



The Impact of Wood Use on North American Forests

Can specifying wood for buildings contribute to forest sustainability?

Sponsored by Think Wood | *By Roxane Ward and Dave Patterson, RPF*

As green building has evolved beyond its initial emphasis on energy efficiency, greater attention has been given to the choice of structural materials and the degree to which they influence a building's environmental footprint. Increasingly, wood from sustainably managed forests is viewed as a responsible choice—for a number of reasons. Wood grows naturally by harnessing energy from the sun, absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. It is renewable and a carbon sink, and it outperforms other materials in terms of embodied energy, air and water pollution, and other impact indicators.¹

But what about the forest? The benefits above notwithstanding, how can building designers be sure that specifying wood does not negatively impact the North American forest resource?

As this course will demonstrate, the answer to that question has several elements. On one hand, North American forest practices are among the world's best, and the amount of forested land, in both the United States and Canada, has been stable for decades. On the other, there are threats—such as climate change, increased wildfire, insect infestation and disease, and deforestation due to urban development—which are broader than the forest industry and must be addressed at a societal level. Drawing from a wide range of research publications, the following pages will examine the current state of North American forests, modern forest practices, and criteria for sustainability, and consider some of the challenges that could profoundly impact the future of the forest resource. In this context, the course will also discuss why strong markets for wood

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Learning Objectives

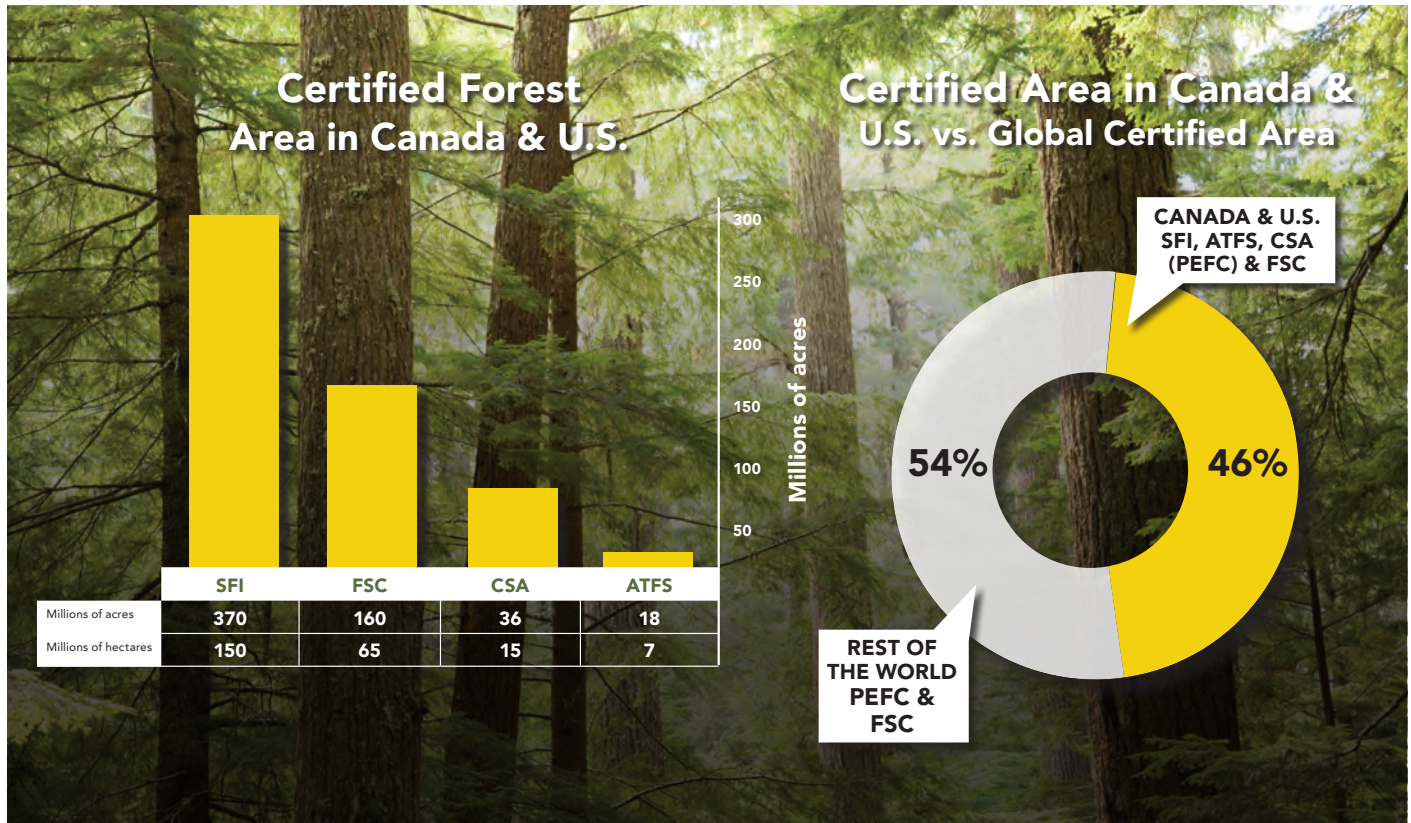
After reading this article, you should be able to:

