

On the surface, this sounds like a great idea, but what about the demand? How can we conserve while at the same time meeting the demand for wood and wood products?

Indonesia produces about 35 million cubic meters of legal round wood every year, but consumes substantially more than that — perhaps as much as 50 million cubic meters per year. This leaves a large gap between legal wood supply and demand for wood and wood products — a gap that is equivalent to over 170,000 hectares of selective forest harvest every year. As human population grows and per capita incomes increase, demand for wood and wood products will most likely continue to grow.

Now enters the idea of avoided deforestation and degradation — which means cutting fewer trees at a time when demand for wood is already higher than the legally sanctioned supply. Whether through a moratorium on new concessions or reductions in land cleared for agriculture or estate crops, the plans for reducing net emissions through avoided deforestation will result in decreasing the legal wood supply.

It seems clear that taking forest land out of production means lower legal wood supply. This was demonstrated through experience of over the last decade when the selective logging concession area was reduced at the same time demand continued to grow.

The result was a gap of some 40 million cubic meters of legal timber and a matching increase in illegal logging. It is wonderful to hope that forest law enforcement can be improved to reduce illegal logging, yet the practical realities of controlling illegal logging are stark — it is very difficult to control illegal logging when there is not enough legal timber in the marketplace.

This is even more important as people's use of wood and paper products continues to grow as population and incomes both increase. The ultimate driver of forest loss and conversion of forest land to other land uses is a hunger for forest products and land for agriculture. These drivers are unlikely to change in the short-term.

Sustainable forest plantations on degraded lands can provide rural livelihoods, help meet future wood requirements and provide direct and indirect climate change benefits. Increasing the wood supply from such plantations is a key part of the legal wood supply picture — but these plantations need to come on line before other reductions are made in production from natural forest. Otherwise illegal harvest will increase as the legal harvests decrease.

So does a reduction in legal wood supply result in lower emissions from forest land use? Probably not. Illegal supplies will replace legal supplies and similar quantities of wood will be used.

It is clear that trying to reduce net emissions from natural forests will only be effective at the national level if wood supply needs are met first. Until then, a reduction in legal supplies will not result in significant net emission reductions — it will only provide market incentives for an increase in illegal logging.

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