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Jaguars and Whales are NOT carbon OFFSETS

Tom BK Goldtooth, Indigenous Enviromental Network (IEN)

'Indigenous Peoples' sacred animal relatives such as jaguars, whales, and elephants are being used as carbon and biodiversity offsets and extractive industries' greenwash, a grave affront to our traditional knowledge systems and spiritual lifeways.

For example, in Peru, the Jaguar Amazon REDD Project of the offset firm Greenoxx pretends to protect jaguars by logging the rainforest, where they live. The "charismatic, boutique" project, which includes the Jaguar Biodiversity Project implemented by Dr. Mathias Tobler of the San Diego Zoo, consists of the timber company Inversiones Forestales Chullachaqui SAC logging the REDD project area and the sawmill operator Forestal Otorongo SAC turning the logs into planks "for at least 80 years."

Even though this project deforests the Amazon, and despite deforestation being the biggest threat to jaguars, the project is the world's 5th largest REDD project and has been certified by Verra's Climate, Community and Biodiversity Gold Standard.

Meanwhile, in the ocean, polluters are using whales for carbon offsets arguing that their bodies are sponges for their pollution. The International Monetary Fund, 41 countries and conservation NGOs support using whales for carbon offsets. The IMF wants to pay the oil, fishing, and shipping industries not to kill whales so they can use them as carbon credits, even though these same industries also pollute and cause climate change, which in turn kills whales.

In 2021, the Whale Carbon Plus Project began near a bowhead whale sanctuary in the Inuit People's territory in the Canadian Artic, where Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation, a partner of the whale offset project, has a polluting iron ore mine, which is expanding despite Inuit opposition. According to the financial news service *Finshots,* "the project would use AI to track the whales' movements. And then issue a bond against it. A company could buy that bond and instead of an interest on the investment, they'd get a carbon credit."

Potential buyers of whale offsets and blue bonds include corporations such as Apple, Amazon, Disney, Patagonia, Microsoft and Walmart. Whale offsets may eventually be used to greenwash devastating Deep Sea Mining.

Using whales to pretend to absorb carbon dioxide is a false solution to climate change that could accelerate the extinction of whales. The former UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples Francisco Calí Tzay admonished that "polluters must not use whales as a 'tool' to absorb their pollution."

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Forest Fires: A Global Crisis Fueled by Profit

Mirna Ines Fernandez, Third World Network

The surge in forest fires across the globe is no longer an occasional environmental tragedy—it has become a systemic crisis, intensifying year after year in the so-called fire season. In recent years, fire activity has intensified to unprecedented levels, exposing the fragility of both ecosystems and political will. Four of the five worst years for global forest fires have occurred since 2020.

The year 2024 marked an alarming record. Wildfires were responsible for 48% of all tropical primary forest loss in the Amazon and Congo Basin—regions indispensable for carbon storage, biodiversity, and local climate regulation. If forest fires were counted as a nation, they would rank as the world's second-largest carbon emitter.

For the first time, large-scale fires simultaneously devastated tropical and boreal forests. Brazil, Bolivia, Russia, and Canada suffered some of their most severe fire seasons in the last 25 years. South America alone accounted for roughly a quarter of global fire-related tree cover loss in 2024. Once hailed as powerful carbon sinks, these regions are now net carbon sources, emitting more greenhouse gases than they can absorb.

Forest fires affect indigenous lands and their ways of life, destroy homes and infrastructure, contaminate water supplies, and inflict significant economic losses to our countries, with US$136 bn lost to global wildfire losses between 2015 and 2024. Even more alarming, wildfire smoke is estimated to cause over 1.5 million premature deaths every year. These cascading impacts reveal that the wildfire crisis is not merely ecological—it is a profound public health and socioeconomic emergency.

Unique biomes such as Bolivia's Chiquitano dry forest or Brazil's Cerrado are now losing species that science has not even had the chance to describe. Scientists warn that the Amazon is approaching a critical tipping point where its hydrological cycle could collapse, transforming it into a dry savannah-like ecosystem. The climatic repercussions of such a shift are incalculable.

Despite the frequent attribution of fires to climate change, the roots of the crisis are primarily structural and political. In tropical regions, most fires are human-induced, to clear land for agriculture or cattle pastures. The influence of the agribusiness sector on land-use policies in many tropical countries has become a central, yet often unspoken, driver of forest degradation. Until this disproportionate power is curbed and ecological integrity is prioritized over short-term economic gain, fire rates will continue to rise.

This global emergency requires more attention from the CBD. The expanded programme of work on forest biodiversity, the decisions on biodiversity and climate change and the implementation of relevant KMGBF targets should address the economic and political structures perpetuating this destruction, before some of the world's most important ecosystems, and the stability they provide, are irreversibly lost.

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Panganga Pungowiyi, staffed with IEN in Alaska, explains that "whales are sacred relatives, not sponges for corporate pollution. We defend whales and our territories from the land grabs and ocean grabs of the IMF, the so-called Blue Economy and carbon colonialism. We know that the commodification of any Life form truly means we are commodifying all life forms. We are not separate. We are connected. When the whales die, we die. These offsets violate our sacred relationship with whales just as forest offsets violate our sacred relationships with our forests. Keep in mind that for-profit companies are still permitted to mine and drill on offset lands and waters."

