

Forests sucking up planet's fuel emissions

By Margaret Munro, Vancouver Sun

The world's forests gobble up so much carbon they are protecting the planet from the worst impacts of humans' staggering fossil fuel emissions.

An international study has concluded forests suck up a third of the carbon pumped into the atmosphere each year through the burning of oil, gas and coal: "That one third taken up by the forests would otherwise be in the atmosphere," said Werner Kurz of the Canadian Forest Service, co-author of the report published Thursday in the journal Science.

The oceans suck up another 20 percent of the emissions, which means "we have basically been getting a 50 per discount on all our fossil fuel emissions," said Kurz.

The report is the most comprehensive assessment yet of the global forest "sink" and shows trees from the tropics to the boreal play a huge role in controlling the global carbon budget by sucking up vast amounts of carbon from the air and locking it away in wood and soil.

It says that the forests have been a major carbon sink since 1990, and shows the changing dynamics of the world's trees.

It says fire and insects hit this country's forests so hard between 1990 and 2007 that the carbon sink in Canada's managed forest was "reduced by half". On the other side of the Atlantic, the carbon sinks grew in fast-growing new forests in Russia and northern Europe.

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