

**CUT CARBON  
NOT FORESTS**



# **UK BIOMASS IMPORTS THREATEN GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY**

**We are in the midst of a global biodiversity crisis, caused mainly by changes in land and sea use, including forest destruction and fragmentation.**



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**This biodiversity crisis is endangering not only wildlife, but humans as well. We depend on biodiversity for the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, the medicines we take, and stable weather patterns, among other benefits.**

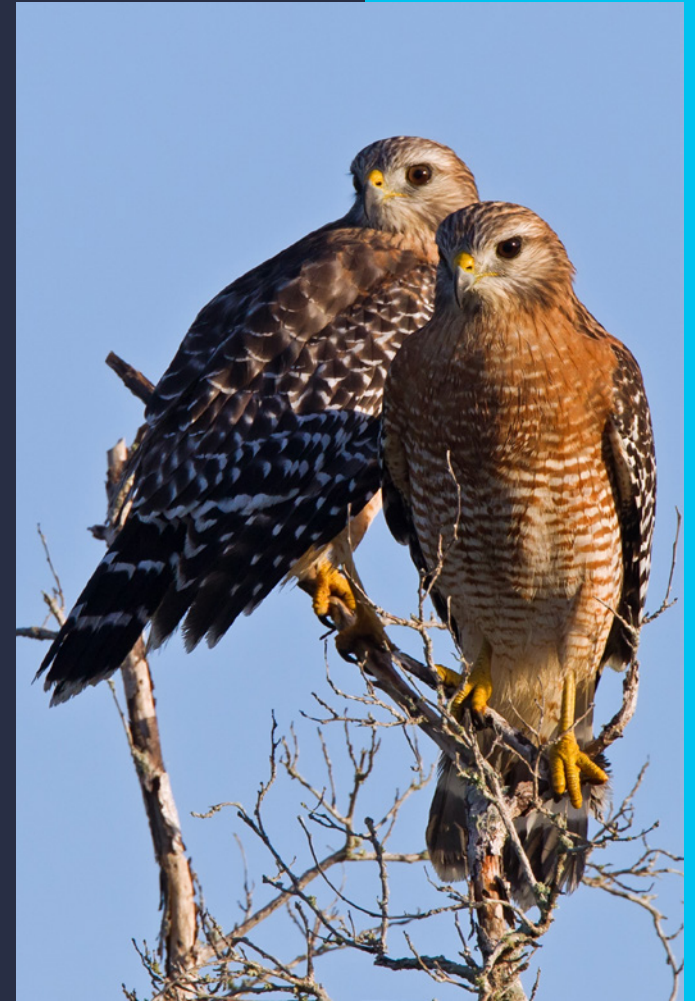
Since 1970, the planet has lost 60 percent of its vertebrate wildlife populations, leading experts to warn that the annihilation of wildlife threatens civilisation. Scientists predict this crisis will become even more dire, with the United Nations' Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services finding that a million species face extinction.

Unfortunately, logging for biomass energy is accelerating the threat to forests and wildlife while scientists are calling for “transformative change” – not business as usual – to save our planet and ourselves.

As the world's top importer and subsidiser of biomass, the UK plays a huge role in this destruction. In 2019, the UK spent more than £1.9 billion on subsidies for biomass energy—more than any other country in Europe.

Most subsidies went towards burning wood imported from overseas forests at Drax Power Station, the largest wood burner in the world. Drax is also now investing heavily in becoming a leading global manufacturer and exporter of wood pellets.

Logging for UK biomass is harming forests around the world, including in the United States, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Canada, devastating already-imperilled wildlife and ecosystems.



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## BIOMASS HARMS FOREST ECOSYSTEMS

Biomass production harms some of the planet's most ecologically valuable forest ecosystems. Forests are among the most biodiverse places on the planet, providing homes for countless species. They are also often referred to as the "lungs of the earth" due to their capacity to absorb nearly a third of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Logging for biomass worsens climate change by releasing the carbon stored by forests and reducing their ability to suck carbon from the air.

While the biomass industry often claims they make wood pellets out of "wastes and residues" from logging, wood pellets made from whole trees routinely enter the UK energy market. Indeed, nearly half of all biomass burned at Drax Power Station comes from whole trees.



