both chambers. The results are revealing, with the primary findings as follows.

- On the whole, congressional staff support international forest conservation, seeing it as a bipartisan issue. They recognize a broad variety of benefits; in particular, they singled out the potential role of reducing excessive, often illegal, deforestation in assisting U.S. businesses and producers in the forest products, agriculture, and other sectors. Staffers consistently support the wildlife and nature conservation message associated with “saving the rainforests.”
- Continuing established programs in the U.S. foreign assistance budget is seen as the best legislative option, with less support and/or more polarization around alternative vehicles, such as forest conservation tax credits, Farm Bill forest conservation programs, and energy bill solutions. At the same time, foreign assistance is consistently viewed as difficult. Staff expressed general interest in and support for alternatives to foreign assistance as long as no large “price tags” are attached. Securing funding via



any legislative or budgetary approach is much more challenging now than in prior years, requiring clear demonstration of need. The 112th Congress is focused on federal budget cuts, and international expenditures are widely seen as a low priority.

- Staff in this Congress do not see climate change as a useful way to frame U.S. efforts to promote international forest conservation, even though many consider this an important reason for U.S. engagement. The significant number of climate change skeptics in Congress, particularly among Republicans, was seen as a reason not to link forests to climate change publicly. On the positive side, the idea that the benefits of tropical forests “stand on their own,” apart from any link to the controversial climate issue, is well supported.
- Finally, staff would very much like to see easy-to-digest research and information on the benefits of tropical forests and the effectiveness of U.S. funding and support programs. Staff would particularly like to see think tanks and advocates collaborate with other stakeholders in providing current, detailed data on the impacts of slowing excessive tropical deforestation on U.S. jobs and economic progress in the forest products, agriculture, and other sectors.

#### THE FINDINGS OF THIS SURVEY LEAD RFF AND CA TO FIVE PRIMARY INSIGHTS:

- **More progress will be possible by emphasizing forests as a “good-natured” issue.** Researchers and stakeholders should educate policymakers on the positive wildlife, nature conservation, development, and domestic economic benefits of tropical forest conservation; these benefits demonstrate our national stake in tropical forest conservation independent of reducing carbon emissions and climate change.
- **High-quality data showing foreign aid effectiveness are needed.** Staffers are generally supportive of tropical forest conservation as part of foreign assistance funding, even though their rationales vary. However, stakeholders and implementing federal agencies should exert extra efforts to support and justify expenditures for forest programs.
- **Policymakers would benefit from additional legislative creativity.** Although foreign assistance should be considered the safest option, other approaches seem feasible. A tax credit solution was least likely to generate an immediate negative reaction, but the reaction to it was also not strongly positive, suggesting that this approach has not been fully developed and leaving an open opportunity for research and policy design. Reactions to the Farm Bill as a home for this issue were strong but highly polarized. Combinations of the Farm Bill, tax credits, and other policy approaches should be considered.
- **Researchers should focus more energy on economic impacts.** To make informed decisions, additional information is needed by staff on the impact of tropical forest



conservation on U.S. jobs and domestic economic growth. This information will receive additional attention if it is the result of forest and agriculture stakeholder collaboration and if it is available in state-by-state form to show the benefits “back home” of preserving tropical forests.

- **Additional research and outreach is needed on nonfederal policy solutions.** A lack of congressional support for comprehensive climate action, and an inability of foreign assistance funding to fully match the scale of financial intervention needed to slow and reverse tropical deforestation, suggest the need for continued robust civil society and business engagement. This should include additional research and outreach on (a) ways to reduce demand for the products of deforestation, (b) the economic incentives for developing countries to protect and better manage their forest estates, and (c) the design of programs and policies that can shift local decisions toward sustainability.

## Study Methodology

This study is based on a confidential, informal survey of staff of the 112th U.S. Congress. The survey goals were to (a) obtain a baseline understanding of the knowledge and opinions of representative key staff and (b) identify optimal ways to frame future educational and policy efforts for tropical forest conservation, according to staff responses.

### WHO WAS INTERVIEWED?

The authors developed a target list of 30 staff with equal representation among Senate and House staff and among Republicans and Democrats, and with representation across the political spectra of both parties. The list included key committee staff (majority and minority) and the personal staff of leaders in international conservation, foreign affairs, appropriations, budget, energy, agriculture, and other areas. Staff of new members and representatives of influential caucuses were sought, including some connected to the International Conservation Caucus and others from the new Tea Party wing of the Republican Party. The aim was to engage in off-the-record “listening sessions” with a broad swath of individuals who could influence legislative and funding outcomes affecting tropical forests over the next two years, not just to interview those staff most accessible to the authors.

