

Forest Facts: Telling the Truth About the Forest Products Industry and the Environment

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Have you ever been told that the forest products industry is destroying America's environment?

Rumors and myths about the affect the forest products industry in the United States has on forests and the environment abound. These "facts" that "everyone knows" get tossed around with no idea as to where they originated. Though you know most of them are not true, do you know what is true? Just as importantly, do you know what benefits the American forest products industry brings to the environment?

Here are a few facts that are important to any conversation on the subject. The next time you are asked these questions, you'll know the answer and have the facts to back it up.

The source for each fact is cited with a reference number after each fact.

Aren't we running out of forests?

Contrary to popular belief, forests in the United States are not disappearing. In fact, the amount of forest land in the U.S. has remained rather steady for the last 100 years. What's more, there are many safeguards in place to ensure that U.S. forests will never disappear because of logging.

- There are 751 million acres of forests in the U.S. – roughly one third of its total land area (1).
- Forest area has been relatively stable since 1910 (7).
- Over 75 million acres of forests are reserved for non-timber use, such as parks and wilderness areas (7).
- The average volume of growing timber per acre is rising. In some areas, the volume per acre is nearly double what it was 50 years ago (7).
- The net growth of timber has consistently exceeded removal over the past 50 years (7).

- Almost 50% of timber in the U.S. is over 50 years old; 5% is more than 175 years old (7).
- Over 25% of private forestlands in the U.S. are certified to sustainable forestry management certification systems, compared to just 10% worldwide (1).
- Forest planting in the U.S. currently averages about 1.8 million acres per year (7).
- Private U.S. landowners plant around 4 million trees every day, five trees each year for every person in America (1).
- Timber harvests on U.S. forests are relatively low, below 2% of standing inventory (10).
- Forests and forest products in the U.S. store enough carbon each year to offset about 10% of the country's CO2 emissions (1).

Doesn't logging destroy the forest?

U.S. forests are among the best managed forests in the world. Proper and complete forest management is the best way to ensure that forests continue to thrive and provide habitats for numerous plant and animal species. What many people do not realize is that harvesting is part of good forest management.

- Deforestation is not a single event, such as logging. It is the continuous process of preventing forests from growing back by human intervention such as buildings, pavement and agriculture (5).
- An ugly looking clearcut is not the same as permanent destruction of the environment. The stumps and broken wood are all organic and will grow back (5).
- As long as land is left alone after a forest is destroyed, the forest will recover and all species that were in it will return (5).
- Within one or two years of harvesting, clearcuts generally have higher biodiversity than meadows (5).
- Human intervention can actually speed the recovery of an ecosystem after a natural disaster (5).
- Clearcutting is most prevalent in areas with tree species that need open sunlight to regenerate (7).

- Excess biofuels left in overgrown forests actually reduce forest health and increase the risk of wildfires (4).

- The industry spends more than \$1 billion per year on environmental improvements and \$2.9 billion on pollution control (9).

Haven't Entire Species Gone Extinct Because of Logging?

One of the most common emotional arguments against logging is making people think that animals everywhere are losing their home because of proper forest management. The reality is that forest management has actually increased the population of some species.

- There is no list of species that have become extinct due to logging (5).

- Logging does not destroy animal and plant species. The white-tailed deer population has grown over the last 30 years from 4.5 million to more than 16 million and the pronghorn antelope that was near extinction now has a population over 1 million, as a result of careful forest management (2).

Can't We Use Something Besides Wood?

Wood is used for many things in everyday life. Some of the most common uses are, of course, paper products, energy, buildings and furniture. Wood does not stop serving the environment when it is cut. One of the best advantages of wood products is that the carbon absorbed by the tree is stored for the life of the product. Also, unlike the other major construction materials, it does not take massive amounts of energy to manufacture.

- Wood represents 47% of all raw material used in the United States. But the energy used to produce wood products is just 4% of the energy used to make all manufactured materials (6).

- Around 85 million tons of paper and paperboard are used in the U.S. each year (8).

- It takes 13,127 board-feet of framing lumber to build a 2,085 square foot home (2).

- All wood used in home construction stores carbon dioxide. This includes doors, flooring, framing, and furniture (6).

- The policy of using less wood is anti-environmental (5).

- Using wood reduces the need to burn fossil fuels. Compared to other materials, wood requires less energy to extract, process, transport, construct and maintain over time (3).

- Using woody biomass to produce energy is a carbon neutral process. It only releases the amount of carbon that the tree absorbed from the atmosphere during its lifetime (4).