1. Evaluate the use of wood as a construction material in the context of long-term forest sustainability as well as attributes such as low embodied energy and light carbon footprint.
2. Discuss forest sustainability measures such as biodiversity, soil and water quality, and harvest versus net growth.
3. Examine the concept that using wood in buildings provides an incentive to landowners to keep forested lands forested instead of converting them to uses such as urban development.
4. Compare the carbon benefits of an unmanaged forest versus a managed forest where timber is used for wood buildings.

To receive AIA credit, you are required to read the entire article and pass the test. Go to ce.architecturalrecord.com for complete text and to take the test for free. This course may also qualify for one Professional Development Hour (PDH). Most states now accept AIA credits for engineers' requirements. Check your state licensing board for all laws, rules, and regulations to confirm.

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Shown is a second-growth working forest in Oregon.

products provide an incentive for landowners, not only to invest in forest management but also to keep forested land forested even though greater profit can often be made by converting it to other uses.

IS NORTH AMERICA RUNNING OUT OF FORESTS?

According to the National Report on Sustainable Forests—2010, “On the whole, no evidence suggests that we are using up our forests. In fact, the total area of forests has been stable and the volume of wood on them increasing.”²

Deforestation is the permanent conversion of forest land to non-forest land uses. Around the world, it is a major issue and contributor to global warming. In the United States and Canada, the rate of deforestation has been virtually zero for decades; however, the value of forest land in agriculture and real estate maintains pressure to convert.⁶

Until the early 1900s, settlers coming to North America cleared an average of 2.1 acres of forest per person to survive and grow food.³ Since then, the establishment of industrial agriculture and other changes in land use have mitigated the need for forest clearing, and forest acreage has been stable for close to a century.

The United States reported an annual increase in forest area of 0.12 percent in the 1990s and 0.05 percent from 2000 to 2005, while Canada had no change, and twice as much wood is being grown each year as is harvested.⁴ In both countries, responsible forest management has resulted in more than 50 consecutive years of net forest growth that exceeds annual forest harvests.

United States

The United States has approximately 765 million acres of forest area, which is about one-third of the country’s total land area.⁵ According to the National Report on Sustainable Forests—2010, “This stability is in spite of a nearly three-fold increase in population over the same period and is in marked contrast with many countries where wide-scale deforestation remains a pressing concern.”

Forty-two percent of U.S. forests are owned by entities such as national, state, and local governments; the rest are owned by private landowners, including more than 22 million family forest owners.⁵ The fact

that net forest growth has outpaced the amount of wood harvested for decades supports the idea that landowners who depend economically on the resource have a strong incentive for their sustainable management for the long term. This aligns with global forest data, which indicates that forest products and industrial roundwood demands provide the revenue and policy incentives to support sustainable forest management.⁷

However, with urban development and other uses increasingly vying for land, an issue going forward will be making sure that landowners continue to have reasons to keep forested lands forested.

Canada

Canada has 857 million acres of forestland, which is about 90 percent of the forested area it had before European settlement.^{8,9} Ninety-four percent of the forest is publicly owned and managed by provincial, federal, and territorial governments. The remaining 6 percent is on private property belonging to more than 450,000 private landowners.

Wood supply is the term used to describe the estimated volume of timber that can be harvested from an area while meeting environmental, economic, and social objectives. Governments regulate harvest levels on public lands by specifying an annual allowable cut.

Photo: www.naturallywood.com



Certification bodies conduct forest management audits as part of the third-party certification process.