**Each year, over a million acres of Canadian boreal forest are clearcut.**



Further, wood used for biomass energy is routinely logged using destructive and unsustainable practices like clearcutting. On-the-ground investigations show that two of the world's largest pellet manufacturers – Enviva and Pinnacle – make pellets from wood clearcut from forests. Clearcutting by other pellet manufacturers in the EU is even occurring in reserves designed to protect forests and rare and threatened species (e.g. European Union's Natura 2000 network).

Once a forest has been clearcut, it takes decades, if not centuries, before it can regrow to recover its original level of ecosystem productivity.

The scale of the impact is alarming. In 2019, approximately 5.33 million metric tons of wood pellets were exported from the United States to the UK, requiring the clearing of an area larger than the New Forest. Each year, over a million acres of Canadian boreal forest are clearcut, in part to feed biomass demand. And between 2001 and 2019, Estonia's Natura 2000 areas lost an area more than twice the size of Manhattan, due in part to biomass production.



## **FACTS:**

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# BIOMASS HARMS WILDLIFE

**To make matters worse, the forests being logged for biomass are some of the most ecologically rich and diverse in the world.**

The North American Coastal Plain – where most UK biomass imports come from – is a global biodiversity hotspot – providing habitat for hundreds of imperilled species, including the Red Wolf, Cerulean Warbler, and Louisiana Black Bear. Likewise, amphibian biodiversity is concentrated in the southeastern **U.S.** where many species inhabit bottomland hardwood forests, including the Three-Lined Salamander and Gopher Frog.



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In **Canada**, logging for biomass is putting an additional strain on imperilled species like the Woodland Caribou, Canada Lynx, and Pine Marten. It's also jeopardizing the over 3 billion birds that rely on the boreal for nesting and breeding, many of which are classified as "threatened with extinction by" the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Biomass is likewise adding pressure to log the last remaining old growth forests in **Estonia** and **Latvia**, which are critical for biodiversity conservation.

The Estonian Fund for Nature states these forests have experienced few major human impacts over the years and are therefore unique local biodiversity hotspots, supporting species that cannot survive in actively managed forest landscapes like Flying Squirrels, Capercaillie, and Black Stork. Many of these species are protected under national and/or EU legislation.

The **Lithuanian** government now allows logging in regional and national forest parks to meet biomass demand, despite their protected status, impacting many bird species listed as endangered in Lithuania's Red Data Book like the Pygmy Owl, White-Tailed Eagle, Black Grouse, and White-Backed Woodpecker and prompting criticism from the European Commission.



**Pine Marten**



**Cerulean Warbler**



**Louisiana Black Bear**



**Red Wolf**



**Canadian Lynx**



**Woodland Caribou**



**Salamander**



**White-Tailed Eagle**

\*Newfoundland Pine Marten (cropped) by Bailey Parsons, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

\*White-tailed Eagle Head detail by Eprdox, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons



**The UK  
should not be  
contributing to  
the dire climate  
and ecological  
crises our  
planet is facing  
by subsidising  
Drax and other  
large biomass  
power plants to  
burn wood.**



# BIOMASS BREAKS THE UK'S PROMISES TO ITS CITIZENS AND THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

The UK's massive biomass electricity subsidies break its promises under Convention on the Biological Diversity (CBD) requiring the elimination of subsidies harmful to international biodiversity (Aichi Biodiversity Target 3).

**It's also hypocritical for the UK to commit to – and lead – the effort to protect at least 30% of its lands and seas by 2030 (an effort known as “30 by 30”) under CBD when, through billions in subsidies for biomass, it is destroying other countries' abilities to meet these targets.**

The country's reliance on biomass for industrial scale electricity generation is also incompatible with its 25-year Environment Plan, which states that the UK will establish “appropriate mechanisms to screen policies and strategies for potential negative environmental effects overseas.”

## UK BIOMASS SUBSIDIES MUST END NOW

Biomass is a one-two punch to biodiversity: ploughing down trees in the world's most ecologically diverse forests for pellets, which are then burned in power plants, fuelling climate change. The UK should not be contributing to the dire climate and ecological crises our planet is facing by subsidising Drax and other large biomass power plants to burn wood. The UK government should immediately end biomass electricity subsidies and invest the savings in true clean and renewable energy like wind and solar.

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