
Chile: native forests cleared for plantations

One of the more widely publicized arguments for the promotion of industrial tree plantations says that fast growing plantations help to alleviate the main pressures on native forests and consequently help to preserve them. This argument has been proven false in all cases and Chile is no exception.

According to the local NGO CODEFF, the substitution of native forest by fast growth exotic plantations constitutes -within the process of destruction of native forests- one of the most important factors. A recent study carried out by the government agency CONAF shows that annual deforestation during the 1985-1994 period reached an annual average of 36,700 hectares and that almost 40% of such area was deforested to make way to industrial tree plantations.

CODEFF itself carried out a survey in the VIII region (which concentrates the majority of tree plantations), which revealed that from 1978 to 1987 almost 30% of the forests of the Coastal Andes were clearcut and substituted with radiata pine plantations.

Such destruction is the result of a number of pressures, both from within and outside Chile. However, the more obvious cause can be traced within the government, which since 1974 has been heavily subsidizing this type of plantations. Many forestry firms decide -legally in some cases and illegally in many more- to clearcut the existing forest and replant it with pines or eucalyptus in order to have access to government subsidies.

Source: Bosques Templados 6 (6) 1998