

Lesson Plan 2: Changing Landscapes: Logging

The Background

Fifty years ago, 60 per cent of Thailand was covered by forest; now it's just 20 per cent. Over the last 100 years, elephant numbers in the wild in Thailand have dropped from 100,000 to just 2,000, and they live in just a few national parks. Recognising the huge impact that it was having on the environment, logging was banned in Thailand in 1989. Nevertheless, illegal logging continues.

A Christian Science Monitor reporter described a de-forested area in Thailand: 'From horizon to horizon the land was gray and white, the soft round contours of the hills broken by jagged lines: the refuse of limbs, unsalable trees, and torn-up soil left by the loggers.

'There was no cover from the tropical sun; there was no sign of life. No birds sang, no small things scurried underneath the brush, and the only insects we saw were swarms of very hungry mosquitoes. There was no path to follow, the streams were choked with ash and deadfall, and the dirt was dry and loose underfoot. The place stank of rot and stagnant water.'

Why?

Forests are cut down to provide timber that can be sold and to create land suitable for agriculture and home building.

Habitat

Cutting down the forests has an effect on the lives of the animals who depend on the forests for survival, such as the rhinos and elephants who live in the forests of Thailand.

Elephants

As well as losing their habitat to them, elephants are also used by illegal loggers. These 'gentle giants' are forced to drag logs for the companies. They are often beaten and spend their lives in misery.

Extinction

The Javan and Sumatran Rhinoceroses are critically endangered; the Asian elephant, the tiger and several species of bat are endangered; the Asiatic black bear, the Malayan tapir and the pileated gibbon are all vulnerable. Some endangered animals can only be found in Thailand.

Environment

The loss of trees brings a decline in soil structure. Rain is no longer absorbed by the trees but instead runs down hillsides, washing away the topsoil. This topsoil is eventually washed into rivers and waterways where it causes blockages that can lead to those areas becoming flooded. In 1988, serious flooding led to the deaths of 350 people. Floods in Thailand still occur regularly.

Write a report about the impact of logging in Thailand using these facts as a starting point for your research. Other possibly useful Web sites are listed below.

World Wildlife Fund
Thai Tourist Authority

www.panda.org
www.thaifocus.com