



Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistory to Global Crisis, An Abridgment

Michael Williams

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“Anyone who doubts the power of history to inform the present should read this closely argued and sweeping survey. This is rich, timely, and sobering historical fare written in a measured, non-sensationalist style by a master of his craft. One only hopes (almost certainly vainly) that today’s policymakers take its lessons to heart.”—Brian Fagan, *Los Angeles Times*

Published in 2002, *Deforesting the Earth* was a landmark study of the history and geography of deforestation. Now available as an abridgment, this edition retains the breadth of the original while rendering its arguments accessible to a general readership.

Deforestation—the thinning, changing, and wholesale clearing of forests for fuel, shelter, and agriculture—is among the most important ways humans have transformed the environment. Surveying ten thousand years to trace human-induced deforestation’s effect on economies, societies, and landscapes around the world, *Deforesting the Earth* is the preeminent history of this process and its consequences.

Beginning with the return of the forests after the ice age to Europe, North America, and the tropics, Michael Williams traces the impact of human-set fires for gathering and hunting, land clearing for agriculture, and other activities from the Paleolithic age through the classical world and the medieval period. He then focuses on forest clearing both within Europe and by European imperialists and industrialists abroad, from the 1500s to the early 1900s, in such places as the New World, India, and Latin America, and considers indigenous clearing in India, China, and Japan. Finally, he covers the current alarming escalation of deforestation, with our ever-increasing human population placing a potentially unsupportable burden on the world’s forests.

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