The target list was adjusted based on initial contacts with staff, some of whom identified other key staffers. Several staff on the initial list would not agree to be interviewed for a variety of reasons (e.g., they were too busy, were uncomfortable with the request, or did not respond to repeated contacts); thus others were substituted with an eye toward maintaining balance and representation by party, committee, body, and political spectrum. On the whole, however, the willingness of staff to answer the questions was good, with about two-thirds from the initial target list participating. Box 1 summarizes the sample and interview process.



### Box 1. Tropical Deforestation Interviews

R = Republican; D = Democrat

- confidential interviews from February 4 to February 25, 2011
- a total of 29 staff interviewed, 15 Ds and 14 Rs
- Senate: 16 (8 Rs and 8 Ds); House: 13 (6 Rs and 7 Ds)
- 11 committee staff and 18 personal staff
- 18 in person, 11 by telephone
- typical duration: 15 minutes

The lead author asked all interviewees the same questions and assured them of the confidentiality of their participation and their responses.

#### SURVEY QUESTIONS

Interviews consisted of seven primary questions (see Appendix 1 for the complete survey instrument). It should be noted that the questions sought each staffer's *own* views, not necessarily the views of his or her boss. As a practical matter, most indicated that their views were consistent with those of their bosses. In only two instances did staffers specifically mention divergence of their personal views from those of their bosses. In keeping with RFF's nonpartisan approach, staff responses are pooled together across party affiliation, except for one question that aimed to identify party-related attitudes.

We began the interview with almost no introduction to the issue, taking the opportunity to gauge the initial response of staff to U.S. involvement in tropical forest conservation and what they might view as benefits to the United States from tropical forest conservation. Having established a baseline, we introduced and prompted respondents with five arguments that have commonly been used to support U.S. engagement in conserving tropical forests in order to measure support for each argument: U.S. jobs and economic growth, social stability and U.S. national security, international economic growth and poverty alleviation, wildlife and forest resource conservation, and reducing climate emissions. We rotated the order of these arguments among respondents and offered additional standard explanatory information to staff if desired.

Moving on from "if" and "why" to "how," we investigated opinions about four specific legislative vehicles for moving tropical forest policy in the United States: the Farm Bill, an energy bill, tax credits, and traditional foreign aid appropriations. Again, if additional information was requested, we provided standard responses.



Next, we queried congressional staff on the political landscape for tropical forest conservation—and specifically the benefits or risks of associating the issue with climate change. And finally, to help guide future work in this area, we asked staff directly to identify information needs.

## Findings

### GENERAL SUPPORT FOR U.S. ENGAGEMENT AND RECOGNITION OF BENEFITS

The large majority of staff members surveyed were supportive of U.S. government engagement on behalf of tropical forest conservation and mentioned a number of specific benefits to the United States. However, all were acutely cognizant of the budgetary challenges facing U.S. engagement.

Twenty respondents expressed positive views of U.S. engagement ranging from generally supportive to very supportive (Question 1). Almost a third of respondents (n=9) would not express their views directly for a variety of reasons, including being “not sure,” “new to this issue,” or feeling that it was “not appropriate” to give their personal opinions. Staff with positive responses saw this as a bipartisan issue.

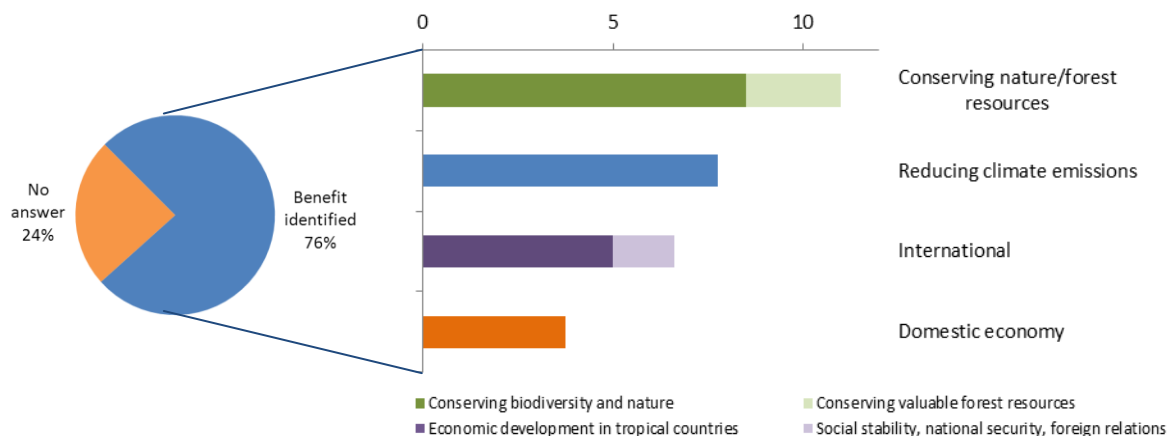
An even larger majority of staff (76 percent, 22 of 29) recognized at least one specific benefit to the United States of tropical forest conservation (Question 2, Figure 1a). With no prompting of options from the interviewer, this open-ended question revealed an impressive range of substantive policy issues that staff linked to tropical forest conservation. Their responses clustered under four primary themes (Question 2, Figure 1b).