TOOLS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Although types of ownership vary, forest management in the United States and Canada operates under layers of federal, state/provincial, and local regulations and guidelines that foresters and harvesting professionals must follow to protect water quality, wildlife habitat, soil, and other resources. Laws addressing safety and workers' rights also govern forestry activities. Training, continuing education, and certification for loggers and foresters support continuous improvement as well as the use of forestry best management practices (BMPs). Government agencies monitor forest management activities for compliance with regulations.

Forest Certification

While sustainable forest management is defined by the regulations and guidelines that consider environmental, economic, and social values for that particular area and ownership, sustainably managed land does not have to be certified. Forest companies can turn to voluntary forest certification to have their practices independently assessed against sustainability standards to provide additional assurance to customers, backing up their claims that their wood products come from legal, responsible sources.

DEFINING FOREST SUSTAINABILITY

Forest sustainability was first described in the book *Sylvicultura oeconomica* by German author Hans Carl von Carlowitz, published in 1713—and, while our understanding of what constitutes sustainability has evolved significantly in 300 years, it has long been a cornerstone of forest management.¹⁴

Von Carlowitz's work planted the seed for what we now know as sustainable development, defined in the landmark 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the 'Brundtland Report') as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defines sustainable forest management as "the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way and at a rate that maintains their biological diversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality, and potential to fulfill, now and in the future, relevant ecological economic and social functions at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage on other ecosystems."

In the United States and Canada, forest sustainability is measured against criteria and indicators that represent the full range of forest values, including biodiversity, ecosystem condition and productivity, soil and water, global ecological cycles, economic and social benefits, and social responsibility. Sustainability criteria and indicators form the basis of individual country regulations as well as third-party sustainable forest certification programs.

Wood is the only building material that has third-party certification programs in place to demonstrate that products being sold have come from a responsibly managed resource. As of March 2019, more than 584 million acres of forest in the United States and Canada were certified under one of the four internationally recognized programs used in North America: the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Canadian Standards Association's Sustainable Forest Management Standards (CSA), and American Tree Farm System (ATFS). This represents almost half of the world's certified forests.¹⁰

According to the National Association of State Foresters, "Credible forest certification programs include the following fundamental elements: independent governance, multi-stakeholder standard, independent certification, complaints/appeals process, open participation, and transparency. While in different manners, the ATFS, FSC, and SFI systems include the fundamental elements of credibility and make positive contributions to forest sustainability."¹¹ Similarly, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development released a statement supporting an inclusive approach that recognizes these programs as well as CSA (and others).¹²

The FSC, SFI, CSA, and ATFS programs all depend on third-party audits, where independent auditors measure the planning,

procedures, systems, and performance of on-the-ground forest operations against the predetermined standard. The audits, performed by experienced, independent foresters, biologists, socio-economists, or other professionals, are conducted by certification bodies accredited to award certificates under each of the programs. A certificate is issued if a forest operation is found to be in conformance with the specified forest certification standard.¹³

EPDs and Forest Certification

The wood industry has been a leader in the development of environmental product declarations (EPDs). An EPD is a standardized, third-party-verified label that communicates the environmental performance of a product, is based on life-cycle assessment (LCA), and applicable worldwide.

An EPD includes information about both product attributes and production impacts and provides consistent and comparable information to industrial customers and end-use consumers regarding environmental impacts. The nature of EPDs also allows summation of environmental impacts along a product's supply chain—a powerful feature that greatly enhances the utility of LCA-based information.

In the case of wood products, sustainable forest management certification complements the information in an EPD, providing a more complete picture by encompassing

parameters not covered in an LCA—such as biodiversity conservation, soil and water quality, and the protection of wildlife habitat.

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF FOREST MANAGEMENT

There is a good reason forestry is often described as a blending of art and science. Foresters must follow the laws, regulations, and best practices of forestry and apply forest science and the results of ongoing research. They must also nurture the art of recognizing the unique features of a specific forest and site and develop the management design that will meet diverse environmental, economic, and social interests, including the needs and objectives of the landowner.

The blending of art and science that occurs in forest management is similar to what occurs in a building project. Like the multidisciplinary team that designs and constructs buildings, sustainable forest management involves a team that includes foresters, engineers, biologists, hydrologists, surveyors, and loggers that plan and care for the forest. In both cases, members of the team must address the technical requirements and obligations of their profession while taking into consideration the tastes and desires of the project partners and owners. In the case of forestry, this includes caring for the forest while meeting the needs of landowners, the environment, and their community.

PLANNING FORESTS OF THE FUTURE

Although approaches differ, effective multi-decade planning is a fundamental part of forest sustainability.

