



MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT FORESTS

Mark Twain once said
that a rumor can race around the world while
the truth is just putting its shoes on.
The same can be said about the myths surrounding U.S. forestry.
Too often they are mistaken for the truth
and discourage common sense solutions to forest controversies.
Here are some of the more common myths,
and the facts that dispel them:

Myth: We're running out of trees.

Fact: We have more trees today than we had in 1970, on the first Earth Day --and even more than we had 70 years ago. In the middle of the last century, for example, Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut were about 35% forested; today they are 59%.

Myth: We're cutting more trees than we're growing for future generations.

Fact: Forest growth has exceeded harvests since the 1940s.

Myth: We're running out of old growth trees in our ancient forests.

Fact: In the U.S. today there are 13.2 million acres of old growth , i.e. large trees 200 years of age or older. The vast majority of these trees--comprising an area the size of New Jersey and Massachusetts combined--will remain in their natural condition and will never be harvested due to legal and regulatory prohibitions on logging, road building and even fire fighting.

Myth: We're running out of wilderness.

Fact: The U.S. has permanently protected 104 million acres of land, much of it forested, in the wilderness Preservation System. It's a part of a larger total of 270 million acres that is off limits to all commercial activity, including logging, mining and grazing.

Myth: Clearcutting, the practice of harvesting most trees in a given area, destroys the forest.

Fact: Clearcutting is a sound practice that benefits future forests. By mimicking natural wildfires, clearcutting is widely recognized by forest scientists and even by some conservation groups (such as American Forests and the Society of American Foresters) as an ecologically sound technique for reforesting many softwood species. That's because conifer seedlings typically require sunlight from an open canopy and cannot survive in shade.

Myth: A natural forest supports more ecological diversity than a managed forest.

Fact: Managed forests, even those with some clearcutting, often produce more biodiversity than completely natural forests, according to U.S. Forest Service studies in the Lake States and New England. Even tree farm plantations contain a rich mosaic of plant and animal life.

Myth: Forest management harms fragile wetlands.

Fact: In fact, good forest management is the environmentally preferred land use for wetlands, as confirmed by the National Wetlands Policy Forum sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Myth: Forest management harms wildlife.

Fact: Forest management helps wildlife. Forest management creates openings that stimulate the growth of food sources - which is the prime reason why forest species such as elk, deer, turkey and antelope are far more plentiful today than earlier in the century.

Myth: More paper recycling will eliminate the use of "virgin" wood from harvested trees.

Fact: Even if we could recycle 100% of our used paper, we would still need "virgin" fiber to replace worn-out recycled fiber and meet the increasing demand for paper products. Recycling extends the use of virgin fiber, but it will not replace it. Even so, today well over half of all fiber used in paper products comes from recycled paper and from wood waste from sawmills.

Source : American Forest & Paper Association

Copyright © 1998 Mead Corporation. All rights reserved worldwide.