The following sections present data from responses to the survey questions that highlight these four primary themes: **conserving nature/forest resources**, the **domestic economy**, **reducing climate emissions**, and **international** concerns, including development and social stability benefits to countries with tropical forest and positive national security benefits to the United States.





**Figure 1. Responses to Question 2: Does conserving tropical forests benefit the United States? How?**



*Notes:* Pie chart shows the number of respondents who identified at least one benefit; bar graph presents a weighted number of responses that fell into each of four basic themes. Weights: first reason mentioned = 1.0; second reason mentioned = 0.5; third reason mentioned = 0.25; fourth reason mentioned = 0.125. The rank order of the four responses was not sensitive to the weighting method.

## Four Driving Themes of Forest Conservation Policy

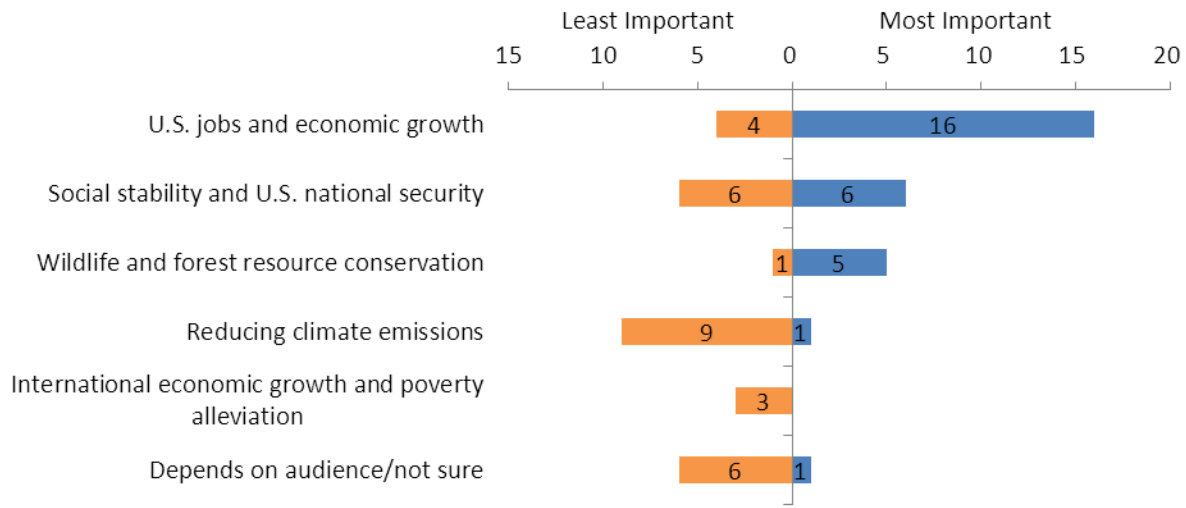
### THE NATURE THEME IS CONSISTENTLY POSITIVE

Of those staff who identified a benefit to the United States, half (11 of 22) identified “conserving biodiversity and nature” either for their own sake or because they are valued by Americans. We grouped together with these an additional few responses that focus more on conserving valuable forest resources and ecosystem services, such as clean air, clean water, and pharmaceutical compounds. A distinction exists between these two “flavors” of conservation, (two respondents mentioned both); however, the distinction within this answer was less clear than between this group of responses in Question 2 (“conserving nature/forest resources”) and other answers.