On national forests in the United States, for example, conformance with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires the development of a comprehensive plan, utilizing substantial public involvement and sound science to guide management decisions.

In Canada, where most forests are publicly owned, integrated land-use planning seeks to balance the economic, social, and cultural opportunities in a forested area while maintaining the well-being of the forest. The public gets a say in decisions about how the land and its resources are managed; forest companies must solicit public input on their forest management plans, which must be approved by government agencies.

Through the use of diverse silviculture practices, foresters tend to the forest, ensuring regeneration, growth, and forest health and providing benefits that support a full range of forest values. For example, forest management practices are often selected to mimic natural disturbances and the cycles of nature that are associated with a specific region, forest type, or species. Natural disturbances, including windstorms, hurricanes, ice storms,



Shown is a Douglas fir working forest in Tillamook County, Oregon.

forest fires, and insect or disease outbreaks, are a fact of life in the forest. To mimic these events, foresters may vary the size of the openings created by forest management, the intensity of management, the retention of wildlife reserve areas, and the frequency with which management occurs.

FOREST REGENERATION

Following harvest, forests can be regenerated either naturally or through planting or seeding. One is not inherently better than the other. Rather, the choice of method varies based on factors that include biology of the tree species, availability of on-site seed sources, site ecology, type of harvest system employed, and objectives for the site.

In Canada, where forest regeneration is required on public lands, just under half of the total harvest area is regenerated naturally and the rest through planting or seeding.¹⁵

ENSURING HEALTHY FOREST GROWTH

After planting new trees, foresters use a variety of practices to support and encourage healthy forest growth, including understory thinning as well as understory planting and weeding. These treatments are applied to sustain ecosystem health and function, improve stand quality, and produce desirable tree qualities that provide important economic and ecological values. They can also help to reduce the risk of wildfire in forests where previous fire prevention and other factors have resulted in an excess buildup of woody debris.

To control competing vegetation or brush, foresters use a variety of tools including chemical (e.g., herbicides), manual (e.g., saws and axes), and biological (e.g., sheep).



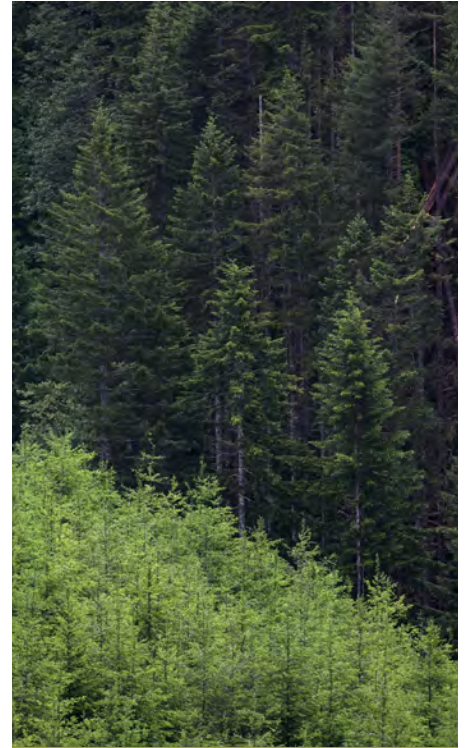
Planting and seeding is a significant component to ensuring healthy forest regeneration.

When properly used, herbicides can be an appropriate tool in a sustainably managed forest. In stands of pine and spruce, for example, pioneer plant species such as raspberry and trembling aspen thrive on disturbed sites with open growing conditions (i.e., following harvest), easily outcompeting newly planted seedlings for nutrients, light, and water. Similar to a garden, weeds that are not controlled will take over and prevent the growth of desired species.

Photo courtesy of Plum Creek/© Colin Hackley



Photo: Gary Darby Weyerhaeuser



IS THERE A NEED TO 'GREEN' THE FOREST SECTOR?

