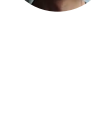


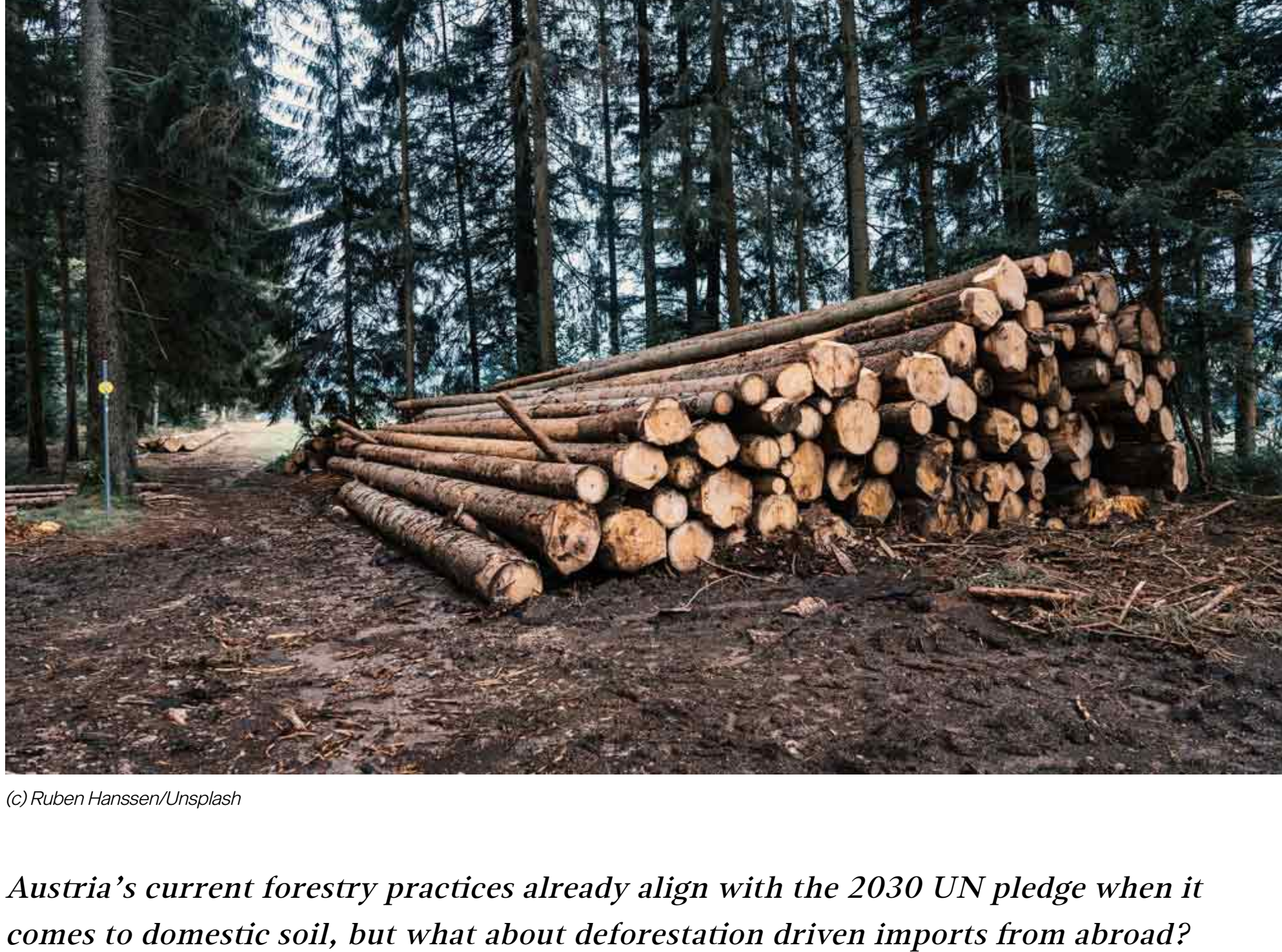
# At the UN Climate Summit, Austria Pledged to End Deforestation by 2030. What Does That Mean?