Respondents frequently reiterated that the public supports “saving the rainforest.” Staffers see this as a bipartisan issue at a time when many issues are not, and this is based on the attractiveness of the wildlife, the importance of tropical forest natural resources, and the value of the ecosystem services tropical forests provide. This was a consistently positive message across both parties and chambers. However, it was not seen as the most important argument (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Responses to Question 3: Which of these (five arguments) is most important and which is least important?**



#### THE DOMESTIC JOBS AND ECONOMY THEME IS POWERFUL

A few respondents to Question 2 mentioned direct economic benefits to the United States of reducing deforestation—for example, through reducing the price impacts of illegal logging and/or through “leveling the playing field” for U.S. producers—but this theme ranked last among self-identified benefits. However, this theme was by far the most favored argument in support of tropical forest conservation when we prompted staff with it as one of five options in Question 3 (most important to 16 respondents, Figure 2). Staffers did not often make this connection themselves, but it resonated strongly when we presented it to them.

#### THE CARBON/CLIMATE FRAME IS PROBLEMATIC

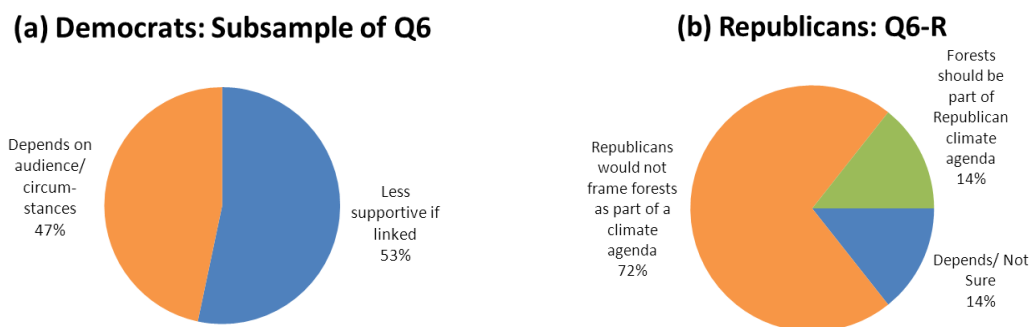
Many staff members pointed to “carbon sequestration/emissions reductions” as a benefit of tropical forest conservation, with 10 mentions in Question 2 (weighted total: 7.75). But, almost universally, staff did not see it as a “winning argument.” When we proposed specific arguments in Question 3, the “reducing climate emissions” argument received virtually no support, with many staffers (nine total, of both parties) seeing it as the *least* favorable message (Figure 2). Indeed, in response to Question 6, just over half of Democratic staff indicated that linking tropical forest conservation to climate change in policy discussions was not favorable for forest conservation, generally because it made the topic more controversial at a time when many members are climate change skeptics. The balance of Democrats took the view that a climate–forest link may or may not be beneficial depending on the audience and circumstances (Figure 3a).

With neither party possessing a supermajority in the Senate, and Republicans controlling the House, Republican views have been pivotal in congressional climate change policy. Question 6-R,



limited to Republican staff, asked whether reducing tropical deforestation might be considered part of a Republican climate change agenda. Notably, this idea resonated with only 2 of 13 respondents, while 10 respondents said this was not the case. Several staff indicated that climate change was not an important issue for Republicans in this Congress.

**Figure 3. (a) Democrats’ Responses to Question 6 and (b) Republicans’ Responses to Question 6-R**



#### DEVELOPMENT, STABILITY, AND NATIONAL SECURITY

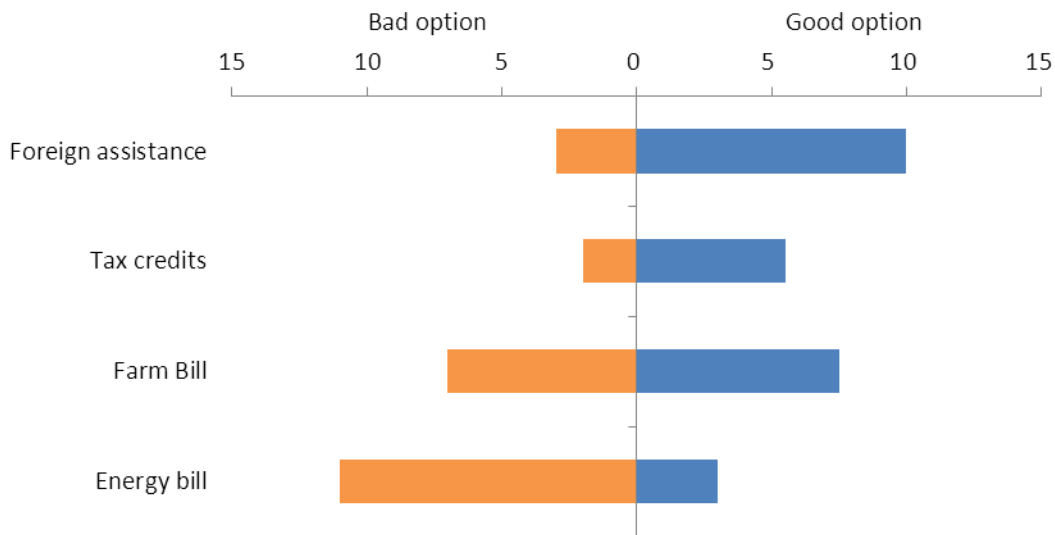
In Question 2, a few staff mentioned social stability in tropical countries as a benefit to U.S. national security, and a very few mentioned the importance of tropical forest conservation to U.S. leadership and foreign relations. About 20 percent discussed the economic development benefits of forest conservation for the tropical countries themselves as a benefit to the United States. It was not always clear whether a staffer considered this a benefit through an economic lens (e.g., through increased U.S. exports) or indirectly through a social stability/national security lens. We thus grouped these responses together in a broader “international” theme under Question 2.