"Forestry is the art and science of creating, using, and conserving forests. The forestry profession was a pioneer in developing techniques for sustainable management and, later, techniques for the multiple use of forests. More recently, broad holistic concepts such as ecosystem management and landscape management have been developed, tested, and applied. These are all elements of the sustainability and sustainable management of a wide variety of renewable resources. Although the term "sustainable forest management" is synonymous with "good forestry," forestry and forest management are sometimes viewed as potentially damaging to the environment. This fear is justified where unscientific or illegal forest practices are used, but the argument that there is a need to 'green the forest sector' appears to give too little credit to forestry's core concepts." —State of the World's Forests 2012, FAO

Thinning treatments were used in this southern U.S. forest to support and encourage healthy growth.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), commercial and government use of herbicides (which includes forestry) accounts for 4 percent of use nationwide, while home and garden use accounts for 5 percent, and the agricultural sector accounts for 91 percent.¹⁶

All pesticides applied in the United States must be registered with the EPA and carry federally approved labels describing permitted uses and appropriate protection measures. To be registered, pesticides must

be tested for effects on humans and the environment, and applicators of pesticides on forest land must also comply with state laws. In Canada, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) of Health Canada reviews and regulates all pesticide use under the federal Pest Control Products Act. Such registration indicates that, based on extensive expert review of all available scientific evidence, registered products have no potential for significant effects on human or environmental health when used as directed.

PROTECTING SOIL AND WATER QUALITY

Soil is made up of a complex mixture of minerals, organic matter, gases, liquids, and microorganisms. It is an obvious and essential component of forest ecosystems, providing both a base for trees, plants, and organisms, and the minerals and nutrients needed for their growth. In a forest, soil is held together by the root structures of trees and plants, and protected from erosion by tree trunks, forest floor vegetation, and woody and leafy debris.

In forestry (as in agriculture), soil is the base resource; the medium that supports the ecosystem. It is therefore essential that soil be protected from damage and erosion.

For example, to avoid compacting sensitive soil, foresters may use heavy equipment in the winter when the ground is frozen instead of summer when it is soft, or use cable logging techniques instead of ground-based equipment.

Protecting against erosion is necessary, not only for the forest but also to keep soil from entering water bodies where it could be detrimental to fish habitat. Strategies involve avoiding sensitive areas (such as unstable slopes) and road construction techniques that include seeding the road with grass, creating diversion ditches, and adding water bars (diagonal channels that prevent water from flowing down the length of the road).

CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY

Biological diversity, or biodiversity, refers to the variety of species and ecosystems on earth and their ecological systems. An important indicator of forest sustainability, it enables organisms and ecosystems to respond to and adapt to environmental change.

Conserving biodiversity is an essential part of forest sustainability and involves strategies at different scales.

At the landscape level, networks of parks and protected areas conserve a range of biologically and ecologically diverse ecosystems. Tens of millions of acres of North America's forests are protected within wilderness areas and parks and through regional and local programs. Forests with special ecological attributes are also protected by established conservation easements developed through the work of local land trusts.¹⁷

From a forest management perspective, conserving biodiversity involves strategies that create a diversity of ecosystem conditions through space and time to provide diverse habitat for native species of plants and animals across the landscape. Among other things, this may include selecting harvest, renewal and tending treatments that maintain existing tree species diversity, maintaining mapped areas of standing trees within a harvested site, or planning harvest patterns based on wildlife habitat management objectives.

Photo: Lawrence Anderson



Architect: DesignARC

THE WOOD IN A BUILDING IS 50 PERCENT CARBON BY DRY WEIGHT¹⁸

To highlight the carbon benefit of wood buildings, U.S. WoodWorks and the Canadian Wood Council partnered with research organization FPInnovations to develop a carbon calculator (available at www.woodworks.org). Based on widely available research, the calculator estimates the amount of carbon stored in a wood building, the greenhouse gas emissions avoided by not using steel or concrete, and how many minutes it takes North American forests to grow that volume of wood.¹⁹

The Stella luxury development in Marina del Rey includes both a four-story Type V-A wood-framed building and five-story Type III-A wood-framed building over a shared concrete podium. With approximately 2.3 million board feet (equivalent) of wood, the calculator estimates the following:

- Carbon stored in the wood: 4,495 metric tons of CO₂
- Avoided greenhouse gas emissions: 9,554 metric tons of CO₂
- Time it takes North American forests to grow this much wood: 16 minutes

Using the EPA's Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator, these carbon benefits equate to taking 2,683 cars off the road for a year or the energy to operate a home for 1,194 years.

Although useful as an illustration of wood's climate change mitigation potential, these results are estimates only, as a detailed LCA would be required to provide this analysis for a specific building.

“Wood products are manufactured from renewable raw material; they are reusable and biodegradable, and they continue to store carbon throughout their lifetime. These characteristics make wood an excellent alternative to many of the materials that are now widely used in construction and consumer goods, which leave a much larger ‘carbon footprint’ and include concrete, steel, aluminum, and plastic. Increasing production and consumption of wood products will therefore be part of a sustainable future.”

