A recent Canadian consumer survey carried out by Toluna and Two Sides North America showed that there are still significant gaps between consumer perceptions and actual fact when it comes to environmental topics such as forestry and recycling. However, many consumers recognized the sustainable attributes of paper and ranked it as the second most environmentally friendly material (behind wood) among eight commonly used products and materials. Plastic was considered to be the least environmentally friendly material, followed closely by electronic devices.¹

**SUMMARY**

Deforestation is not a cause of forest loss in Canada. Deforestation occurs only when forests are permanently removed so the land can be used for something else. Harvesting, forest fires and insect infestations do not constitute deforestation, since the affected areas will grow back. According to laws, regulations and policies in place across Canada, all areas harvested on public land must be reforested, either by replanting or through natural regeneration. About 94% of Canada’s forests are on public land.²

Nearly half of Canada’s forests are certified to an independent sustainable forest management standard such as the Forest Stewardship Council or the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.³

Canada’s renewable forests play an essential role - they absorb tremendous amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂), and by doing so help regulate the world’s climate systems for the benefit of the entire planet. This critical role of storing carbon continues in the increasing array of products made from wood fiber and is further prolonged through the recovery and recycling of forest products, including paper.⁴

Canada is a world leader in paper and cardboard recycling.⁵

Forests are sustainably managed in Canada so that they can continue to provide social and cultural benefits and ecosystem services, while also providing wood-based products. In 2019, the forest sector provided 205,000 jobs for Canadians, including about 12,000 jobs for indigenous people, and was the primary source of economic well-being for 300 Canadian communities. The forest sector contributed about $23.7 billion to Canada’s gross domestic product in 2019.⁶

**The State of Canada’s Forests**

Canada is home to 9% of the world’s forests, behind only Russia (20%) and Brazil (12%). Canada’s total forest area was quite stable between 1990 and 2020 at around 347 million hectares (857 million acres).⁷

Forests dominate many Canadian landscapes, but cover only 38% of Canada’s land area. Although 77% of Canada’s forests are found in the boreal zone, 37% of the country’s wood volume is found in its temperate forests.⁶

**The global distribution of forests showing the 10 countries with the largest forest area, 2020 (million hectares and % of world’s forests).**

- 1375 ha (34%) Russian Federation
- 815 ha (20%) Brazil
- 497 ha (12%) China
- 310 ha (8%) United States of America
- 220 ha (5%) India
- 126 ha (3%) Democratic Republic of the Congo
- 134 ha (3%) Australia
- 92 ha (2%) Indonesia
- 72 ha (2%) Peru
- 347 ha (9%) Canada

Between 1990 and 2018, deforestation occurred on less than 0.5% of Canada's forest land as the conversion of forest land to agriculture and hydroelectric land uses continued to decline. Canada's overall deforestation rate is expected to decline further over time.  

Deforestation is defined by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as the conversion of forest to other land uses whether human-induced or not. The definition specifically excludes areas where trees have been removed as a result of harvesting or logging and where the forest is expected to regenerate naturally or with the aid of silvicultural [sustainable forest management] measures.  

Insects, disease, wildfires and drought affect more than 18 million hectares of forests in Canada annually. By killing trees, natural disturbances increase light penetration and disturb the soil to varying degrees, depending on the type of disturbance and its severity. These changes, in turn, allow new trees to sprout, grow and start a new forest succession – how whole forests grow back.  

The area of forest harvested each year is less than half of one percent of Canada's 347 million hectares forest land, significantly smaller than the areas affected and burned by fires each year.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Causes of Forest Disturbance in Canada</th>
<th>Area (hectares)</th>
<th>% of Forest Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area affected by insects (2018)</td>
<td>16,391,000</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area impacted by fire (2019)</td>
<td>1,843,000</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area harvested (2018)</td>
<td>748,000</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area deforested (2018)</td>
<td>34,000</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2018, at least 427 million seedlings were planted on 350,000 hectares of provincial forest lands in Canada.  

**Forest Management and Certification**

At the end of 2019, Canada had over 168 million hectares of independently certified forest land (to either CSA®, SFI® or FSC®). Nearly half of Canada's forests are certified and 37% of all certified forests worldwide are in Canada, the largest area of any country.  

Monitoring the area of forest harvested each year ensures that the level of industrial activity in Canada's forests is sustainable over the long term. In 2018, an estimated 748,000 hectares of forest were harvested. This is a 3.9% decrease from 2017 levels when 778,000 hectares were harvested and well below the average area of 1 million hectares harvested each year during the peak period of 1995 to 2005. This decline was largely due to a decrease in the area of provincial Crown forests harvested in British Columbia as forestry operations were curtailed by wildfires.  

**Of Canada's 347 million hectares of forest land, more than 200 million hectares are managed with a long-term management plan of 10 years or longer. This is an increase of 8% since 1990. Management plans ensure that public forests are managed sustainably. The development of a plan follows a strict process with input from industry, government, First Nations, the public and other stakeholders.**

**Recycling**

Canada recycles almost 70% of its paper and cardboard, making it among the top paper recycling countries in the world.  

Of the total amount of waste diverted from the landfill through recycling or composting (9.3 million tons) in 2016 in Canada, the majority was paper (39%) and organic materials (28%) and less than 5% was plastic.
Environmental Performance and Goals

The forest sector’s ability to generate its own electricity, largely from bioenergy, has reduced its reliance on fossil fuels. Between 2007 and 2017, the forest sector reduced energy use by 24% and total fossil GHG emissions (direct emissions plus indirect emissions from purchased electricity) by 40%.12

The Canadian forest industry is pledging to remove 30 megatons of CO₂ from the atmosphere per year by 2030 – more than 13% of the Canadian government’s emissions target.13

Human activities in Canada’s managed forests accounted for removals of about 8 million tons of CO₂e in 2018, while large-scale natural disturbances accounted for emissions of about 251 million tons of CO₂e, resulting in net emissions of 243 million tons CO₂e. Forest lands managed for timber production, and the emissions from harvested wood products harvested from these lands, continue to be an ongoing sink of carbon, removing 8 million tons of CO₂e from the atmosphere in 2018. A “carbon sink” removes and stores carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.14

Canada’s Pulp and Paper Effluent Regulations govern the discharge of harmful substances from pulp and paper mills into water frequented by fish. Since 1985, the quality of pulp and paper effluent (wastewater) released directly to the environment, as set out in the regulations, has improved considerably. Effluent tests met regulatory standards 25% of the time in 1985 and 98.3% of the time in 2018. Tests for biochemical oxygen demand and total suspended solids met regulatory standards 68% and 60% of the time, respectively, in 1985. Both tests met the standards 99.9% of the time in 2018.15

Sources

1. Toluna and Two Sides North America, 2019
2. Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), 2020
3. NRCan, 2019
4. Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC), 2016
5. FPAC, 2020
6. NRCan, 2020
7. UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2020
8. UN FAO, 2020
9. NRCan, 2020
10. FPAC, 2020
11. NRCan, 2020
12. NRCan, 2020
13. FPAC, 2020
14. NRCan, 2020
15. NRCan, 2020

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