Do You Know the Facts About Trees and Paper?

There's no shortage of claims about paper and forest loss — but not all of them are true. Let's break down the most common myths and explore the facts about trees, forests, and responsible paper production.

The Myth: The production and use of paper is destroying U.S. forests.

The Fact: U.S. forests are a renewable natural resource that is continuously replenished through sustainable forest management and natural regeneration.

Paper's Naturally Sustainable Life Cycle

Paper is one of the few products on earth that already has an environmentally sustainable, circular life cycle. It is made from a renewable natural resource – trees that are purpose-grown, harvested and regrown in sustainably managed forests. It is manufactured using mostly renewable, carbon-neutral bioenergy in a process that uses a lot of water but consumes very little. And paper products are recycled more than any other material.

The State of U.S. Forests

Sustainable forest management is a dynamic and evolving concept that aims to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests for the benefit of present and future generations.[1]

Sustainable forestry practices integrate management of the entire forest ecosystem, including trees and other plants, wildlife and habitat, soil and water. Sustainable forestry also helps protect forests from wildfire, pests and diseases, and preserves forests that are unique or special. Strong market demand for sustainably sourced paper products provides a powerful financial incentive for landowners to continue managing their land responsibly and keeping it forested, rather than converting or selling it for non-forest uses.

U.S. forests are a renewable natural resource and are not shrinking. Net forest area in the United States increased by approximately **10 million acres between 2000 and 2025**.[2] This is an area equivalent to approximately 1,100 NFL football fields every day.

U.S. forestland totals around **766 million acres, supports 356 billion trees, and covers 1/3 of the U.S**. Over the past 100 years, while the U.S. human population has nearly tripled, the total forest area has remained relatively stable.[3]

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While **67% of U.S. forestland is legally available for harvesting, tree cutting and removal occur on less than 2% of forestland each year**. This contrasts with nearly 3% disturbed annually by natural events like insects, disease, and fire.[4]

Deforestation

Deforestation is the permanent conversion of forest to other land uses, including urban development (the leading cause in the United States), agriculture, pastures, water reservoirs and mining. The definition of deforestation specifically excludes areas where the trees have been harvested or logged, and where the forest will regenerate naturally or with the aid of sustainable forestry measures.[5]

Carbon Sequestration

Sustainable forestry practices, such as those implemented by the U.S. paper industry, can increase forests' capacity to sequester atmospheric carbon while enhancing other ecosystem services, such as improved soil and water quality. Planting new trees and improving forest health through thinning and prescribed burning are among the ways to increase long-term forest carbon. The perpetual cycle of harvesting and regenerating forests can also result in net carbon sequestration in wood products and new forest growth.[6]

Forest Ownership

More than half **(60%) of the forestland in the U.S. is privately owned and managed**. Approximately 11 million families, individuals, trusts, and estates, collectively referred to as family forest owners, control 37% of private forestland, more than any other group.[7]

About **88% of wood harvested in the U.S. comes from these private forests**, which provide most of the wood for domestically produced wood and paper products.[8] The demand for sustainably sourced paper products provides a powerful economic incentive for landowners to keep their land forested and sustainably managed.

Timber sales and other removals of forest products support agency strategic objectives to foster resilient, adaptive ecosystems to mitigate wildfire risk and climate change, produce carbon-storing sustainable materials, and strengthen communities.[9]

Forest Certification

Forest certification is a voluntary process whereby an independent third party assesses the quality of forest management and production against a set of requirements (standards) predetermined by a public or private certification organization. Certification standards in the United States include those of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®), the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®), the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), and the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). Forest certification and associated labeling inform consumers about the sustainability of the forests from which wood and other forest products are produced.[10]

Most forest management certification standards address a wide range of economic, social, environmental and technical aspects of forest management, including the well-being of workers and families living in and around the forest area subject to certification.[10]

Approximately **11% of the world's forestland is certified – about 1 billion acres (434 million hectares)**. This is a net-certified area, owing to the fact that some forest land is certified to more than one standard. The majority of certified forest area is in North America and Europe.[11]

Sources

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