—*State of the World's Forests 2012, FAO*

CHALLENGING PRECONCEPTIONS

This course has touched on a variety of criteria for forest sustainability. Another is public discourse. Frank discussion regarding the status of North American forests, how they are managed, and the challenges they face is necessary to maintaining the many values they provide. In that spirit, this section addresses some of the most common concerns about forests and the forest industry.

True or false: Leaving the forest alone has the greatest climate change benefit.

False. There is growing awareness among building designers that using wood can reduce a building's carbon footprint, provided it comes from a sustainably managed forest. At the core of wood's carbon benefit is the fact that as trees grow they absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere, release the oxygen (O₂), and incorporate the carbon into their wood, leaves or needles, roots, and surrounding soil.

Young, vigorously growing trees take up carbon quickly, with the rate slowing as they reach maturity (typically 60–100 years, depending on species and environmental factors).

Over time, one of three things happens:

1. When the trees get older, they start to decay and slowly release the stored carbon.
2. The forest succumbs to wildfire, insects, or disease and releases the carbon quickly.
3. The trees are harvested and manufactured into products, which continue to store much of the carbon. (Wood material is approximately 50 percent carbon by dry weight.) In the case of wood buildings, the carbon is kept out of the atmosphere for the lifetime of the structure—or longer if the wood is reclaimed at the end of the building's service life and either re-used or remanufactured into other products.

Unless the area is converted to another use, the cycle begins again as the forest regenerates and young seedlings once again begin absorbing CO₂.

The other important aspect to wood's relatively light carbon footprint is the fact that wood products require less energy to manufacture than other major building materials, and most of that comes from renewable biomass (i.e., sawdust, bark and other residual fiber) instead of fossil fuels.²⁰ In the United States, biomass fuels provided 75 percent of the energy required at wood product facilities in 2010.²¹

In Canada, bioenergy accounts for 57 percent of the energy used by the entire forest industry.²² A great deal of research has been undertaken to determine how forests can be managed to maximize their carbon benefits. According to a report from the Society of American Foresters, numerous



There are different age classes across the forest landscape.



This forest in the northern Sierra Nevada mountains was clearcut to support the natural regeneration of ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, sugar pine, California white fir, and incense cedar.

studies of forest carbon relationships show that a policy of active and responsible forest management is more effective in capturing and storing atmospheric carbon than a policy of hands-off management that precludes periodic harvests and use of wood products.²³

While acknowledging that it is not appropriate to manage every forested acre with a sole focus on carbon mitigation, the report's authors conclude (among other things), that:

- Wood products used in place of more energy-intensive materials, such as metals, concrete, and plastic, reduce carbon emissions, store carbon, and can provide additional biomass that can be substituted for fossil fuels to produce energy.
- Sustainably managed forests can provide greater carbon mitigation benefits than unmanaged forests, while delivering a wide range of environmental and social benefits, including timber and

biomass resources, jobs and economic opportunities, clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

As with all aspects of forestry, choosing not to manage also has consequences, and this also impacts carbon. Young, healthy forests are carbon sinks because they are actively absorbing carbon dioxide as they grow. As forests mature, they generally become carbon cycle-neutral because primary productivity declines.

Many continue to store substantial amounts of carbon indefinitely—old-growth forests in the United States and Canada represent significant carbon sinks—but the probability of massive carbon loss also increases. Where forests are killed by large-scale natural disturbances (such as wildfires and insect or disease infestations), they emit their stored carbon without providing the benefits available through product and energy substitution.

According to the FAO, “Several aspects of the forest industry’s activities are not adequately captured by looking at only the emissions and sequestration accomplished in the value chain. For example, the use of wood-based building materials avoids emissions of 483 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent a year, via substitution effects. In addition, by displacing fossil fuels, the burning of used products at the end of the life cycle avoids the emission of more than 25 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year, which could be increased to 135 million tonnes per year by diverting material from landfills.

“The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that forest biomass-derived energy could reduce global emissions by between 400 million and 4.4 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year, a goal that the forest products industry can help society to reach through its forest biotechnology research and forest biomass infrastructure. The market for wood encourages landowners to keep land under forest, helping to avoid large-scale losses of carbon to the atmosphere via land use change.

