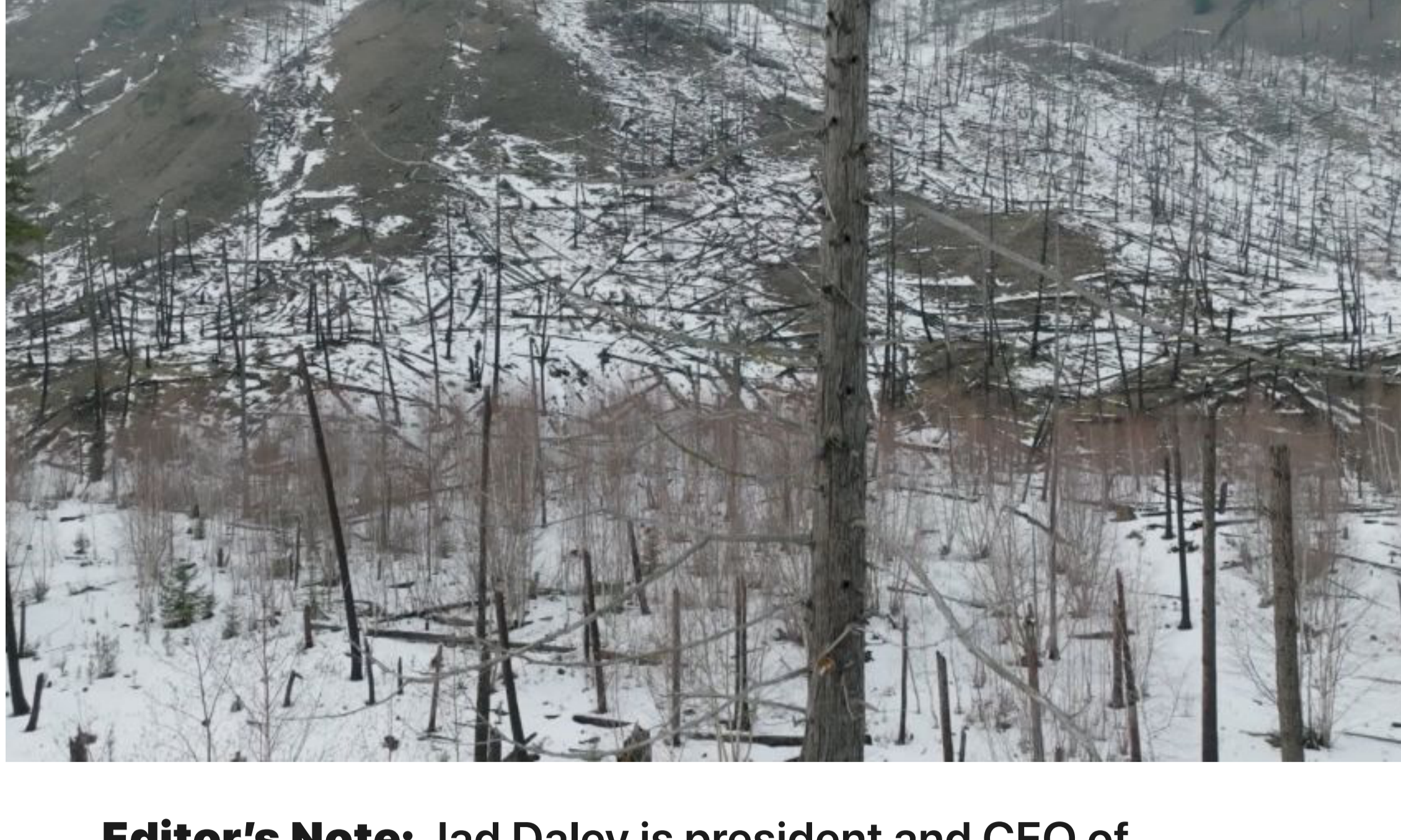


# Opinion: To help fight the climate crisis, we should plant more trees



**Editor's Note:** Jad Daley is president and CEO of American Forests and a leader of the U.S. chapter of 1t.org. Marc Benioff is the chair and co-CEO of Salesforce. The opinions expressed in this commentary are their own. Read [more opinion](#) on CNN.

When we joined with countries, companies and NGOs two years ago to launch the global partnership [1t.org](#), we knew it would not be a panacea for climate change. Leaders across the [forest-climate movement](#), including ourselves, have always made clear that the most important step we must take to fight climate change is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In recent months, despite the deadly fires, floods, heat and drought fueled by climate change, a steady stream of criticism has been aimed at the flourishing global movement to use trees as a response to the climate crisis.

Some critics have warned against pretending that planting trees is a permanent [climate solution](#), concerned that reliance on trees will slacken other climate efforts. Others have worried that planting the wrong trees will lead to forests that are less resilient and less [biologically diverse](#).

But we believe it would be a profound mistake to ignore or diminish the indispensable role that protecting and growing trees can play in addressing climate change. In the United States, for example, our forests captured approximately 13% of gross US [greenhouse gas emissions](#) in 2020. In addition to protecting our existing forests, there are millions of [acres](#) across America where we can plant and grow more trees, such as reforesting burned areas and planting trees in urban areas. And we know that our efforts must lead to biologically diverse forests, and only in ecosystems where trees belong. That's why we and our partners adhere to best practices such as the "[10 golden rules](#)" for restoring forests.

The private sector has a particularly large role to play here. Companies can bring invaluable resources, skills and technologies to bear in a responsible and science-based manner, for both the forest movement and the broader fight against the climate crisis.

Here's how:

## Be transparent

There must be zero tolerance for "greenwashing," where a company might exaggerate or falsify the actual climate change impact of its investment in natural climate solutions. Businesses must practice transparency through rigorous public reporting, and by using technologies that enable stakeholders to see exactly what their investments are accomplishing. Stakeholders' ability to see and verify climate investments can hold businesses accountable and push them to invest in truly rigorous, credible projects.

## Go to net zero

Investing in nature-based solutions like trees cannot be an excuse for companies to continue emitting dangerous levels of greenhouse gasses. Companies that commit to net zero should pair their investments in carbon removal efforts, such as reforestation, with changes to their operations that will reduce actual emissions.

[Opinion: In 1991, tiny Vanuatu already nailed the climate conversation](#)

[Salesforce](#), for example, is supporting the conservation, restoration and growth of 100 million trees by 2030, while prioritizing emissions reductions and reaching 100% renewable energy for its global operations last year. For any emissions that remain after that, Salesforce is using carbon credits to have net zero residual emissions today. And [PepsiCo](#) is adopting more energy-efficient manufacturing processes and shifting to [renewable electricity](#), while also investing in natural climate solutions such as forest conservation and restoration.

## Invest in innovation

Companies can go beyond just paying for tree seedlings to help deliver forest-climate solutions with rigor and innovation. They should look at ways they can contribute from their unique areas of expertise. Technology companies, for instance, can donate products and pro-bono services to help partner organizations better utilize forest and climate data. Companies should also use their direct financial contributions to help partners with fewer resources develop and execute projects. This includes partner expenses for things like designing climate-resilient plantings and training workers to implement these cutting-edge forestry approaches.

We welcome the ongoing debate about the best way to achieve our climate goals. But as we move forward, let's not dismiss climate solutions – including natural ones, like trees. That's how we can sustain the climate momentum we have worked for so many decades to build, engage more people and communities in this urgent work and spare the world the worst effects of climate change. That can't be just the work of governments and environmentalists. It has to be the business of business.