What About Green Energy?

With all the recent focus on climate change, sustainable energy solutions and U.S. energy security, the forest products industry stands to play a key role in solving these energy-related concerns. Wood biomass is a renewable, abundant, energy source that can be widely used for producing heat, power and even fuel.

- The forest products industry is the largest producer of renewable biomass energy in the country, generating 77% of the nation's industrial biomass energy. Additionally, the renewable energy generated by the forest products industry exceeds all of the nation's solar, wind and geothermal energy generation combined (1).

- Co-generation technology is widely recognized as the most efficient method for producing electricity, and co-generation power plants are often 50 to 70% more efficient than single-generation facilities. The forest products industry is a leader in the use of co-generation technology and is second only to the chemical industry in its use (1).

- On average, paper and wood products mills generate 65% of their energy needs from renewable biomass (1)

- A wood biofuels industry could revitalize rural communities hurt by declines in timber harvesting (10).

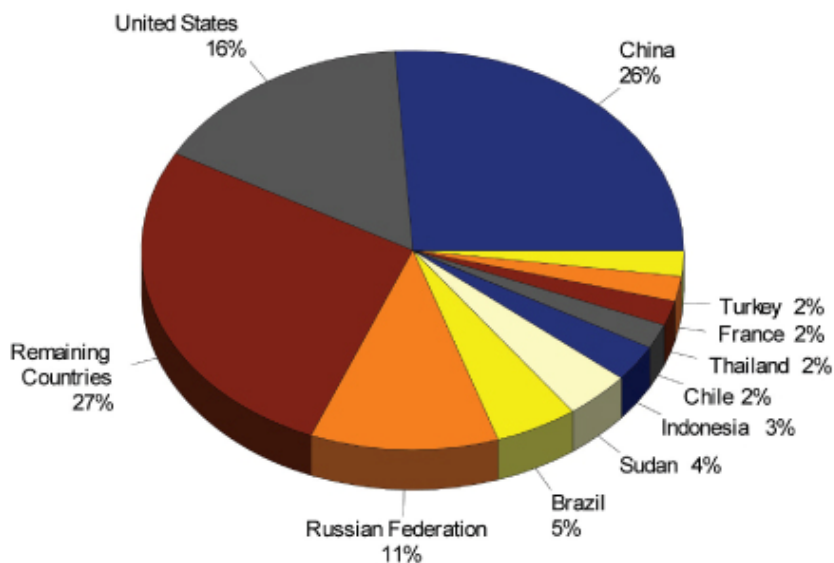
Because of the careful forest management that is in place today, the forests of the United States are growing and thriving. Though the "horror" stories continue to swirl, the fact is that the forest products industry has more of an interest in maintaining a healthy forest than anyone else. After all, our livelihood depends on it.

Fact Sources

- 1. American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA)*
- 2. Temperate Forest Foundation*
- 3. Wood Promotion Network*

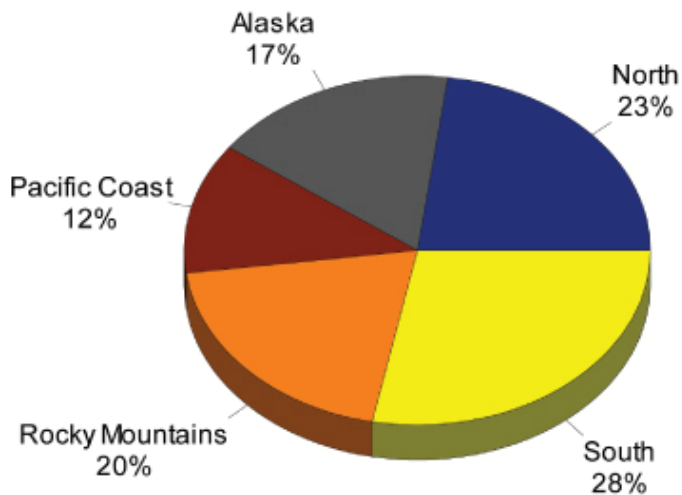
4. *Forest Foundation*
5. *Greenspirit*
6. *National Hardwood Lumber Association*
7. *USDA Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis National Program*
8. *Environmental Protection Agency*
9. *U.S. Department of Energy*
10. *Society of American Foresters*

Countries with the Largest Area of Productive Forest Plantations 2005



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization. 2005. *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2005. Progress Towards Sustainable Forest Management. Rom.*

Forestland Distribution in the United States 2005



Source: USDA Forest Service, *Forest Inventory Analysis Program. 2006.*