This grouping was reinforced by the responses to Question 3, in which we approached these as two separate topics: (a) social stability and U.S. national security and (b) international economic growth and poverty alleviation. Several staffers explicitly linked these two themes in their responses to Question 3, with the line between development and social stability as a driving U.S. interest being fuzzy at best. The national security argument was somewhat polarizing, with equal numbers considering it the most and least important; the development argument was identified only in its weakness given the current budget context—a message reinforced repeatedly throughout the survey.



## Legislative Vehicles

**Figure 4. Responses to Question 4: What would you consider the best option for the U.S. government to aid conservation of tropical forests?**



*Notes:* This question is paraphrased. Note that, whereas the question asked for the best option and the next-best option (see Appendix), more than half of respondents who gave an opinion (14 of 25) also identified one or more option as “bad.”

### THE TRADITIONAL ROUTE—FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

Both this survey and events surrounding the FY2011 and FY2012 federal government budget negotiations reinforce the reality that funding cuts are a dominant theme in Congress in 2011. In Question 1, when asked for their views on whether the United States should be engaged on this issue, almost all of the respondents answering positively acknowledged the difficulty of messaging the idea of U.S. funds going overseas in the current political environment. An overwhelming 19 respondents identified this issue as the major political obstacle for tropical forest conservation, swamping all other political considerations entirely, both pro and con (Question 5).

On the whole, staffers expressed pessimism about new legislative vehicles involving novel budget expenditures. However, they were open-minded to novel programs that do not involve expenditures *per se*, but rather use incentives or other means to achieve similar goals (Question 4). Staff largely saw foreign assistance expenditure programs as the “safest bet” because such programs were not new (Figure 4; 10 identifications as good and 3 as bad).



## NEW VEHICLES

After foreign assistance, several staff preferred the idea of tax credits, whereas a comparable number preferred the Farm Bill as a vehicle. However, the Farm Bill had as many staffers responding negatively as positively. Many staffers had strong reactions against using an energy bill with an offset provision or crediting for tropical forests, reflecting a negative view of the offsets concept expressed by many who had dealt with it in cap-and-trade emissions reduction bills in the last Congress.

Staff also showed substantial interest in approaches that would complement the favored foreign assistance funding approach. They provided innovative ideas in response to several of the questions, including “Lacey Act enforcement funding and incentives against illegal logging,” “strengthen the Tropical Forest Conservation Act,” and others such as developing new treaties and international partnerships and ending the “ethanol mandate.” These provided welcome additions to the menu of legislative options we highlighted when we posed Question 4.

## Information Needs

Many staffers would like more basic information on the value of tropical forests and the full contours of this issue. Many staffers answered “not sure” or had no opinion on several of the questions. Staff pointed to detailed information needs that would help advance their understanding of the issue and aid them as they communicate about it with others (Question 7, Table 1).

Many staffers saw RFF as a reliable source of helpful information on this topic and encouraged RFF and others to provide more reports and briefs, ranging from basic background about the benefits of forests to detailed data on the “per-acre” U.S. job and economic impacts from forest loss overseas (Question 7). Environmentally focused organizations were encouraged to partner on such studies with U.S. forest products and agriculture stakeholders, such as prominent farm organizations, to enhance their credibility and reception within those key sectors as well as in Congress.