By Gregory Manni



November 5, 2021



(c) Ruben Hanssens/Unsplash

*Austria's current forestry practices already align with the 2030 UN pledge when it comes to domestic soil, but what about deforestation driven imports from abroad?*

Nearly half of Austria is covered in forest—the nation has a long history of caring for its woodlands, along with a rich cultural connection to them, from vast hiking trails to forest fairy tales to mountain huts showcasing foods gathered from among the trees, like “Eierschwammerl” (chanterelles) and “Zirbenschnaps” (pine schnaps). Now, Austrian leaders joined other countries at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) to cement its commitment to ending deforestation, both at home and abroad. But what does that mean in practice?

## Declaration on Forests and Land Use

Austria signed on to the agreement alongside more than 100 other countries on Nov. 1 in a pledge to end deforestation and improve sustainable land use by 2030. The most notable addition was Brazil, which has been [harshly criticized](#) in recent years by environmental advocates, international corporations and the US and France for allowing the Amazon rainforest to be razed in the expansion of its agricultural industry.

The [Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use](#) represents an effort to halt the destruction of forests, which absorb about one third of global greenhouse gas emissions and are thus an essential mitigator to climate change. The declaration will be [bolstered](#) by at least \$19 billion in public and private funds over the next four years to help developing nations restore and protect their forests, reduce forest fires, strengthen sustainable agricultural trade and support Indigenous communities' conservation of forested lands.

President Alexander Van der Bellen celebrated the move in a video on Twitter Tuesday: “Forests matter to Austria because they are an essential part of Austria's biodiversity, our history—of our sense of ‘home,’ in German ‘Heimat.’”



**A. Van der Bellen**  
@vanderbellen

#Austria's contribution to the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use at #COP26:

"Forests and their sustainable management are indispensable to our wellbeing and our future." 🌲

[ukcop26.org/glasgow-leader...](https://ukcop26.org/glasgow-leader...)

#TogetherForOurPlanet  
#ClimateAction



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## “Forest cities”

While Austrian residents don't quite live in “forest cities”—as one former US President [infamously claimed](#)—and likewise don't need to worry about “exploding trees” or “raking the forest floor,” Austria does have robust forest management measures in place that stretch back to the country's first Forest Act of 1852. According to the [Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism](#), Austrian forestry is characterized by a focus on sustainable use, balancing the many positive societal benefits that forested land provides, including timber, water, biodiversity protection and climate control.

In 2020, Parliament further invested in climate mitigation and resiliency by setting aside €350 million through the federal [Forest Fund Act](#), a package of measures aimed at improving restoration, reducing fires, compensating tree damage and supporting research.

Of the 3.9 million hectares of forest that cover Austria, 76% is used for commercial timber production, 19% is protected forest with partial commercial use and 2% is shrubby coppice forest, according to the [Austrian Forest Inventory](#). Over 80% of Austria's forests are privately owned.

Logging and timber production directly account for 3.2% of Austria's GDP, and the raw materials feed into many other [sectors](#) of the nation's economy. Although the industry cuts down several thousand hectares each year, Austria's forested area is increasing on the whole. The nation's forests [have grown](#) by about 3,600 hectares every year since 2010, due primarily to natural regeneration and expansion, as opposed to intentional planting.

## The hard part

Austria's highly regulated management practices mean the country is already more or less fulfilling one aspect of the UN pledge, domestic forestry. But the UN declaration also includes a commitment to “strengthen shared efforts” in ending trade-related deforestation abroad. Rainforests in particular are continually destroyed so that commodities like soy, palm oil and beef can be produced—and our appetite for these is more difficult to curb.

According to a [study](#) released in April by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the European Union ranked as the second largest driver of forest destruction from 2005 to 2017, and was responsible for “16% of global tropical deforestation in connection with international trade.”

In 2017, the EU indirectly caused 116 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by importing goods that drive deforestation in countries like Brazil, Indonesia and Paraguay.

