

WORLD/ENVIRONMENT

Report says world values wood more than forests

WASHINGTON (AP) The world puts too much emphasis on the value of lumber and not enough on that of forests, according to a Worldwatch report calling for an end to all logging subsidies.

The report says most timber is priced far below its actual cost, because the full value of the forest isn't figured in under conventional accounting systems.

The report, released over the weekend by the independent research group, also recommends new user fees on public forests. It says an end to logging subsidies would slow the rate of deforestation around the world, arguing \$3 entrance fees for S. national forests, for

example, would raise more money nationwide than timber sales bring in on those lands, said the report. "Sav- ing the Forests; What Will it Take?"

"We tend to think of them as lumber to build things or thickets to be cleared, but fore- ests are often worth more to the world economy and soci- ety left alone than cut down," said Alan Durning, author of the report.

"We have tried to stop the loggers, small farmers, min- ers and real estate develop- ers. But these are just the teeth of the saw. The saw is much bigger — it is an econo- my that is blind to its own eco- logical roots," he said.

Durning is a senior re-

searcher for the institute, a nonprofit environmental or- ganization based in Washing- ton, that says its mission is to "foster a sustainable soci- ety."

In addition to wildlife habi- tat and recreation, forests provide valuable services in the form of flood prevention, watershed stabilization and fisheries protection.

"For instance, the price of teak does not reflect the costs of flooding that teak logging has caused in Myanmar, nor does the price of old-growth Douglas fir from the Pacific Northwest include losses suf- fered by the fishing industry due to damage caused to salmon habitat," the report said.

The study added:

- One hectare of Malaysian forest is estimated to provide carbon storage services that help prevent climate change, worth more than \$3,000 over the long term.

- A mature forest tree in India is worth \$50,000, the Center for Science and Envi- ronment in New Delhi esti- mates.

- The full cost of a ham- burger produced on pasture cleared from rain forests ap- proaches \$200, according to a study at New York Universi- ty's School of Business.

Under a true accounting system, clear-cut timber would be far more expensive than wood from careful, low- impact logging, Durning said.

"In current market prices, however, recklessness ap- pears cheap. That illusion is why just one-tenth of 1 per- cent of all tropical wood is logged on a 'sustained-yield' basis — one in which annual harvest does not exceed annu- al regrowth," he said.

U.S. Forest Service offi- cials had no immediate com- ment on the report.

The Forest Service deter- mined this year that about half the 121 national forests that sell timber are losing money on the sales, spending more to build logging roads and cut the trees than the re- ceipts for the wood.

"Taxpayers are paying for the forests to be cleared," Durning said.

Randal O'Toole of Cascade Holistic Economic Consul- tants in Oak Grove, Ore., cal- culates that 109 national for- ests lost nearly \$500 million of taxpayers' money on timber sales in 1992.

The report also dismisses arguments that rural commu- nities surrounding forests are dependent on timber harvest- ing.

"Like the whalers denied a livelihood by the international whaling moratorium, or the weapons manufacturers put out of work by the end of the Cold War, the loggers, devel- opers and other workers em- ployed by the industries of de- forestation have a wrenching period of transition ahead of them," the report said.

"Their jobs, however, are no more reason to continue deforestation than jobs in weapons plants are a reason to go to war."