
PREY LANG FACT SHEET

CAMPAIGN TO SAVE “CAMBODIA’S AMAZON”

The Bigger Picture In 1970, 70% of Cambodia’s land was covered with old-growth forests. Today it is only 3%. Cambodia has the third highest deforestation rate in the world, behind only Nigeria and Vietnam.

Size The core area of Prey Lang consists of primary, lowland, evergreen, forests, that cover about 200,000 acres. It is surrounded by over 600,000 acres of secondary forest. The entire Prey Lang area is roughly the size of Rhode Island.

Population 200,000 people depend on the Prey Lang forest for their livelihoods, their culture, and their lives. Some 300 villages and family rice fields are also at risk that are scattered through a large buffer zone of secondary forest that surrounds Prey Lang.

Not Legally Protected The Prey Lang forest is not fully legally protected by law, and existing laws are not enforced. Illegal loggers are clear-cutting large areas of old-growth trees.

Industrial Concessions More than 30 companies have been granted economic and mining land concessions in the greater Prey Lang area by the Cambodian government. Old-growth forests are clear-cut and replaced with rubber tree and cassava plantations (the latter to provide ‘eco-friendly’ ethanol), or mined for iron and other ores.

Rate of Destruction A botanical team from a top European University recently conducted several surveys in Prey Lang and predict that at the current rate of destruction, the entire Prey Lang forest will be gone within five years.

Language In the language of Cambodia’s Kuy people, Prey Lang means “Our Forest.”

Biodiversity Prey Lang is Cambodia’s ‘Amazon.’ The forest has seven distinct ecosystems, including primordial swamp forest, that provide habitat to more than 50 endangered animal and bird species including sun bears, tigers, and leopards. Most areas remain largely unexplored by scientists. Elephants and tigers may still roam wild in parts of Prey Lang.

Water & Food Security The Prey Lang forest is a vital source of water for Cambodia’s rice growing region and for the Mekong delta. As a primary watershed regulating water and sediment flow to the Tonle Sap Basin, and as an important fish spawning area, Prey Lang is vital for Cambodia’s long-term environmental sustainability and for food and water security.

Climate Stabilization Left standing, the Prey Lang forest has among the highest carbon sequestration values in the region and is a powerhouse for fighting global warming. Cambodia’s Forest Administration has identified Prey Lang as an important area for conservation, with high potential for carbon-credit financing.

Meeting the Needs of Villagers The Prey Lang forest meets the food, water, livelihood and spiritual needs of the Kuy communities. They build their rice fields along Prey Lang’s edges and go into the forest for hunting, fishing, and gathering fruits and herbs for food and ceremonies. They tap several species of trees and collect the resin for making torches and caulking boats. Resin has become the main source of cash for many Kuy families who sell it for industrial use. Overall, the forest is the spiritual center of their lives.

Short-lived Victory In 2002, the Prey Lang people and other forest communities persuaded the government to ban logging concessions. But their victory was short-lived as the government continued to award concessions to agro-industry and mining companies, both of which clear-cut the land.

Avatars In May 2011, members of the Prey Lang Network gained international media attention for their staged demonstrations in Phnom Penh where they painted themselves blue and green, wore leaf hats, and called themselves Avatars, after the James Cameron film.

Repression & Violence Police armed with AK-47s have broken up Prey Lang Network meetings and Network members are being increasingly threatened with physical harm and criminal charges.

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