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In South Mexico, a Forest and Culture Die

To the Editor:

"Loss of Tropical Forests Is Found Much Worse Than Was Thought" (front page, June 8). We would like to bring to your attention the destruction of a rain forest much closer to the border of the United States. The Major Peten, the forested areas of southern Mexico, the Peten in Guatemala and the northern portion of Belize, constitutes the second largest tropical forest area in the Americas. At the present rate of destruction, these forests will disappear in 70 to 75 years. The loss would seriously diminish the genetic pool and have a dramatic impact on natural productivity throughout the hemisphere.

Equally tragic is the impact of increased deforestation on the indigenous peoples of the rain forest. The Major Peten, for example, has been home to the Maya culture for more than 3,500 years. As well as deforestation, this region is subject to destruction and suffering from the civil war raging in Guatemala. This rapid deforestation will mean the end of a way of life for such rain forest cultures as the Mayan Lacandon of southernmost Mexico.

We should remember the words of "Our Common Future," a 1987 report



Thomas Kerr

of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development: "The starting point for a just and humane policy is the recognition and protection of rights" — of indigenous peoples — "to land and the other resources that sustain their way of life."

IGNACIO MARCH, KURT RUSSO

Bellingham, Wash., June 13, 1990

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