“IPCC has stated that ‘In the long term, a sustainable forest management strategy aimed at maintaining or increasing forest carbon stocks, while producing an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre, or energy from the forest, will generate the largest sustained mitigation benefit.’ The analysis contained in the present report gives strong support to IPCC’s assertion that sustainable management of production forests represents an important mitigation option over the long term.”²⁴

In addition to reforestation, the IPCC also recognizes that some degree of afforestation (the conversion of non-forest land to forest land by planting or seeding) may be needed to limit global warming to the goal to 1.5 C by removing additional CO₂ from the atmosphere as the trees grow.²⁵

True or false: The forest industry has seen its last days as a major employer. False. The forest industry is responsible for more than 1.4 million direct and indirect jobs in the United States and Canada. As with many resource industries, employment in both countries decreased in recent years for a variety of factors that include the recession and U.S. housing market crash. However, the industry is in many ways engineering its renewal.

Innovation in the forest. Recognizing that healthy, sustainable forests are the first prerequisite, forest companies continue to invest in advanced management technologies. For example, the latest inventory systems use light detection and ranging (LiDAR) technology to better predict fiber supply attributes, identify key habitat features and sensitive areas, and build more efficient and environmentally sound road systems.

Resource efficiency. According to a report on wood utilization, “The term ‘waste’ is largely obsolete in the context of today’s North American forest products industry. Logs brought to U.S. and Canadian sawmills and other wood product manufacturing centers are converted almost totally to useful products.”²⁶

Expanded opportunities for wood use. The development of innovative new buildings systems (e.g., mass timber) is allowing wood to be used as a structural material in a wider range of building types, increasing the low-carbon options available to building designers.

New product categories. Recognizing that forest-based materials generally have advantages over materials that are nonrenewable and/or require large amounts of fossil fuel energy to manufacture, the industry is increasing its R&D efforts in developing new products such as green energy, bio-plastics, and bio-pharmaceuticals.

As these examples demonstrate, continual improvement is fundamental not only to forest sustainability but also the industry’s own competitive future and its ability to provide jobs and contribute to forest-dependent communities.

True or false: If we use more wood, we will have less forest. False. According to the USDA Forest Service, more than 44 million acres of private forestland could be converted to housing development in the next three decades.²⁷ In the United States, where 58 percent of forests are privately owned, strong markets for wood products help to ensure that landowners derive value from their investment. This provides an incentive to not only keep lands forested but also manage them sustainably for long-term health.

In Canada, where most forests are publicly owned, sustainable harvest levels are based on the biological and ecological capacity of the land. However, strong markets contribute to resource efficiency by ensuring that forest fiber is utilized for the highest value products.

THREATS TO FOREST SUSTAINABILITY

While North American forests have remained relatively stable for decades, they also face significant threats. Although by no means a comprehensive list, the following three were identified in the National Report on Sustainable Forests–2010 as crucial.

The Loss of Forest Lands and Working Forests

According to the report, “Gross statistics on forest area mask substantial fragmentation and outright losses in forest land at the regional level, particularly in areas adjacent to growing urban areas or where recreational development is prominent. Fragmentation and loss is further compounded by the sale of forest lands to firms and individuals whose primary focus is not active forest management for timber production, forest conservation, or other purposes.” Where profitable, forest management and the revenues it generates can serve as an incentive to landowners to keep lands forested and not convert them to other uses.

Climate Change

Although forests and wood products have a significant role to play in climate change mitigation, the report says, “We are already seeing altered patterns of forest disturbance associated with changes in temperature, precipitation and insect activity. The resulting changes in the distribution of forest cover and species distribution will play out over the coming decades.” Climate change is already being incorporated into forest management planning with the objective of helping forests to remain resilient in the face of environmental stressors.²⁸

Wildfire and Insect Infestation

Referred to in sustainability language as “changing disturbance patterns,” this category has included a three-fold increase in insect-induced tree mortality in the last decade and

CLEARCUTTING: APPROPRIATE SILVICULTURAL TOOL OR ‘ALL THAT IS WRONG’ WITH THE FOREST INDUSTRY?

In many conversations about forestry, clearcutting is held up as the beacon signalling ‘all that is wrong’ with the industry. This negative social reaction is an important consideration for foresters, especially those managing public lands.

Clearcutting is used when the young trees of a species need an abundance of sunlight to germinate and to compete successfully with grasses and other plants. It is usually used to grow tree species that historically found open sunlight by following large natural disturbances such as windstorms or wildfire. It provides the direct sunlight needed to effectively grow some native species while helping to create a mix of forest ages across the landscape, including the young forests preferred by certain wildlife.

