



ARE MARKETS REALLY HELPING FORESTS?



OUR FORESTS. OUR STRENGTH.

Stand4Forests Report Series

A common misconception in land use and forestry is the saying, “healthy markets keep forests healthy.”

Versions of this statement imply, paradoxically, that cutting trees down somehow keeps forests on the landscape. However, the metrics used by the forest products industry do not assess forest health, but instead only the ability of forests to provide a steady supply of wood to commercial markets. The simple truth is that our forests in the US South are suffering under a logging regime more frequent and widespread than what occurs almost anywhere else in the world.

Here’s the truth of the matter:

- Natural, healthy forests are declining in the US South.
- The constant expansion of wood product markets has come at the expense of the ecological health of our forests, degrading critical life-supporting functions across a large landscape.
- Natural forests are being replaced with plantations which hold little value for ecosystem services, ecological function, or carbon storage.

In conclusion, we need new policies designed to scale back forest disturbance from logging and leave more forests standing.

MYTH: Southern forests are healthy as a result of “healthy markets”

TRUTH: Natural forests should be growing—but aren’t.

Forest acreage has grown less than 2% in the last 64 years, and acres of “forest” in the US South are increasingly likely to be pine plantations, not natural forests.¹² The forest products industry celebrates this growth as a “victory”, because they value profits and standing tree farms above all else. If those forests had grown at the same rate that they had grown between 1953-1964, the first recording period, there would be 25 million more acres of forests in the US South than there are currently. Instead, forest growth in the US South is hampered by overzealous logging and industrial pressures.

TRUTH: Forest health is declining in the US South, and logging is to blame.

While acreage has stagnated, other measures of forest health have also declined.

In the last sixty years, there have been increases in natural forest replacement with plantations, increases in exotic pests,³ decreases in biodiversity,⁴ and sharply increased forest fragmentation⁵. All of these measures point to declines in forest health.

In some cases, forest health declines are directly due to the impacts of increased extraction from Southern forests. The US Fish & Wildlife Service acknowledged in their last “Status & Trends” report that silviculture was the dominant cause of forested wetland loss in the US, also accounting for over half of all wetland losses from 2004 to 2009.⁶ Another study found that around half of tree cover loss in North America was driven by forestry activities, and that particular tree cover loss was predominantly in the United States (see map).⁷

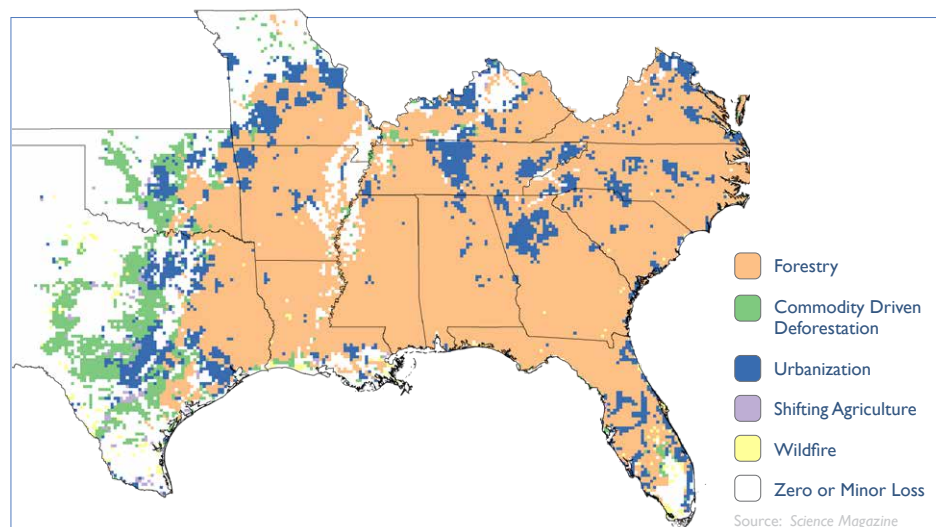
Some will respond to the statement “forests are declining” by attempting to pin the blame on urbanization instead of forestry activities like clear cutting and expanding plantations. However, globally, forest loss due to urbanization represents less than 1% of total loss.⁷ The forest products industry is the dominant cause of carbon loss, deforestation, and degradation in the United States.^{6,8,9}

TRUTH: The forest products industry uses misleading metrics to paint a picture of healthy forests.

The forest products industry justifies their claim that forests are growing in the US South by focusing on growing stock -- the amount of usable wood that comes out of a tree. In other words, they’re not measuring acres; but rather, the number of straight, young trees that can be cut down for timber.

When you use “growing stock”, it doesn’t consider the structure of forests or their ability to provide substantial ecosystem services—like wildlife habitat, flood control, carbon storage, and water filtration.

CAUSES OF FOREST LOSS IN THE US SOUTH



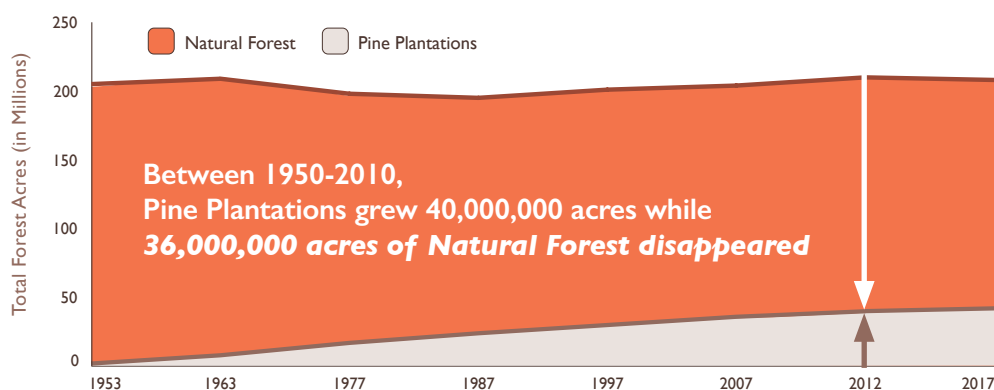
Extensive logging in natural forests has devastated carbon sinks, biodiversity, water quality, and other ecosystem services.^{4,5} One study found that the global timber trade represents an annual loss of \$1.5 trillion USD in ecosystem services.¹⁰ Any “growth” touted by the forest products industry represents an erosion of natural, intact ecosystems, in favor of commercial pine monocultures.²

MYTH: Plantations are valuable forests.

