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## **US, 5 others pledge \$3.5B to protect rainforests**

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Negotiators moved closer to a deal to protect the world's forests with a pledge from the United States and five other countries to spend \$3.5 billion over the next three years to slow their destruction.

The plan to reduce and eventually reverse deforestation in developing countries is a key component of the global climate pact being negotiated at the U.N. conference in Copenhagen.

The funding announced Wednesday "is what's needed to break the logjam" of negotiations and spark more commitments for the issue, Andrew Deutz of the Nature Conservancy said in a statement.

The burning or cutting of trees to clear land for plantations or cattle ranches is blamed for about 20 percent of global emissions. That's as much carbon dioxide as all the world's cars, trucks, trains, planes and ships combined.

Sen. John Barrasso, a Republican from Wyoming, criticized the funding announcement as ill-timed considering the state of the country's economy.

"With 10 percent unemployment and a \$1.4 trillion dollar deficit, it's already outrageous that the Obama Administration is working on a binding international climate change agreement that will kill more American jobs and decrease our economic growth," Barrasso said in a statement. "But today's announcement just adds more fuel to the fire."

Progress on the proposal known as REDD, for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation, has been hampered by a lack of funding commitments from developed countries. The nations with rainforests want billions more in commitments from wealthy nations.

The United States said it would contribute \$1 billion from 2010 to 2012, with Australia, France, Japan, Norway and Britain contributing the rest. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said the money will be available for developing countries that produce ambitious plans to slow and eventually reverse deforestation.

Brazil's lead negotiator on the deforestation deal, Tasso Rezende de Azevedo, said the negotiated text was in good shape after days of confusion and various versions. Negotiators, realizing the text

had become too unwieldy for their ministers, stripped down the text from over nine pages to four pages. They removed benchmarks for deforestation, figures for financing and options for financing that included government assistance or carbon markets.

"The only question is whether we have a decision on all the topics," he said. "This decision doesn't exist unless you have a decision on the whole thing."

That leaves most of the key decisions to minister, including deciding whether REDD projects will be done at a national or local level, how much to reduce deforestation in 2020 or 2030 and, most importantly, the amount of money that will go to the program.

"It is missing funding. It is not in the text and will have to be negotiated at the ministerial level," said Federica Bietta, the deputy director of the Coalition for Rain Forest Nations. The group represents most of the countries that could take part in a forest scheme.

Some environmental groups criticized the text, saying it left too much work for the ministers and needed to include hard figures.

"We can't run REDD on an honor code," said Rosalind Reeve of Global Witness. "Developed countries must kick-start this process and put money on the table now."

Others complained that the targets were stripped out of the text which called for halving deforestation rates by 2020 and eliminating it completely by 2030. Some have said deforestation should be stopped by 2020.

"We're losing an acre of rainforest each second," said Alistair Graham of Humane Society International, the global arm of the Humane Society of the United States. "For countries to take REDD seriously, we need to halt emissions, retain forest carbon stocks and end gross deforestation by 2020."

REDD would be financed either by wealthy nations or by a carbon-trading mechanism -- a system in which each country would have an emissions ceiling, allowing those who undershoot it to sell their emissions credits to over-polluters.

Brazil wants rich nations to contribute euro20 billion (\$30 billion) in direct aid by 2015, and wants to limit to 10 percent the amount of credits that rich countries can get for investing in forests. Other tropical nations counter that carbon markets should play a bigger role.

About 32 million acres (13 million hectares) of forests are cut down each year -- an area about the size of England or New York State -- and the emissions generated are comparable to those of China

and the United States, according to the Eliasch Review. Deforestation for logging, cattle grazing and crops has made Indonesia and Brazil the world's third- and fourth-biggest emitters.

Reducing tropical deforestation is one of the most effective and inexpensive ways to reduce emissions, according to UCS. Two years ago, Norway announced it would commitment \$500 million annually to reduce deforestation at a climate summit in Bali, said Kevin Knobloch, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists. "Now the United States has shown that it is willing to play in the same league."

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