**Table 1. Number of Interviewees Giving Different Responses to Question 7 about Information Needs**

Topic (descending order)	Responses
Quantification of connection between U.S. jobs, the economy, and tropical forest conservation	9
Easy-to-understand, up-to-date information on general benefits and value of tropical forests	7
Specifics on cost/benefits, accountability, and alternatives for U.S. expenditures for tropical forest conservation	5
More on the connection between tropical forests and climate change and costs/benefits of alternative carbon emissions reduction strategies	2
Others	4
Not sure	5

In the “others” category, some needs identified by only one staffer included new case studies to illustrate the national security/social stability argument and information on humanitarian and stewardship arguments for forest conservation prepared in collaboration with religious groups.

## Discussion

### A NOTE ON THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

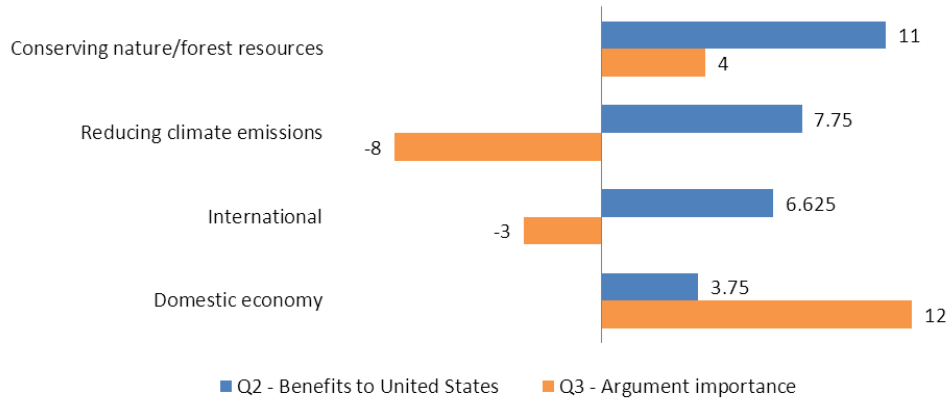
Staff members’ perceptions and attitudes about tropical forest conservation revealed in this study should be considered within the political context of the moment. The interviews were conducted in February 2011 during contentious public debates and lengthy floor votes on a continuing resolution for the FY2011 budget in the House of Representatives—the first real budget battle of the 112th Congress. Opinions on budget cuts and the related message about foreign assistance may require some discounting to reflect these “passions of the day.”

The strength of the domestic jobs and economy theme in staffers’ answers also should be considered in context. The U.S. economy is barely recovering from the 2008–2009 recession—still reeling from persistently high unemployment, wage stagnation, and the housing market bust. Staff plainly perceived these as critical challenges in their day-to-day work.



## COMPARATIVE DATA SYNTHESIS AND SUMMARY

**Figure 5. Contrasting Themes: Unprompted Responses about Benefits to the United States (Question 2) Compared with Importance Ratings of Prompted Arguments (Question 3).**



*Notes:* Positive responses are to the right and negative ones to the left. For the sake of comparison, we group here those responses to Question 3 that identified the importance of “social stability and U.S. national security” and “international economic growth and poverty alleviation” into the single theme of “international.”

Below, we reiterate and summarize the data, as illustrated in Figure 5.

- When not prompted with particular arguments, staff identified conserving nature/forest resources and reducing climate emissions as the top two benefits to the United States of tropical forest conservation.
- However, the political landscape leads staffers to very different opinions about how the issue should be positioned and framed publically. This comes through in staff evaluations of the importance of prompted arguments about the various benefits, as shown below.
  - Although conserving nature/forest resources is a strong personal driver, this lens is an overall positive but weak way to position the issue.
  - Many also considered climate emissions mitigation a benefit to the United States, but as a way to position policy, it was almost universally perceived as negative.
  - Responses shifted from positive to weakly negative for the suite of development, security, and international relations benefits.
  - Staff did not overwhelmingly identify domestic jobs and economy as reasons for U.S. involvement, but this theme was strongly positive as a way to frame the issue.



