

'Recognizing Contemporary Roles of Swidden Agriculture in Transforming Landscapes of Southeast Asia ' by Alan D. Ziegler et al. Conservation Biology

In this paper Alan Ziegler (Geography) and his co-authors re-examine the practice and consequences of 'slash-and-burn agriculture' to reveal that the practice may not be so pernicious as is popularly perceived.

The paper is a synthesis of a body of work looking at the consequences of the demise in swidden agriculture systems in Southeast Asia. Rapid transitions in land use in humid tropical uplands of Southeast Asia often involve replacement of swidden agriculture, also known as slash-and-burn or shifting cultivation. Swiddening was once the dominant agricultural system on sloping forested lands in the region, but it is now generally denounced by governments, who associate it with deforestation and degradation of soil and water resources. Land uses that are replacing swidden agriculture include extensive, long-term cultivation of annual crops, cultivation of monoculture tree plantations (particularly rubber and oil palm), cultivation of horticultural plants in greenhouses, and livestock grazing. These commercial systems are often favored by antagonists of swiddening and agriculture entrepreneurs, who claim these agricultural practices are more productive and cause fewer environmental problems. However after synthesizing decades of swidden research, including their own work throughout SE Asia, the authors show that in some situations swiddening is still a productive agricultural system that has a role in the preservation of species diversity, soil and water conservation, and climate-change mitigation.

Ziegler A.D, J.M. Fox, E.L. Webb, C. Padoch, S.J. Leisz, R.A. Cramb, O. Merts, T. B. Bruun, and Tran D.V. (2011) Recognizing Contemporary Roles of Swidden Agriculture in Transforming Landscapes of Southeast Asia *Conservation Biology* 25:4 846–848.