Photo: Gary Darby Weyerhaeuser



Young, healthy forests are carbon sinks because they are actively absorbing carbon dioxide as they grow. As forests mature, the rate of carbon uptake slows.

a “marked increase” in forest fires, especially on public lands in the West. “This increase is tied to a complex set of natural and human-induced dynamics involving fire suppression, increasing stand densities, aging of certain tree species, and warming temperatures. The result has been a dramatic increase in the area of forest affected by bark-beetle infestations in the pine forests of the interior West and a general increase in forest fuel loadings and fire susceptibility.

THE NEXT 100 YEARS

The complexities associated with forests and their management do not lend themselves to easy generalization. As this course has shown, North American forests have been stable for decades. Modern forestry involves teams of dedicated professionals who rely on science and their experience of the forest to plan for and protect a wide range of forest values. Forests and wood products have carbon benefits that exceed the benefits of natural forests alone, and strong markets for wood products provide incentives for landowners to keep lands forested. There are also profound threats to future forest sustainability.

However, while the threats may seem insurmountable, a report from Dovetail

Partners, “The Next 100 Years of Forests in the U.S.—Growing the Forests We Want and Need,” offers an interesting perspective: “It may help to remember that previous generations were able to [meet their forest management challenges] during an era that included The Great Depression, WWI and WWII, global energy crises, and many other social and economic upheavals. Our history shows that if we want healthy, abundant forests, we can have them. We just need to choose a vision for the future that includes abundant forests and take appropriate action to secure them.”

END NOTES

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QUIZ

1. In the United States and Canada, responsible forest management has resulted in forest growth that has exceeded annual forest harvests for:
 - a. five years.
 - b. 20 years.
 - c. **50 years.**
 - d. Forest growth never exceeds forest harvest in the United States and Canada.
2. The concept of forest sustainability was first introduced:
 - a. **in 1713, in the book *Sylvicultura oeconomica*.**
 - b. in the 1800s, when settlers coming to North America cleared an average of 2.1 acres of forest per person.
 - c. in 1987, by the World Commission on Environment and Development.
 - d. in 1992, as part of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.
3. Which of the following is NOT used as a measure of forest sustainability?
 - a. Ecosystem condition
 - b. Biodiversity
 - c. Economic and social values
 - d. **Forest ownership scenarios**
4. Clearcutting is considered an appropriate silvicultural tool:
 - a. **when young trees of a species need an abundance of sunlight to germinate and compete successfully with other plants and species.**
 - b. on private lands only.
 - c. when woody debris in the forest builds up and increases the risk of wildfire.
 - d. when the forest company is in a hurry to finish harvesting before winter.
5. In the United States, commercial and government use of herbicides in the forestry sector accounts for what percent versus the percentages used in home and garden and agriculture?
 - a. 30 percent forest/10 percent home and garden/60 percent agriculture
 - b. 43 percent forest/12 percent home and garden/45 percent agriculture
 - c. **4 percent forest/5 percent home and garden/91 percent agriculture**
 - d. 18 percent forest/28 percent home and garden/54 percent agriculture
6. All of the following contribute to biodiversity EXCEPT:
 - a. planning forest management to maintain habitat patterns.
 - b. managing forests so they resemble forests established by natural disturbance (such as fire or wind).
 - c. creating parks and protected areas.
 - d. **adding diversion ditches and water bars to forest roads.**
7. Deforestation is defined as:
 - a. areas impacted by insects or wildfire prior to regeneration.
 - b. harvested areas prior to regeneration.
 - c. **forested lands that have been permanently converted to other uses.**
 - d. areas that need additional treatments when the regenerating forests are young.
8. The carbon benefits associated with forests include all of the following EXCEPT:
 - a. **the use of carbon calculators.**
 - b. carbon absorbed from the atmosphere by forests.
 - c. carbon stored in wood products.
 - d. using wood instead of products that require large amounts of fossil fuels to manufacture.
 - e. the use of biomass energy.
9. The latest forest inventory systems use light detection and ranging technology to do which of the following?
 - a. Identify habitat and sensitive areas
 - b. Determine the best intermediate treatment techniques
 - c. Build more environmentally sound road systems
 - d. Identify popular areas for backwoods camping
 - e. A and B only
 - f. **A and C only**
10. Threats to forest sustainability include:
 - a. forest fragmentation.
 - b. urban development.
 - c. increased wildfire and insect infestation.
 - d. **All of the above**