Austria was responsible for the deforestation of 2,800 hectares of tropical forest every year between 2005 and 2017, according to the WWF study. That's approximately 36 square meters of tropical forest lost per Austrian resident over that time period.

## Empty promises?

This week's Glasgow declaration is not the first. In 2014, the EU joined the New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF), which called for all deforestation to be cut in half by 2020 and completely halted by 2030. Over 100 other governments and companies committed to the NYDF, which had more specific targets than the new agreement, but aimed to address many of the same problems.

The new declaration, like the NYDF, is voluntary, and [notably lacks](#) any enforcement mechanism to keep countries on track.

“While the Glasgow Declaration has an impressive range of signatories from across forest-rich countries, large consumer markets and financial centres, it nevertheless risks being a reiteration of previous failed commitments if it lacks teeth,” Jo Blackman, head of forests policy and advocacy at London-based Global Witness, told Thomson Reuters Foundation.

An October [progress report](#) by the NYDF Assessment Partners shows that some countries, including Brazil, Colombia, the DR Congo, Indonesia and Peru have not followed through on the deforestation pledges they made seven years ago. The EU has shown some progress in improving sustainable development goals, but in 2017, ranked third in a list of countries not reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to their full potential in the area of forest management after Brazil and China.

In a speech following the Glasgow declaration, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said, “European voters and consumers are making this increasingly clear to us: They no longer want to buy products that are responsible for deforestation or forest degradation. This is why we will soon propose a regulation to tackle EU-driven global deforestation.”

The EU Commission contributed €1 billion to the pledge.

The joint declaration came hours after Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg [addressed](#) world leaders at the UN climate conference, citing measures planned by the ÖVP-Green government that would achieve climate neutrality for the country by 2040—though there was also no legal backing to assure compliance with the target.

In related news, forest fires [continue to burn](#) in Lower Austria. And around the world.

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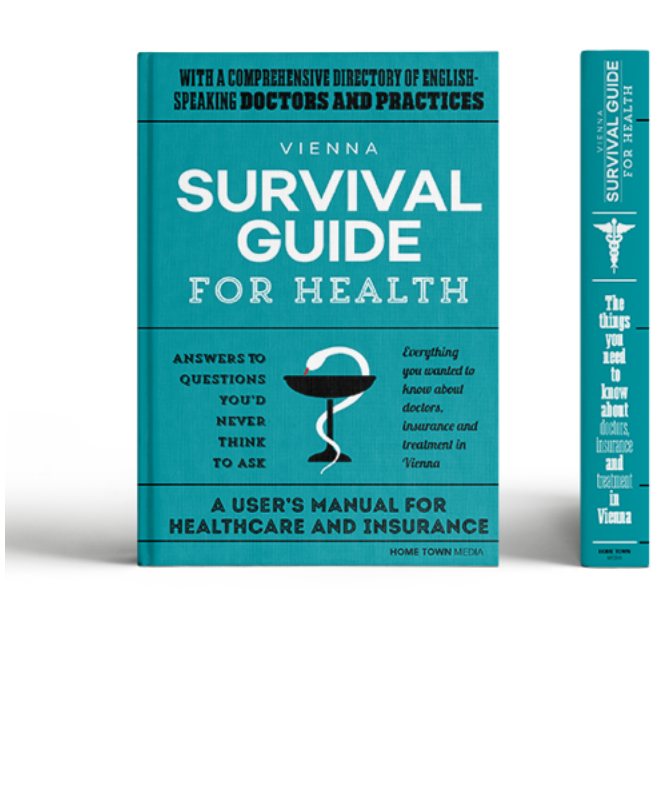
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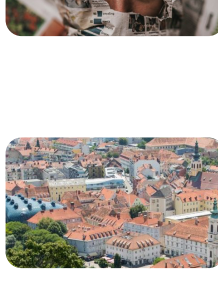



