

# Rain Forest Resources

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In this section, you will learn about the valuable resources of the rain forest.

All questions require at least  
**THREE** sentences on own paper.

## PLACES & TERMS

**biodiversity** a wide range of plant and animal species

**deforestation** the cutting down and clearing away of trees and forests

**global warming** a rise in the temperature of the atmosphere

**debt-for-nature swap** arrangement in which an organization pays off part of government debt, and the government agrees to protect a certain portion of the rain forest

## Rain Forest Land Uses

The rain forest is an important global resource. Its vegetation helps to clean the earth's atmosphere and regulate the climate. It also shelters several million species of plants, insects, and wildlife.

Scientists have begun to investigate and understand the rain forest's **biodiversity**. This is its wide range of plant and animals species. And yet, this variety of life is being destroyed at a breathtaking pace. At the end of the 20th century, nearly 50 million acres of rain forest were being destroyed every year.

The Amazon rain forest contains tropical hardwoods such as mahogany and cedar. These are harvested for export by the timber industry. The world's demand for timber is great.

Native peoples, living in poverty, travel into the rain forest in search of land to grow crops. They clear the forest, not realizing that the soil is not very fertile. Also, cutting down the trees exposes the land to erosion. After a few years, this new farmland

becomes less productive. The people move to a new area and clear more timber.

Livestock, too, have been introduced into the rain forest. Ranchers need land on which to graze their cattle. By clearing the forests for pasture, they can gain a steady supply of beef for the export market.

More than half of the Amazon rain forest is located in Brazil. That country's growing population is contributing to the rain forest's decline. The estimated population of Brazil in 2000 was about 173 million people. Brazil's population is expected to reach 200 million by 2020. With that many people to shelter, some developers are looking to build homes on land now covered by rain forest.

### 1. What effect will destruction of the rain forest have on biodiversity?

Answer in at least **THREE SENTENCES** on own paper.

## The Price of Destruction

There is a cost to pay for the destruction of the rain forest. **Deforestation** means the cutting down and clearing away of trees and forests. There are short-term benefits for this to the local people. But these are offset by the high price Latin America and the world are paying as the rain forests are destroyed.

Forests help to regulate the earth's climate. They do this by *absorbing* carbon dioxide and producing oxygen. As the forests disappear, much less carbon dioxide is absorbed. The carbon dioxide that is not absorbed builds up in the atmosphere. This buildup prevents heat from escaping into space. The temperature of the atmosphere begins to rise.

Weather patterns start to shift. This rise in temperature is called **global warming**. By the beginning of the 21st century, evidence of global warming appeared around the world. A common method for clearing rain forest, known as slash-and-burn, produces even more carbon dioxide.

The world's rain forests cover about six percent of the earth's surface. However, they are home to at least 50 percent of the world's plant and animal *species*. Medical researchers are just beginning to understand and make use of rain forest plants. Rain-forest dwellers have harvested these plants for thousands of years. They have used these plants to make medicines that heal wounds and cure disease. The rain forest holds secrets of nature that might improve and extend the quality of people's lives.

### 2. How do rain forests help regulate the climate?

Answer in at least THREE SENTENCES on own paper.

## Moving Toward Solutions

Saving the rain forests of Latin America is an issue that affects people around the world. Creative solutions will be required to make sure that the forests are not sacrificed to economic development.

The central issue facing Latin American countries is how to balance competing interests. Some Latin American countries are trying to find the right balance between economic development and preservation of the rain forest.

For example, *grassroots* organizations are closely watching development projects in the forests. Their mission is to educate people about the value of the rain forests.

Economic gain is at the heart of rain forest destruction. So some people offer money to preserve the forests. One such plan is known as a **debt-for-nature swap**.

Many Latin American nations are burdened with debt. Now they are struggling to pay it back. In a debt-for-nature swap, an organization agrees to pay off a certain amount of government debt. In return, the government agrees to protect a certain portion of the rain forest. Governments get debt relief. Environmentalists get rain forest preservation.

The movement to preserve the rain forests has many supporters. The battle to preserve the rain forests may be one in which everybody wins.

### 3. What are some of the things people have done to help preserve the rain forests?

Answer in at least THREE SENTENCES on own paper.