

The Top Ten Environmental Benefits of Forestry – courtesy of The Society of American Foresters.

Forestry is bringing back forests. - Until the 1920s, forests were often logged and abandoned. Now, across the country an average of 1.7 billion seedlings are planted annually. That translates into six seedlings planted for every tree harvested. In addition, billions of additional seedlings are regenerated naturally.

Forestry helps water quality. - Foresters carefully manage areas called watersheds (areas where we collect our drinking water) and riparian zones (land bordering rivers, streams, and lakes). These are places where maintaining water quality is the primary concern for foresters. Forests actually help to clean water and get it ready for us to drink. The trees, the soil, and bacteria are all part of this process. Forest cover protects and nurtures the soils that are the key to water retention, filtering, and quality.

Forestry offsets air pollution. - Foresters nurture forests, which are sometimes called "the gills of the planet." One mature tree absorbs approximately 13 pounds of carbon dioxide a year. For every ton of wood a forest grows, it removes 1.47 tons of carbon dioxide and replaces it with 1.07 tons of oxygen.

Forestry helps reduce catastrophic wildfires. - At the turn of the century, wildfires annually burned across 20 to 50 million acres of the country each year. Through education, prevention, and control, the amount of wildfires has been reduced to about two to five million acres a year--a reduction of 90%. By marking and removing excess fuels, such as underbrush and some trees, foresters can modify forests in order to make them more resilient to fire.

Forestry helps wildlife. - Foresters employ a variety of management techniques to benefit wildlife, including numerous endangered species. For example, thinning and harvesting create conditions that stimulate the growth of food sources for wildlife. Openings created by harvesting provide habitat for deer and a variety of songbirds. Thinning can be used to accelerate growth and development of older trees that are favored by owls and other species. In order to enhance salmon habitat, foresters also carry out strategic tree plantings and monitor forest health along streams in order to keep the water cool and reduce sediments.

Forestry provides great places to recreate. - Foresters manage forests that provide recreational benefits to communities. Forests are important areas for such recreationists as birdwatchers, hikers, nature photographers, horseback riders, skiers, snowmobilers, and campers. And because foresters put water values high on their list of priorities, the rivers and lakes in forested areas provide such recreational opportunities as fishing, canoeing, and rafting.

Forestry benefits urban environments. - Urban foresters manage forests and trees to benefit communities in many ways. Forests in urban areas reduce stormwater runoffs, improve air quality, and reduce energy consumption. For example, three well-placed mature trees around a house can cut air-conditioning costs by 10-50 percent.

Forestry provides renewable and energy-efficient building products. - Foresters manage some forests for timber and produce a renewable resource because trees can be replanted. Other building materials, such as steel, iron, and copper, can be reused and recycled but not replaced. Wood is a renewable resource which, in addition to being recyclable, can be produced anew for generations to come on sustainable managed forestlands. Recycling and processing wood products also requires much less energy than does the processing of many other non-renewable materials.

Forestry helps family forests stay intact. - Foresters help family forestland owners, who own 54 percent of all the forests in the US, understand the benefits of managing their forests in an environmentally friendly manner. Better management of private forests means that those forests will remain healthy and productive. Many endangered species spent at least part of their time on private land, more than 80 percent of our nation's total precipitation falls first on private lands and 70 percent of eastern watersheds run through private lands.

Forestry is good for soils. - Foresters and natural resource managers are dependent on forest soils for growing and managing forests and, to a large extent, forest soils are dependent on resource professionals and managers. Foresters' success in growing forests and producing forest products is dependent on their ability to understand soil properties and to then match species with soils and to prescribe activities that not only promote forest growth but also enhance and protect soil productivity and prevent soil erosion.