

# The Sensible Environmentalist

(NAPS)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**  
**We hear a lot about tropical forests, but what can you tell me about the state of our own forests here in North America?**

The news is good. North American forests cover about the same area of land as they did 100 years ago. Over the past decade our forests have expanded by nearly 10



Dr. Moore

million acres, according to satellite tracking and two successive reports from the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization (State of the World's Forests, 1997 and 2001).

There are two main reasons for this. One is that advances in agriculture have enabled us to grow about five times as much food on each acre of farmland. As a result, we've been able to feed a growing population without converting any more forests into farms.

Another reason, surprisingly enough, is that North Americans use a lot of wood. We've been led to believe that this is bad, that each time we buy a piece of wood we cause a little more forest to be lost. On the contrary, every purchase of wood sends a signal into the marketplace to plant more trees and grow more valuable product. If we don't continue to use wood for building houses,

making paper or crafting furniture, there will be little incentive to keep land forested. It could just as easily be cleared for development or to grow something else.

This is a win for both the environment and the economy. The land stays forested, thus providing habitat for hundreds of species of wildlife. Timber creates jobs, fuels economies and generates hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue. So long as we plant enough trees to satisfy the demand for wood, North American forests will be sustainable.

Between them, Canada and the United States have about 1.75 billion acres of forest. About one billion acres are used to grow timber while the other 750 million acres are composed of parks, wilderness and non-commercial forest land.

Trees are the most abundant of the world's renewable resources and will continue to grow over much of the earth's surface indefinitely. I believe that a sensible environmentalist would weigh the facts and choose both to grow more trees and use more wood.

• *Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder and former president of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to [Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com](mailto:Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com).*