

Restore, Respect, Respond

By Megan Stout

Freshwater flowing and heavy rain pouring, copper leaves falling and animals scurrying, canopies shading on hot summer days- these are a few of my favorite things.

With a deep seeded history in agriculture and manufacturing, southern forests function as a major carbon sink, removing carbon from the atmosphere and restoring it into tree and soil. (2) They are the home of high concentrations of rare and endangered species, estimated around 170 amphibians and 197 reptiles. Southern forests alone account for nearly forty percent of the United States land area and encompass 13 states all together (1). As Dogwood Alliance Media Outreach coordinator Lauren Barnett said, "Southern forests are (among) the most bio-diverse forests in the world." Yet, they may soon begin to vanish if steps aren't made to conserve them in the near future.

Just think, a major part of our daily activities are related to forests, like that newspaper you read this morning. What about that light you just switched on, the glass of fresh water you just drank, or that last breath you took?

Gandhi once said, "What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another." In the past years, southern forests have been decimated. As the need for more residential land and commercial space grows, millions of acres of forest have been clear-cut. Although it might solve a short-term space problem, the long-term effects are damaging. Those forests are needed to serve vital ecosystem services, such as fuel wood, lumber, and pulp used to make paper, which are highly beneficial to the national economy (3). Each year, forests around the world provide us with around 4.7 trillion dollars per year. A loss in forest area will have damaging effects on the economy of the area it affects.

Did you know that the South alone produces 15.8% of the world's timber production, and 58% of all the timber production in the United States (4)? Think of how many jobs would be lost if these forests were not preserved. Thousands. Not only are southern forests important to sustaining jobs in agriculture, they also affect the South's recreational industry. Forests are popular places for weekend family camping trips and class field trips.

Last year, my own English class visited southern Georgia's Moody Longleaf Pine Forest on a brisk January day. Greenery was all around us as we spent the day lying down in the tall grasses, gazing up at the powder blue sky above, soaking up any ounce of sunlight. It was not only an educational experience, but also an enjoyable memory. How often does one get the opportunity to explore the deep crevasses of a forest on a Wednesday? Respectively, changes must be made to continue such recreational enjoyments that Southern forests offer to all. It is a true treasure that must be conserved for future generations to experience the true beauty southern forests offer.

Not only are southern forests a part of my personal history; they are also a central part of the history of the South- the agriculture, the economy, the people. Millions depend on these forests every day, for water, food, timber, and most especially clean air. So I ask of you, what are you favorite things? What will happen to them if our southern forests disappear?

I thank you God for this most amazing day, for the leaping greenly spirits of trees, and for the blue dream of sky and for everything which is natural, which is infinite, which is yes.

~E.E. Cummings

Bibliography

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3. <http://www.wri.org/publication/southern-forests-for-the-future>
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