TRUTH: Plantations are “corn fields” of trees.

Plantations are agricultural lands providing little ecological benefit at the expense of more diverse natural ecosystems.^{11,12} Forest plantations provide about half the carbon sequestration,^{13–15} poor habitat for rare and endemic species,¹⁶ and lower water quality and filtration services¹⁷ than standing natural forests. Unfortunately, ecosystem services from natural forests tend to be severely undervalued in comparison to money received from logging. To add insult to injury, the marginal benefits from ecosystem services in plantations are wiped out after a harvest, and take years to recover.

LOSS OF NATURAL FORESTS IN THE US SOUTH



TRUTH: Natural forests are being replaced at an alarming rate.

With stagnant forest acres, land for plantations has come directly from logging and replacing natural forests. In 64 years, the US South lost 37 million acres of natural forest, yet gained 42 million in plantations.

Some companies have publicly acknowledged the issue of forest conversion to plantations. Georgia Pacific, a large paper manufacturer, has agreed to not source wood from hardwood forests converted to pine plantation after 2008.¹⁸ But natural pine forest conversion is also a problem and there have been repeated, documented instances of site conversion from natural forests to planted pine in recent years, especially on private lands that provide wood to Enviva, a wood pellet export company.¹⁹

TRUTH: The forest products industry thinks that plantations are forests.

The forest products industry lumps plantations in with natural forests whenever they talk about the benefits that “forests” provide, claiming credit for all forests. However, plantations are substantially different from natural forests in terms of what ecosystem services can be provided. A long-term study in the Pacific Northwest found that summer water flows in plantation forests were half that of those in natural forests.²⁰ Altogether, plantations provide significantly less value in ecosystem services like flood control and wildlife habitat, and fail to provide a biodiverse understory to support rare and endemic species.^{12,16}

The forest products industry also lobbies for legislation that provides subsidies to landowners for plantation management: pesticide application, planting, and harvesting.^{21,22} Legislation labeled as focused on “conservation” or “forest health” often still includes provisions for commercial harvesting as long as, some day, the land has trees again.



WHAT MAKES A HEALTHY FOREST?

We believe healthy forests:

- Are growing in acreage of natural forests over time
- Have high amounts of biodiversity and wildlife habitat
- Are not artificial monocultures or plantation-style forests
- Have many stands over the age of 60 years for increased carbon storage
- Are limited in the extent of disease or exotic pest invasion
- Have forest types traditionally associated with the landscape; with supporting biogeochemical characteristics like hydrology unaltered or restored to natural states.

TRUTH: There is not significant carbon storage in plantations.

Finally, the forest products industry claims that plantations, even after logging, have significant carbon storage. But claims of carbon storage in plantations and harvested wood products are dubious. All told, just 14% of the carbon from a forest harvest is retained in products or landfills after 100 years.²³ Additionally, repeated harvesting reduces the overall carbon storage of a forested area -- previously logged forests were found to store just 55% of the carbon in an unlogged equivalent area.¹³

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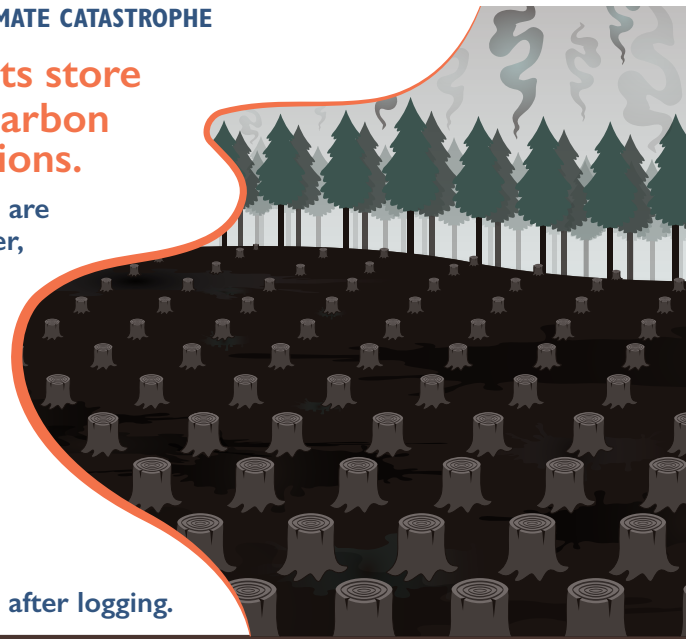
PLANTATIONS: A CLIMATE CATASTROPHE

Native forests store 50% more carbon than plantations.

When plantations are cut down for paper, lumber, and pellets, it creates carbon sequestration

DEAD ZONES

for up to 13 years after logging.



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ABOUT DOGWOOD ALLIANCE • Dogwood Alliance mobilizes diverse voices to protect Southern forests and communities from destructive industrial logging. For over 20 years, Dogwood Alliance has worked with diverse communities, partner organizations and decision-makers to protect Southern forests across 14 states. They do this through community and grassroots organizing, holding corporations and governments accountable and working to conserve millions of acres of Southern forests.