

An Assessment of the Factors Responsible for the Extent of Deforestation in Mapfungautsi Forest, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in Mapfungautsi forest to determine the extent of deforestation from the year 2000 (when no deforestation was detected by satellite imagery) up to 2020, as well as to gather perspectives from members of communities around the forest, on factors responsible for deforestation. A mixed method approach in the form of remote sensing techniques, questionnaires and key informant interviews was used to gather data. Findings indicated the extent of deforestation to be 4254ha (5%) and 10632ha (14%) after the first decade (2000 – 2010) and second decade (2000 – 2020) respectively. Of the cleared forest, the most affected vegetation cover type was the wooded grassland (84%) followed by bushland (31%) and wooded land (10%) after the 20-year period. Respondents identified political gain, expansion of jurisdictions of chiefs and population pressure as the social factors most responsible for accelerated deforestation in Mapfungautsi. Conversely, the identified economic factors mainly contributing to deforestation were agriculture, timber and firewood poaching. The study concluded that agriculture was the single most impactful factor responsible for deforestation as the main social factors (political gain and expansion of chieftaincy) worked in combination to invade and clear protected forests for settlement and agriculture (which is also the main livelihood source of local people). Consequently, any control measures to arrest deforestation in Mapfungautsi and any other protected forests for that matter, will require serious buy-in and will power from political and traditional leaders and other stakeholders like farmers and community members.

Keywords: Deforestation, Agriculture, Protected forest, Economic factors, Social factors.