**mrd**
Mountain Research and Development

# Woodland Resurgence and Sustainability in Mountains—Patterns, Drivers, and Social-Ecological Consequences

**Deadlines:** Submit notice of intent by **31 January 2024** and full paper by **30 April 2024**

**Publication date:** February 2025 (Vol 45, No 1)

Due dates extended!

*With this focus issue, MRD aims to contribute to a better understanding of drivers, patterns, and consequences of woodland resurgence in mountain areas around the world. In particular, we are looking for contributions that examine the conditions and approaches under which woodland cover can contribute to greater socioeconomic or environmental sustainability.*

In recent decades, the resurgence of forests and other woodlands has become apparent in different regions of the world, challenging the perception of deforestation as being the dominant land cover change pattern. Woodland resurgence has been particularly pronounced in mountain areas, where conditions limit the scope for agricultural intensification and rural outmigration has favored land abandonment. In addition, many governmental and nongovernmental initiatives to promote forest management, protect biodiversity, and conserve ecosystem services have focused on mountain areas.

While forest resurgence and its implications for sustainability have been documented in different mountain systems of the world, the underlying causes and drivers as well as the social-ecological consequences are less known—and they are likely to differ from one region to another. In addition to typical forests, both natural and planted, other types of woodlands such as shrublands, open woodlands, or agroforestry systems are also expanding. However, as those woodlands feature fewer trees, they are less charismatic and more difficult to map via remote sensing than forests with megaflora. As a consequence, they have received substantially less research attention.

Changes in woodland cover are expected to have major impacts on social-ecological systems, affecting hydrological cycles, biomass sequestration, habitat quality for biodiversity, and a variety of ecosystem services for human societies, be it locally (timber, fuel, fiber, food, and medicinal plants), regionally (watershed protection), or globally (climate regulation). While mountains are a paradigmatic example of social-ecological heterogeneity, research on the social-ecological effects of woodland expansion often assumes relatively simple or common features, including that forests improve local livelihoods by providing resources or reducing soil erosion. Many of these assumptions may not hold up to local validation. For example, some forest types might increase erosion or have lower biodiversity compared to grasslands, and woodland expansion might cause or intensify conflicts between wildlife and local communities, or might increase fuel loads and connectivity, thereby promoting the spread and intensity of fires. Moreover, policy efforts and development initiatives aimed at woodland resurgence and sustainability are increasingly influenced by global politics promoting conservation and restoration or trade in environmental services and forest commodities. As a result, these efforts may fail to match local realities.

With this focus issue, MRD aims to contribute to a better understanding of drivers, patterns, and consequences of woodland resurgence in mountain areas around the world. Further, it aims to bring together analyses of conditions and approaches under which woodland cover can contribute to more sustainable socioeconomic or

environmental outcomes. We expect to compile a global collection of both basic and applied research that provides examples of novel conceptual and methodological approaches to the topic. We invite contributions, including comparative studies, that explore and address woodland resurgence issues in different mountain areas of the world. Contributions may include case studies of landscape or land cover change, analyses of forest composition trends, studies of social-ecological dynamics and impacts, as well as systematic assessments of policy and development approaches addressing woodland resurgence with the aim of promoting more sustainable development pathways. Specifically, we invite contributions from scholars and development specialists for MRD's 3 peer-reviewed sections:

[MountainDevelopment](#) (transformation knowledge): Papers should present insights and lessons learned from systematic assessments of innovative approaches or from action-oriented and transdisciplinary research. They should focus on how initiatives have helped to maximize the benefits and reduce the negative impacts of woodland resurgence. For example, papers might assess how different forms of land tenure, different economic, legal, or governance policies, and different development activities lead to differing woodland quality. They could consider how current global initiatives (eg promoting carbon sequestration or forest restoration) affect local woodlands and landscapes, or how local governance structures interact with national or regional initiatives to shape more sustainable structures and properties of local woodland landscapes in mountains with multiple benefits for people in mountains and lowlands.

[MountainResearch](#) (systems knowledge): Papers in this section should present empirical research, baseline studies, and meta-analyses focusing on woodland trends, drivers, and consequences at different spatial and temporal scales. Important topics include differences between planted and natural woodlands or between "new" woodlands (eg including biological invaders) and previously existing woodlands; drivers, both local and distant, of woodland cover change; and its socioeconomic and environmental impacts at different spatial and temporal scales. However, this list is by no means exhaustive. Place-based and context-specific studies of woodland properties and trends are most welcome. Conceptual frameworks such as "Forest Transition Theory" can provide valuable theoretical background.

[MountainAgenda](#) (target knowledge): Papers should propose agendas and priorities for future research, policies, or interventions, with a focus on favoring trends in woodland cover and characteristics that result in a better balance of costs and benefits for social-ecological systems in mountain areas. The agendas must be based on a sound state of the art that results either from a rigorous and in-depth literature review or from a systematic stakeholder process in the respective field.

## Submission details

- E-mail a short **notice of intent** (including a working title, 2–3 sentences on the content, and the journal section to which you intend to submit the paper) to mrd-journal.cde@unibe.ch **by 31 January 2024.**
- **Submit your full paper by 30 April 2024** using MRD's online submission platform.
- The issue is scheduled for completion in **February 2025**; articles will be published on a rolling basis, as soon as they are ready.
- Before submitting, please read our guidelines for authors at [https://www.mrd-journal.org/for-authors/](https://www.mrd-journal.org/for-authors/).
- For more information on the journal, see [https://www.mrd-journal.org/](https://www.mrd-journal.org/).
- As a not-for-profit open access journal, MRD charges authors a publication fee to offset part of its production costs: [https://www.mrd-journal.org/about/publication-fee-policy/](https://www.mrd-journal.org/about/publication-fee-policy/).

H. Ricardo Grau, João Carlos Azevedo, Sara Nowreen, and Dietrich Schmidt-Vogt, guest editors,
in collaboration with MRD's Editorial Office, November 2023