



**Written Statement of M. Sanjayan, Ph.D.,  
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**House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing on  
Forest Conservation in the Fight Against Climate Change**

**Thursday, May 12, 2022**

My name is Dr. M. Sanjayan and I am the CEO of Conservation International, a conservation nonprofit working in dozens of countries around the world to protect nature. Thank you for inviting me to testify to stress the importance of conservation and share my perspective on HR 5830, also known as the “AMAZON21” Act.

### *About Conservation International*

Conservation International’s mission is to help people and nature thrive together. Everything we do is aimed at fulfilling that purpose. Since 1987, we have worked to protect critical ecosystems by engaging businesses and governments to account for their impacts and reliance on nature. We also promote the creation of self-sustaining, conservation-based economies.

### *The AMAZON21 Act*

The AMAZON21 Act would substantially strengthen conservation efforts around the world. At its core, the legislation incentivizes developing nations that invest in maintaining the health of some of our most critical ecosystems to protect and restore nature. Additionally, the legislation creates a technical assistance program through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to help developing countries and landowners access carbon markets, creating important economic opportunities for rural landowners and Indigenous peoples, among others, who commit to protecting nature.

The bill has the opportunity to create lasting impacts, by helping to preserve critical ecosystems and important natural carbon sinks, and protect wildlife. This in turn helps provide food, climate and national security for developing countries.

Furthermore, the AMAZON21 Act heralds a shift in how conservation is done at a crucial and decisive moment where swift action is needed to protect nature to slow the spread of deforestation, the mass extinctions of wildlife and to stabilize our climate.

### *Protecting Nature*

The global and unequivocal scientific consensus is that the burning of fossil fuels is warming the planet. We must emit fewer greenhouse gases to stabilize our climate. However, even if the world stopped using fossil fuels completely, we would still fail to avert a worst-case scenario if we did not also reverse the destruction of ecosystems, such as forests that absorb and store carbon. To put that into perspective, if deforestation was a country, it would be the third largest emitter after China and the United States.<sup>1</sup> If we continue to lose the carbon stored in our planet’s forests at this pace, it would be absolutely devastating for the entire planet.

Luckily, there is a solution at hand — we must prioritize protecting nature. A landmark 2017 study<sup>2</sup> found that protecting and restoring nature can deliver more than one-third of the net emissions reductions that we need to make by 2030.

The benefits of doing this are not confined to the climate:

- Nature is an essential part of our daily lives. It provides the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe. Forests, in particular, are powerhouses of the water cycle, holding and filtering water and

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<sup>1</sup> If Tropical Deforestation were a Country, it Would Rank Third in CO<sub>2</sub>e Emissions: <https://bit.ly/3OWpUT1>

<sup>2</sup> Natural climate solutions: <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1710465114>

providing flood control for adjacent communities. Pollinators are also critical to maintaining global food supply, helping produce \$170 billion in crops per year.<sup>3</sup>

- For 1.2 billion people in the tropics, the conservation of nature is a matter of survival every single day.<sup>4</sup> As climate change and wildlife extinctions continue to accelerate, people who derive basic needs from natural sources are disproportionately affected. Even small changes to their environment can have an enormous impact on their lives and livelihoods — cutting off access to food and clean water, building materials or their incomes.
- Our planet is home to species as varied and unique as the landscapes they depend on for survival. Protected lands and waters like national parks and national wildlife refuges are vital to the survival of imperiled wildlife. In fact, mammal diversity within protected areas is an incredible 66 percent greater than in non-protected areas.<sup>5</sup>

### *Investing in Nature*

Nature conservation, like all things, requires investment. These investments can take many different forms. For example:

- A company supporting Indigenous peoples by paying for the restoration of tropical rainforests in South America.
- A nonprofit that partners to support local communities to conserve mangrove forests along shorelines in Southeast Asia.
- A government that establishes and funds a new protected area around peatlands and marshes, which contain extraordinarily massive stores of carbon. If these areas are destroyed, that carbon is released into the atmosphere and is gone, essentially “irrecoverable” in our lifetimes.<sup>6</sup>

However, in order to be able to make these investments, you need financing. Currently, only 3 percent of all available global climate finance is aimed at protecting nature.<sup>7</sup> There is also a massive finance gap — if the world is to meet its targets for protecting wildlife and land, while also curbing climate change, it needs to close a finance gap of more than \$4 trillion by 2050, according to a United Nations report<sup>8</sup> released last year. Current investments in nature-based solutions amount to \$133 billion, most of which, the report found, comes from *public* sources.

