

Basics of Sustainable Forestry

Understanding the forest impact of specifying North American wood products



North American forests can sustainably produce more timber.

In both the U.S. and Canada, responsible forest management has resulted in **more than 50 consecutive years of net forest growth that exceeds annual forest harvests.**¹ A 2021 study on the impact of long-term demand for wood products on U.S. forests found that forest growth exceeded harvest levels—even in the most conservative scenario, using the lowest estimate of growth and the highest estimate of harvest volumes required to meet incremental demand for both lumber and mass timber in 2035.²

In North America, working forests are not a cause of deforestation.

Modern forestry standards in North America ensure a **continuous cycle of growing, harvesting and replanting:** in other words, reforestation, not deforestation. In the U.S. and Canada there is “extremely low risk of deforestation.”³ Data shows that global regions with the highest levels of industrial timber harvest and forest product output are also regions with the lowest rates of deforestation.⁴

Trees that are harvested as a part of active forest management are replanted.

The forest sector **replants over 783 million seedlings per year.** According to a 2021 study by the University of Washington - CINTRAFOR, 23 seedlings are planted per thousand board feet of lumber produced.⁵

1. [U.S. Forest Resource Facts and Historical Trends](#), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2014, p. 26
2. Sustainability, [Increasing Mass Timber Consumption in the U.S. and Sustainable Timber Supply](#)
3. [WWF Living Forests Report](#): Chapter 5 Saving Forests at Risk.
4. Ince, Peter. 2010. [Sustainable development in the forest products industry](#), Chapter 2. Porto, Portugal : Universidade Fernando Pessoa, 2010: p. 29-41.
5. [Timber Demand Study](#), CINTRATOR, 2022.



Active forest management, including harvesting, can improve forest health.

Overstocked forests are vulnerable to drought, disease, and insects, making them prone to high rates of tree mortality and wildfires that are very difficult to control⁶—both of which **sustainable forestry practices help mitigate.**^{7,8}

The annual rate of trees harvested for timber is less than 2% of the total available volume.

The volume harvested from the nation's timberland in 2016 represented **1.3% of the total timber volume available for harvesting.**⁹ In the same year, annual mortality represented 1% of growing stock on U.S. timberland, exceeding 10 billion cubic feet.

Forest products like lumber and mass timber provide an economic incentive for landowners to keep forests as forests.

Strong timber markets **encourage retaining forests rather than clearing them for development or other land uses;** they also encourage continued investment in forest management.

North America has more certified forests than anywhere else in the world.

There are about 96 million acres of certified forests in the U.S., which is roughly 19% of total U.S. timberland—well above the global average of 11%.¹⁰ 11% of the world's forest area, or 1 billion acres, is certified. **More than 90% of the certified area is in the northern hemisphere, and almost half is in North America.** The U.S. accounts for 9% of the world's certified forestland.¹¹

How do I know if wood is from legal and sustainable sources?

You can find out if the wood you use is harvested sustainably through systems like forest management certification, responsible fiber sourcing standards, and certification of mills, all of which are underpinned by a robust set of state defined best management practices (BMPs) at the forest level.

- **Forest management certification:** Forest certification assesses a landowner's forest management against a series of agreed standards related to water quality, biodiversity, wildlife, and forests with exceptional conservation value.
- **Fiber sourcing standards:** Fiber sourcing is another type of certification aimed at mills to limit the risk of fiber coming from undesirable sources like high-conservation forests or illegally harvested forests.
- **BMPs:** Every US state has developed best management practices guidelines for water quality and other environmental concerns such as soil erosion and regeneration, some of which are codified into state forest practice regulation and others of which are voluntary.

6. [What is Forest Management?](#)

7. [Tree growth, mortality, harvesting and planting](#)

8. [USDA# 5923](#)

9. [Tree growth, mortality, harvesting and planting](#)

10. [10 Questions With Sustainable Forestry Expert Dr. Edie Sonne Hall](#)

11. [State of America's Forests](#), Certified forests (arcgis.com)

12. [Protecting Water Quality through State Forestry Best Management Practices](#)