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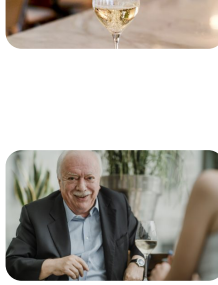
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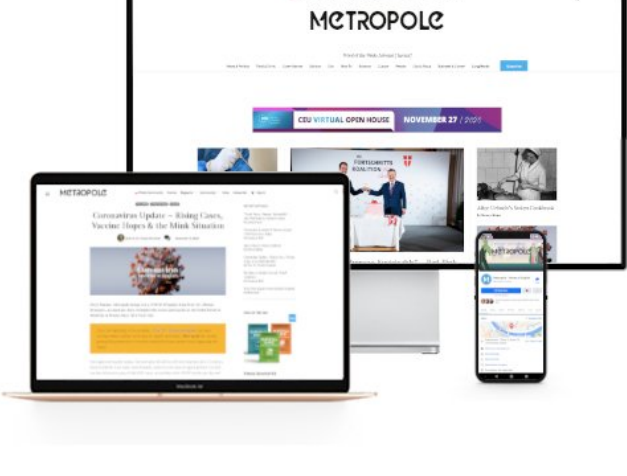
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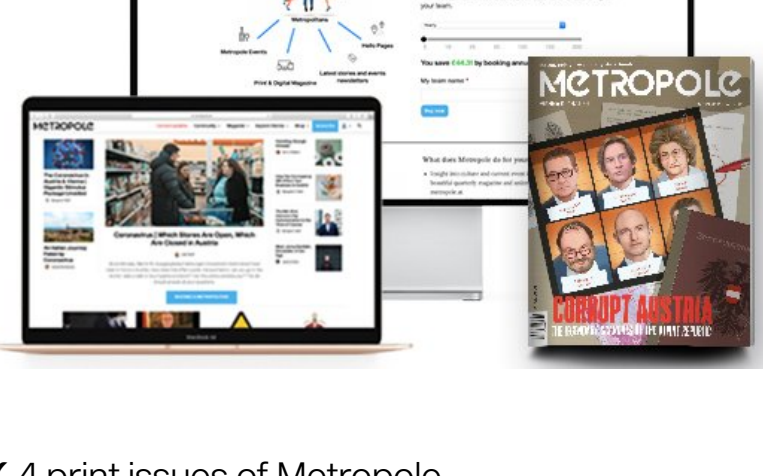
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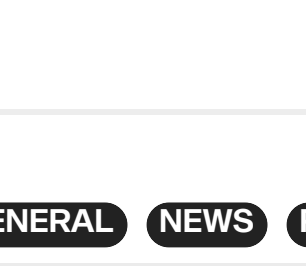
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**Gregory Manni**

Gregory Manni grew up between Detroit's suburban sprawl and Lake Michigan's shoreline, and has since become a disciple of ecology, poetry, and story. He moved to Austria in 2021 to see about a girl, and his current aim is beating back climate change through the act of writing. He tweets at @gregory\_manni.



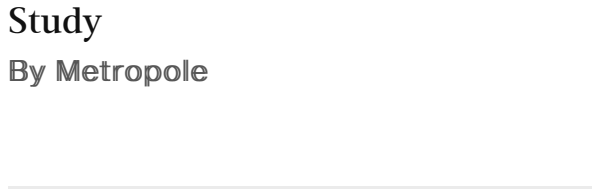
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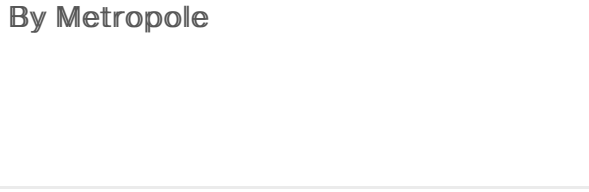
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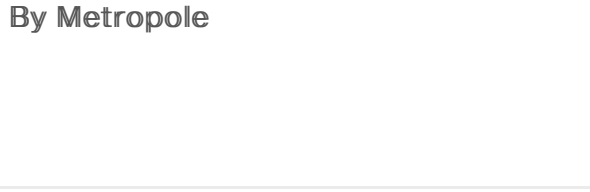
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