Billions of dollars in available private capital for nature-based investments are sidelined by uncertainty and risk. Yet, we know demand is there. Over the last few years, the voluntary carbon market has surged. Experts

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<sup>3</sup> Nearly 40% decline in honey bee population last winter 'unsustainable,' experts say: <https://abcn.ws/3yeiqVr>

<sup>4</sup> Nature-dependent people: Mapping human direct use of nature for basic needs across the tropics: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378021001473>

<sup>5</sup> Global camera trap synthesis highlights the importance of protected areas in maintaining mammal diversity: <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/conl.12865>

<sup>6</sup> Irrecoverable carbon: <https://www.conservation.org/projects/irrecoverable-carbon>

<sup>7</sup> Nature Based Solutions Essential For Climate Mitigation: <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2020/12/11/nature-based-solutions-essential-for-climate-mitigation/>

<sup>8</sup> State of Finance for Nature: <https://www.unep.org/resources/state-finance-nature>

estimate that the market for carbon credits could exceed \$50 billion before 2030.<sup>9</sup> Companies, shareholders and consumers are incredibly motivated to take part in this growing market, which enables them to reduce their carbon footprint by investing in the protection of nature. Public-private partnerships, like the International Terrestrial Carbon Sequestration Fund established under the AMAZON21 Act, would ensure that these investments reach places they would not ordinarily.

These returns will be felt far and wide. More than half of the world's GDP already depends in some way on life-sustaining services, such as pollination, freshwater provision, flood control, food security, and building supplies, provided by nature.<sup>10</sup> A collapse of these services would cost more than 2 percent of GDP globally, approximately \$2.7 trillion, each year by 2030, and the poorest countries would be hit the hardest.<sup>11</sup> A future of resource scarcity, famines and climate refugees would await, creating a recipe for conflict and national security risks. A 2019 analysis<sup>12</sup> found that such effects have influenced as much as 20 percent of violent armed conflict over the past century, and that if we stay on our present course, the risk of such violence will increase fivefold.

### *Investing in Nature through the AMAZON21 Act*

The AMAZON21 Act would help dramatically stave off these effects. I have seen firsthand that conservation can be a stabilizing factor in nations where climate change has stressed economic, social and political systems, particularly in those countries where nature provides food and livelihoods for a significant portion of its citizens.

Natural climate solutions are beneficial because they exist today, and because we can easily implement and scale them almost immediately. This is critical, because if we continue on our current path, the dangers of climate change will only become dramatically worse. For the sake of our economies, our homes and our loved ones, we must quickly change course.

Amid the growing climate and biodiversity crises, the timing of this hearing is critical, and there could not be a more compelling case for urgent action. I firmly believe that the AMAZON21 Act would help us do that, by moving forward with necessary urgency.

This legislation represents a critical next step in the rich and storied conservation legacy of this country. In the United States, our cherished landscapes and beloved wildlife exist because of our long and distinguished history of committed and bipartisan conservationism. For the better part of a century, legislation like the Farm Bill has been a part of this tradition — incentivizing landowners that protect the health of ecosystems and provide adequate habitat for imperiled wildlife. We also appreciate the efforts of Members of this Committee and Congress to advance legislation that supports conservation efforts, including the FOREST Act.

The AMAZON21 Act takes that kind of legacy to a new, global scale — bolstering efforts in developing countries to make verifiable progress in protecting nature. Further, the technical assistance provided by USAID

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<sup>9</sup> Voluntary carbon markets: how they work, how they're priced and who's involved:

<https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/blogs/energy-transition/061021-voluntary-carbon-markets-pricing-participants-trading-corsia-credits>

<sup>10</sup> Half of world's GDP moderately or highly dependent on nature, says new report: <https://www.pwc.com/th/en/press-room/press-release/2020/press-release-28-02-20-en.html>

<sup>11</sup> The Economic Case for Nature: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35882/A-Global-Earth-Economy-Model-to-Assess-Development-Policy-Pathways.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Climate as a risk factor for armed conflict: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1300-6.epdf>

will play a critical role in teaching developing countries and landowners how to attract investment into conservation projects in their countries and navigate complex carbon markets.

This is commonsense, pragmatic legislation designed to properly balance socioeconomic realities alongside the crucial need to conserve ecosystems and the critical services they provide. It would open new opportunities to make targeted and purposeful investments that will bolster climate resilience, protect livelihoods and food security without destroying nature's life-support systems in a way that is inclusive and pro-business — combining the efforts of private, nonprofit and multinational entities, as well as individuals, to achieve a broader, more impactful reach.

Thank you for your leadership in holding this important hearing. Conservation International looks forward to working together to continue to develop policies that can help to accelerate action that protects nature for the benefit of all people.