Dept-for-Nature Swaps: Doubtful Impact on Debt and Biodiversity

Nele Mariën, Friends of the Earth International

Debt-for-Nature Swaps (DFNS) are being promoted as innovative tools that can tackle two challenges at once: sovereign debt and biodiversity loss. Part of a country's external debt is restructured in exchange for commitments to finance conservation or climate-related programmes.

Ahead of the next SBI meeting in Rome, which will look into finance issues, Friends of the Earth International's new publication on the topic tries to give an answer to the question of whether these are real solutions for biodiversity and the indebtedness of countries.

Minimal Debt Relief

Countries in the Global South carry very high debts, often historically unjust ones, contracted under dictatorial regimes or under coercive conditions imposed by international financial institutions. Servicing these debts has forced governments to expand extractive industries — mining, oil, monocultures, and logging — in order to earn foreign currency. This has intensified deforestation, pollution, and land dispossession in some of the world's most biodiverse regions.

DFNS have made only a negligible impact on debt. Since the 1980s, they have relieved just 0.11% of developing countries' total external debt. Rather than cancelling debt, most swaps involve refinancing or restructuring existing obligations, often under new conditions. The swaps often primarily benefit creditors and financial intermediaries, who receive fees and guarantees from public institutions. For heavily indebted countries, this no new fiscal space. Fiscal resources that could otherwise support essential services — such as health, education, or climate adaptation — remain tied to repayment obligations.

Uncertain Benefits for Nature

DFNS are often presented as a way to fund conservation and biodiversity protection. However, evidence of lasting environmental benefits is limited. Many projects focus on expanding protected areas without addressing the main drivers of biodiversity loss — such as extractive industries, large-scale agriculture, or fossil fuel dependence.

Funds generated through swaps are typically managed by conservation trust funds, often with international oversight. This usually reduces national and local ownership over conservation priorities. In some cases, the governance of these funds is heavily influenced by external institutions, raising questions about transparency and accountability.

Risk of External Control

Debt-for-Nature Swaps can also reshape who makes decisions about land use and biodiversity management. When conservation funds are governed primarily by international partners, debtor countries may lose decision-making power over their own environmental policies.

Communities living in or near conservation areas can also be affected. In some cases, DFNS have led to restrictions on land use without adequate consultation or participation of local people.

The Need for Systemic Solutions

The challenges of debt and biodiversity loss are deeply interconnected. To truly support countries in addressing biodiversity decline, measures are needed that:

- Provide **substantial and unconditional debt cancellation**, especially for countries facing climate and ecological vulnerabilities.
- Ensure **public and transparent financing** for conservation, rather than relying on complex financial instruments.
- Strengthen **community-led and rights-based approaches** that protect ecosystems while supporting livelihoods.
- Address the **structural causes of unsustainable debt**, including unfair trade relations and dependence on resource extraction.

Find the full article here:

Will Gene Drives Work? Cutting Through the Hype in Synthectic Biology

Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher, Federation of German Scientists

Hype is often part of how scientific development is communicated to decision-makers and the public. As Professor Timothy Caulfield (University of Alberta) explains, "spin happens throughout the science translation process" — from research proposals and peer-reviewed papers to press releases and media stories. Studies confirm a growing use of promotional language, and Caulfield argues that genetics has been particularly prone to this.

Synthetic biology, drawing on engineering metaphors, has built a vision of "biology by design." Some practitioners warn that it is often framed as offering "easy solutions to difficult problems" or even as "the one technical solution to many grave world problems." Engineered gene drives (EGD) for example have attracted considerable attention and funding by promising such simple solutions. The question is whether the science supports these claims.

The ambition: altering nature's inheritance. Gene drives are designed to bias inheritance so that a chosen genetic trait spreads rapidly through a population — even if it harms the organism. The ambition is to use this mechanism to suppress or eliminate wild species seen as problematic, such as disease-carrying mosquitoes or invasive rodents. But if released, these systems could persist and spread uncontrollably, posing serious ecological risks. Before debating governance, it is worth asking: can they deliver on their promises?

Hype: suggesting readiness that does not exist. One high-profile proposal is to use a "tCRISPR" gene drive to eradicate invasive mice by spreading female infertility. The abstract of the study implies this goal is achievable, but the gene-drive mice used for modeling differ from those actually used in experiments,. It only works in laboratory mice already engineered to express Cas9, meaning it would not function in wild populations. A proof of principle is lacking. Even if such proof were reached, its behavior in nature would remain uncertain due to issues such as drive resistance and mating patterns.

Hype: promising control without proof. Concerns about gene drives spreading uncontrollably are often met with assurances that they can be "localized" or "confined." "Daisy drives" have been widely cited as the solution, supposedly allowing local control. Yet despite major investment, there is no evidence that a functional daisy drive exists beyond computer models. These assurances rest on hypothetical mechanisms rather than demonstrated technologies.

Hype: overstating novelty by dismissing existing tools. There is a tendency to portray existing control measures as ineffective. A recent gene-drive announcement claimed malaria control had "stalled," whereas the World Health Organization highlights continuing progress and points to social and funding challenges. This selective framing risks undermining established, proven methods.

Beyond the hype. Promotional terms such as innovative, powerful, and scalable are common in synthetic biology, but assessing real potential requires separating speculation from evidence. As Caulfield notes, the competitive nature of research encourages exaggeration and premature optimism. For gene drives, this means recognizing that what is promised is still far from proven. Whether or not gene drives eventually work, decision-making must be guided by evidence, not hype.

Find the full article here: