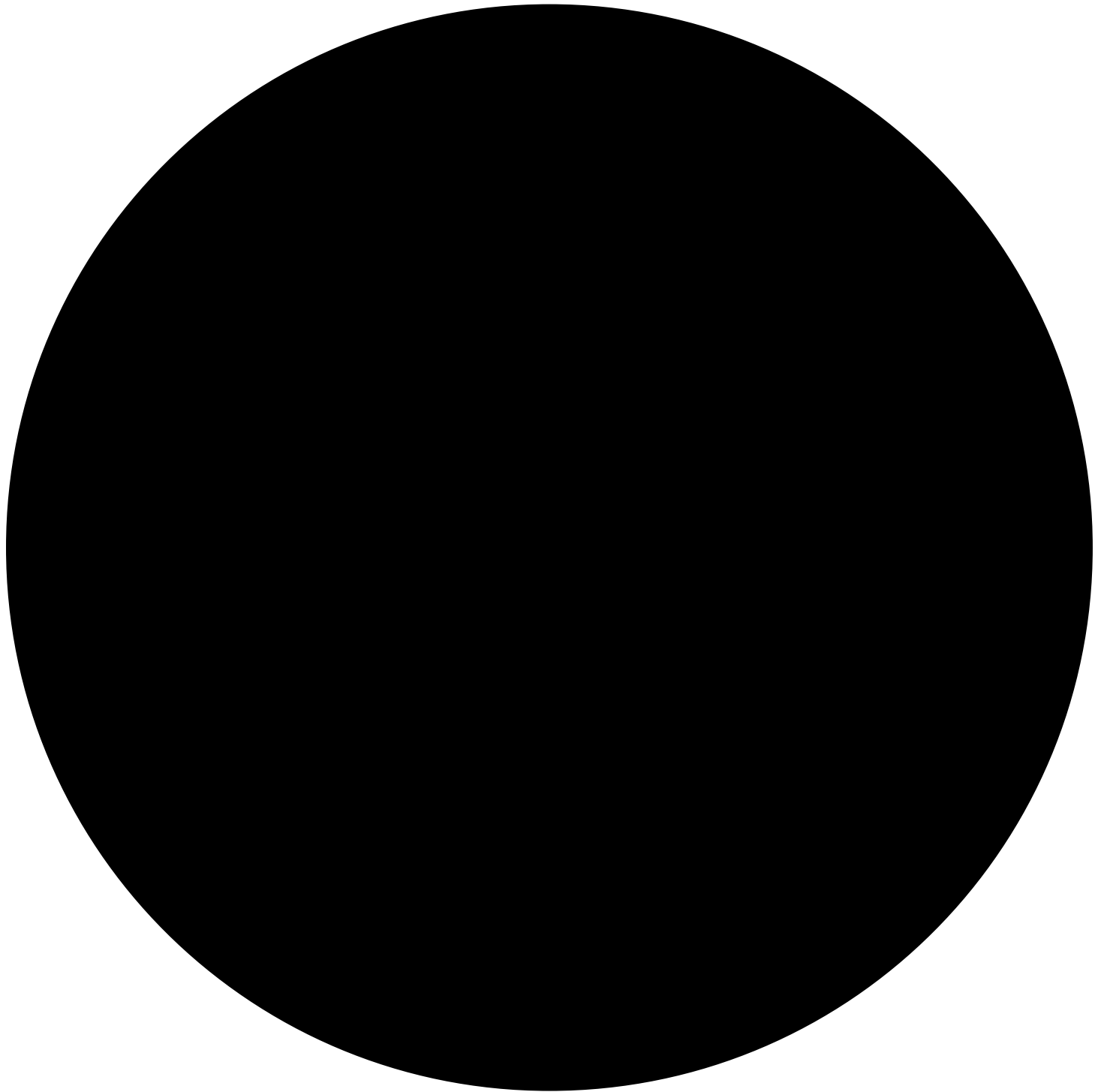


THE GREAT GREEN WALL OF CHINA: STOPPING THE ADVANCE OF THE GOBI DESERT

Posted on 25/05/2015 by Naider



In recent years, sandstorms in the Gobi have become more frequent and end up affecting the inhabitants of nearby cities, causing respiratory problems (due to [yellow dust](#)), decreasing visibility on the streets and damaging arable areas.

Despite the fact that in the last decade millions of forest hectares have disappeared all over the world, today there are more trees and vegetation on the planet than there were in 2003. One of the great causes of this positive news: "The Great Green Wall" of China, a massive project launched in 1978, which aims to afforest, until 2074, an extension of 4480 km to stop the advance of the [Gobi Desert](#), and reduce the problems named in the introduction.

Due to its length, it is already being dubbed by some as *"the largest ecological engineering feat in the world"* and is being carried out on the north and northwest side of the country. The green belt, which has a width that will vary in certain sectors between 236 and 537 meters, will cover 42 percent of the national territory, according to [data](#) from the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#).

Over the past decades, more than 66 billion trees have been planted in North China. By 2050, the project is expected to have spanned 2,800 miles. In theory, it's curbing the effects of the desert,

though some critics say the plan may not be working. Still, what is certain is that trees are absorbing carbon, and without them, climate change would likely spread more rapidly.

Using a new technique for analyzing satellite photos, researchers have recently observed and analyzed exactly how vast numbers of trees and plants around the world have evolved over the past two decades. China is the only country to intentionally increase vegetation to such a massive level. In other countries, there has also been a growth of vegetation, but for natural reasons, without government intervention, such as the cases of Australia and Africa due to increased rainfall, or the case of Russia, due to farms. abandoned turned into forests.

The amount of carbon stored in trees and plants in China has increased by about 0.7 trillion tons since 2003, largely thanks to the Great Green Wall (forests throughout the rest of the country have been declining). However, the researchers point out that carbon emissions, both in China and elsewhere, have skyrocketed.

"During the same time, carbon emissions into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels and the production of cement increased by about 60 trillion tons," says [Yi Liu](#), lead author of the latest paper on the research, and a scientist at [Center of Excellence for Climate System Science at the University of New South Wales](#) in Australia. "Tree planting projects can help absorb some carbon from the atmosphere, but this amount is certainly tiny compared to carbon emissions."

"Vegetation has improved and sandstorms have decreased significantly in the Great Green Wall region, compared to other areas," he told Britain's New Scientist, [Minghong Tan](#), from the [Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research of China](#) in Beijing. According to the State Forestry Administration of China, the forest cover in the threatened areas increased from 5.05% in 1977 to 12.4% at the end of 2012.

Negative reviews

Critics of the project argue that tree plantations in arid areas can exacerbate desertification by depleting groundwater and killing the grasses that bind the soil together. This is what Zhao Wenju, a farmer from the Zhangjia village, near Beijing, denounces, who told The Economist that 10 years ago he could draw water from a nine-meter-deep well, but now the water has withdrawn some 60 meters below the ground level. Hou Yuanzhao of the Chinese Academy of Forestry is concerned that the dying poplars in this area, which is less dry than many others in the project, are the start of widespread wilting.

There are no comments yet.