- The negative views on the importance of climate as an argument arose from the intense political polarization around climate change and the recent failure of cap-and-trade legislation in the 111th Congress; staffers carried this failure forward and do not see energy legislation as a productive path for conserving forests.
- Foreign assistance was seen as the right legislative option by many. At the same time, the low priority of aid funding in a time of budget cutting was seen as an overwhelmingly negative political consideration.
- Approaching this issue in the context of domestic-focused but nonclimate/nonenergy funding solutions appears to elicit strong opinions in the case of the Farm Bill (with an approximately equal number of positive and negative views) and weaker but more positive responses with respect to tax credits.
- Finally, a clear desire existed among staff for much more detailed information—preferably on a state-by-state basis if feasible—on the connections between the rate of tropical deforestation and the numbers of U.S. jobs in the wood products, agriculture, ranching, manufacturing, and other sectors.<sup>2</sup>

### Comparing Results to the 2009 RFF Congressional Staff Survey

This report complements RFF’s February 2009 report, *International Forest Carbon in Congress: A Survey of Key Congressional Staff* by Leonard, Kopp, and Purvis.<sup>3</sup> The 2009 report aimed primarily at the role of international forest carbon in cap-and-trade climate legislation and specifically at various challenges posed by including reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD), a system designed to reduce the overall cost of the program by allowing and incentivizing lower-cost emissions reductions from forests to enter the system. The 2009 report sought out the staffers most engaged on climate, whereas the present report takes in a much wider sweep of staff, including those connected to budget, appropriations, agriculture, and other areas. Further, the scope of the seven questions here was on the conservation of forests themselves and less on their role in climate change or on REDD. Thus, comparison of the two reports is problematic. Nevertheless, some similarities exist.

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<sup>2</sup> This impact is estimated in economic models reported on in two publications: Shari Friedman, *Farms Here, Forests There: Tropical Deforestation and U.S. Competitiveness in Agriculture and Timber* (Washington, DC: David Gardiner & Associates, 2010); and Seneca Creek Associates LLC and Wood Resources International LLC, *Illegal Logging and Global Wood Markets: The Competitive Impacts on the U.S. Wood Products Industry* (Poolesville, MD: Seneca Creek Associates LLC; University Place, WA: Wood Resources International LLC, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The present study slightly under-represents Republicans (14 to 15 Democrats) and House staff (13 vs. 16 Senate staff). This was not intended; it resulted from difficulties in securing interviews with staff of high-level Republican House members. The 2009 RFF survey covered 31 staff, but it included 19 Democrats and only 10 Republicans and 2 Independents; it included 22 Senate staff but only 9 House staff. Thus, the present survey was more balanced in presenting views of the two major parties and the two chambers.





- The 2009 report highlighted the absence of a strong political constituency for tropical forests according to staff; this also came through in 2011.
- The 2009 report saw a relative lack of understanding among many staffers on the role of forests in climate change; this accords with 2011 findings.
- A low prioritization of overseas expenditures and continued low confidence in international carbon markets as a reliable option for achieving emissions reductions are consistent across the two surveys.
- Finally, both surveys similarly emphasize the need for user-friendly information on the domestic benefits of saving tropical forests as well as on how international forest conservation projects are implemented and their effectiveness in terms of costs and benefits.

## Recommendations

- **More progress will be possible by emphasizing forests as a “good-natured” issue.** Researchers and stakeholders should educate policymakers on the positive wildlife, nature conservation, development, and domestic economic benefits of tropical forest conservation; these benefits demonstrate our national stake in tropical forest conservation independent of reducing carbon emissions and climate change.
- **High-quality data showing foreign aid effectiveness are needed.** Staffers are generally supportive of tropical forest conservation as part of foreign assistance funding, even though their rationales vary. However, stakeholders and implementing federal agencies should exert extra efforts to support and justify expenditures for forest programs.
- **Policymakers would benefit from additional legislative creativity.** Although foreign assistance should be considered the safest option, other approaches seem feasible. A tax credit solution was least likely to generate an immediate negative reaction, but the reaction to it was also not strongly positive, suggesting that this approach has not been fully developed and leaving an open opportunity for research and policy design. Reactions to the Farm Bill as a home for this issue were strong but highly polarized. Combinations of the Farm Bill, tax credits, and other policy approaches should be considered.
- **Researchers should focus more energy on economic impacts.** To make informed decisions, additional information is needed by staff on the impact of tropical forest conservation on U.S. jobs and domestic economic growth. This information will receive additional attention if it is the result of forest and agriculture stakeholder collaboration and if it is available in state-by-state form to show the benefits “back home” of preserving tropical forests.



- **Additional research and outreach is needed on nonfederal policy solutions.** A lack of congressional support for comprehensive climate action, and an inability of foreign assistance funding to fully match the scale of financial intervention needed to slow and reverse tropical deforestation, suggest the need for continued robust civil society and business engagement. This should include additional research and outreach on (a) ways to reduce demand for the products of deforestation, (b) the economic incentives for developing countries to protect and better manage their forest estates, and (c) the design of programs and policies that can shift local decisions toward sustainability.

