

Threats to the Southern U.S. Forests

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Within the past century, southern forests have dissipated dramatically. Going about one's day to day activities, one may not even recognize the harm he is causing around him. Southern forests are waning due to suburbanization, disease, surface mining, and invasive species.

Each decade, millions of acres of forest in the southern United States fall victim to suburbanization. In Georgia, Atlanta's rapid population growth has led to an increase in suburbanization. According to Nick Price and *Southern Forests for the Future*, "unless there are changes in the pattern of development...suburban growth will lead to... 19 million acres of forest lost...from 2020 to 2040. From where do these suburbs come, geographically? In fact, they take the place of a forest that has occupied the southern United States long before our arrival.

Being small does not mean that an animal cannot cause major damage. Pests can eat their way through forests, killing thousands of acres all throughout the nation. Researchers at several universities, including Michigan State University and the University of California at Santa Barbara, discovered that 455 insects and 16 pathogens are destroying forests from the Pacific all the way to the Atlantic. In the southeast United States, including Georgia, laurel wilt disease is spread by a foreign beetle. In Georgia specifically, this species preys on redbay trees. The gypsy moth, whose caterpillar is harmful to certain trees, is expected to move South in the near future. Such small animals, when in large groups, can cause immense harm to our southern forests.

Forests are cut down due to the constant need of minerals. Places where trees once flourished are now barren land. Besides the obvious of cutting down trees, mining causes another problem. Mining can degrade the soil, causing the trees that haven't been cut down to

not be as healthy. Due to the degradation of soil, the plant and animal species shift, adapting to the different soil. Explosives are used to clear land for mining, wiping out areas of forests in seconds. Although mining helps the United States, it also hurts our country, environmentally.

Although many people may not realize it, there are numerous factors threatening the health and extent of southern U.S. forests. Threats come in all shapes and sizes and, unlike a human's attention span or life; they do not waver or cease to exist. These dangers will not recede, they will not go away if they are ignored, and the dangers will increase in the future, unless something is done.

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