

## A Place to Dream

By April Marie Lucas

As I lay on my back in the field, looking up into the powder blue sky, I have time to dream about what my future may hold. The wind blowing through the pines is nature's song, a sweet gentle melody created as the trees sway in the breeze, it seems to carry me away to distant places, at least in my dreams. Growing up in the southern pine forest is a gift I wish I could give to everyone. Hours spent walking, running, listening, growing with the trees, and they with me. We need the trees. Trees, especially the large pines and other species of the south, actually clean the air, and regulate global climate. Without them, the air we breathe would become saturated with pollutants like CO<sub>2</sub>, and other green house gases. We need the trees. They provide shelter, homes, and food for a large population of birds, squirrels and other woodland creatures. We need the trees. Lastly, they reduce soil erosion and water runoff, which have become major environmental problems for America today. We need the trees.

Trees are one of the main contributors in reducing soil erosion and water runoff, which both have very negative effects on the environment. America has always been a farm country, and the demand on farmers is even higher today. Because of this demand, more and more people are expanding their fields, building more homes, and cutting down more forests. Especially in the south. This leads to both soil erosion and water runoff. If someone farms in an area with little to no surrounding trees, when it rains all of the waste: pig slop, fertilizer, pesticides and more get washed away into storm drains, streams, and ultimately the ocean. The chemicals in fertilizer and pesticides especially can harm and even kill the aquatic life in the area. Soil erosion is also a major issue when it comes to agriculture or any plant life really. When it rains heavily, "the running water strips the top layer of soil away. The top layer of soil is

the most nutritious and without it, it is hard for plants to grow<sup>1</sup>". Trees provide an obstacle for both, the flowing water and soil. They prevent the waste of so much good soil, and runoff of pollutants into our oceans. "24 billion tons of agricultural topsoil wash or blow away each year<sup>1</sup>", and that number will continue to climb unless we save our forests. We need the trees.

Second, the Southern forests literally clean the air we breathe. "You could think of them as nature's vacuum cleaners. The particles of many pollutants cling to the leaves of trees, so less pollution reaches us<sup>2</sup>". Gases like carbon dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide are all absorbed by our leafy comrades. Without them, all of these toxic pollutants would be ingested, which can be lethal. The southern forests also regulate the temperature of the region. Yes, they give us shade on a hot summer day, but they actually make the temperature of the earth bearable. Carbon dioxide, being a greenhouse gas, accumulates in our atmosphere, creating a "blanket that warms the earth<sup>3</sup>", and ultimately contributing in a major way to global warming. Without the trees in the forests of the southern United States, the air we breathe would be heavy with greenhouse gases and the earth would warm to a boil. We need the trees.

Finally, the trees in the Southern forests of the United States provide homes for many different species of animals and plants that are all interconnected and dependent on each other for survival. Removing any part of the ecosystems that exist in southern pine forests could cause the collapse of the entire system. Squirrels depend on pine seeds for food, owls and falcons feed on the squirrels. Birds eat insects and prevent them from overpopulating. This is especially important to the survival of the pine forest because beetles are very damaging to southern pines. This is all part of a delicate balance that has existed for many, many years. It must be preserved. We need the trees.

We must protect our forests so that future generations can walk and talk and enjoy nature's morning and evening songs. We must save the place where a child can hold his parents hand, look up and listen to the whisper of the wind in the trees and watch as an eagle learns to fly. Please, protect our southern pine forest. We need the trees!

## Works Cited

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