

Measuring Global Canopy Reduction: A Forest Degradation Proxy for FRA2015

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Abstract

Global interest in forest degradation is widespread – but is fraught with widely differing views. Forest degradation by one definition may be sustainable forest management by another. The Global Forest Resources Assessment, conducted by FAO every five years, is working to find an approach to a global estimation of forest area that can address these differing views. This approach is based on the use of MODIS VCS satellite data to evaluate significant forest canopy reduction over a ten year time span. Significance in this case will be calculated as a threshold (most likely 20%) reduction in canopy area at the pixel scale. The reduction in forest canopy area may or may not be seen as degradation – depending on the values of the data user.

This analysis will be completed during 2013 for use in FRA 2015 and will provide summaries of reduced forest area globally, regionally and by ecological zone. Country representatives will be provided with data from the initial analysis done by FAO so that they can review and revise as needed. A tier system will be used as part of FRA 2015 to describe the overall level of each variable – including the reduced forest canopy area. While not a report of forest degradation directly, it is intended to be a proxy that can provide at least some indication of the area of forest in which human activities have resulted in reduced canopy density forest.

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