## Conclusions

On the whole, congressional staff are supportive of U.S. government engagement on behalf of international forest conservation, seeing it as a bipartisan issue. They recognize a broad variety of benefits and single out the role that reducing excessive, often illegal, tropical deforestation can play in assisting U.S. producers and employees in the forest products, agriculture, and other sectors. Continuing established foreign assistance funding for effective programs is seen as the safest legislative vehicle, in contrast to novel funding approaches, but staff do support innovative approaches if no large “price tags” are attached. Funding via any approach is seen as more challenging now, requiring a clear demonstration of need.

The 112th Congress is less amenable than was the 111th Congress to combating climate change through reducing tropical deforestation, no doubt because of overwhelming political pressure to focus on U.S. employment and the economy and to reduce the focus on climate policy. Over the longer term, it is foreseeable that the majority of staff of both parties could become supportive of highlighting the role of forests in climate change via legislation aimed at emissions reductions, but reaching that point probably will require continuing information and education efforts aimed at Capitol Hill.



## Appendix 1. The Survey

**Question 1.** What are your views on whether the United States government should be helping to conserve tropical forests in places such as the Amazon, the Congo Basin, Southeast Asia, and other regions?

**Question 2.** Do you think that conserving tropical forests benefits the United States and, if so, how? [follow-up:] Are there any other ways?

**Question 3.** I'd like to ask your opinion of 5 arguments for conserving tropical forests. Which of these, a thru e, is most important and which is least important?

- a) U.S. Jobs and Economic Growth
- b) Social Stability and U.S. National Security
- c) International Economic Growth and Poverty Alleviation
- d) Wildlife and Forest Resource Conservation
- e) Reducing Climate Emissions

### Question 3, Additional Information

- a) *U.S. Jobs and Economic Growth:* Illegal tropical forest clearing depresses world agriculture and timber prices, reducing U.S. exports and destroying American jobs; even legal deforestation in these nations can create price-cutting competition for American foresters and farmers.
- b) *Social Stability and U.S. National Security:* In some tropical forest nations, forest loss is a destabilizing agent, leading to dislocation, economic upheaval, and political unrest—threatening their social stability and thus U.S. national security.
- c) *International Economic Growth and Poverty Alleviation:* Conserving tropical forests maintains resources that about 1.6 billion people depend on for their livelihoods and it can preserve job opportunities, strengthen local governance, and protect indigenous tribes.
- d) *Wildlife and Forest Resource Conservation:* Burning and clear-cutting forests kills animal and plant life, drives vast numbers of species to extinction, and destroys sources of essential pharmaceuticals and other resources.
- e) *Reducing Climate Emissions.* Approximately 17% of global carbon emissions come from forest loss and degradation, more than from all the cars, trucks, ships, and planes in the world combined.

Again, the question is which of these, a thru e, [list again if needed] is *most* important? Which is *least* important?

**Question 4.** I want to ask about some options for the U.S. government to aid conservation of tropical forests. Some of the legislative vehicles being discussed are the Farm Bill, an energy bill,



tax credits, and traditional foreign aid appropriations. What would you consider the best option, if any? [Additional information if requested. Follow-up:] What’s the next-best option?<sup>4</sup>

**Question 4, Additional Information**

- The Farm Bill, for example, could include a forestry title with financial incentives that aided conservation of both U.S. and international forests.
- An energy bill, for example, could allow companies to protect tropical forests to reduce emissions while new emissions reduction technologies are developing, through an offset or crediting system.
- Tax credits, for example, could include credits for carbon sequestration or forest land protection.
- Traditional foreign aid appropriations could include, for example, programs that partner with developing countries to build sustainable forest management systems.

**Question 5.** What are the U.S. political considerations, pro or con, surrounding engagement on conserving tropical forests?

**Question 6.** When talking about legislative options to help save tropical forests, would you be *more* or *less* supportive if the issue is linked to climate change?

**Question 6-R, Republicans only.** Some people say that conserving tropical forests is part of the climate change agenda that Republicans can support—arguing that there are positive impacts on U.S. jobs, and forests are unrelated to domestic power sector regulation or a carbon tax—and so it should be framed as a Republican climate solution. Others say that it would be difficult for Republicans to support conserving tropical forests as part of a climate change agenda at this time. What do you think?

**Question 7.** In what areas, if any, do you think that members or their staffs would benefit from additional research and information to be better informed on the topics we’ve been discussing?

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<sup>4</sup> Although Question 4 specifically prompted for the “best” and “next-best” options, many staffers also volunteered their opinions on “bad” options, which we recorded and analyzed as well.

