

Sweden's forests show how to halt the greenhouse effect

If half the world's forests were run like Sweden's, the entire greenhouse effect could be eliminated— this is the momentous finding of researchers at Sweden's largest forest owner and woodpulp producer, Södra (1).

A radical overhaul of global forestry along Swedish lines would see carbon locked in a growing reserve of timber rather than remaining in the atmosphere in the form of carbon dioxide, which is responsible for the greenhouse effect.

This is not just pie in the sky, according to Göran Örländer, silviculture manager at Södra. “The world's forests cover some four billion hectares. We could increase forest growth by more than one percent per year across half of this area (only half of the world's forests are suitable for management based on the Swedish model). To implement the Swedish model we would need to break the negative trends of deforestation, forest damage and poor forest management on a global basis, but we'd be rewarded with an increase in carbon uptake of almost two billion tonnes per year (2).”

Initially this would have the effect of reducing the level by which emissions of carbon dioxide increase every year. But continuous forest growth of one percent in half the world's forest could halt the increases altogether, possibly within as little as 20 years.

The Swedish model does not entail a ban on felling trees - quite the opposite. Timber is Sweden's most valuable natural resource, and Swedish companies process millions of tonnes of it every year. But thanks to intelligent forestry, Sweden manages to increase the amount of timber in its forests year in year out, despite harvesting it constantly.

So growth in forests would cap increases in carbon emissions as well as providing a source of renewable materials and energy. “Using biofuel from the forest means we can leave fossil raw materials in the earth and prevent them from adding to climate change. When we build with timber, the carbon remains stored in the building and does not return to the atmosphere for many years,” says Örlander.

Notes for editors:

1. Södra is Europe’s largest, and the world’s third largest, producer of woodpulp, which is mainly used to make paper, cardboard and tissue. www.sodra.com
2. Unfortunately the reality of forest management in the world is a far cry from the Swedish model. Every year, seven million hectares of forest are felled – the equivalent of one third of Sweden’s forest resource. The situation is gravest in South-East Asia, which has lost almost one per cent of its forest every year during the past couple of decades. Another extreme threat is large-scale insect attack, microbial attack and forest fires. Much of the 100 million hectares lost by these causes every year could have been saved if action had been taken early enough. All preventative measures are significantly less costly than the damage which might otherwise occur.

Press enquiries to:

Jonathan Roberts/Amanda Marcus
Roberts Media
jonathan@robertsmedia.co.uk/amanda@robertsmedia.co.uk

Tel: +44 (0)1892 614013

M: 07960 716573 Jonathan

M: 07802 449144 Amanda