



# Why Your E-Commerce Box and Paperback Novel Is Growing U.S. Forests

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt, who created the U.S. Forest Service, warned that “we are consuming our forests three times faster than they are being produced.” In 1630, according to the Forest Service, the estimated area of U.S. forestland was 1,023 million acres, or about 46% of the nation’s total land area, but by 1907 it had declined to 759 million acres.

In just the last 20 years, U.S. forest area has increased by 18 million acres to about 741 million acres, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The stability of the country’s forests is largely a result of the sustainable practices of the paper and wood products industry.

“Our entire business depends on the sustainability of forests,” says Sophie Beckham, Chief Sustainability Officer at International Paper. “It’s our most important resource.”

While sustainability values are increasingly embedded across the industry’s global footprint, negative perceptions still persist about its role in forest management, even as consumer demand for products such as paper, paperboard and corrugated boxes has increased.

## Active forest management vs. deforestation

These perceptions often begin with a misunderstanding about the differences between deforestation and active forest management.

“Deforestation is when you remove forest cover forever,” says Dr. Darren Miller, Vice President of Forestry

Programs at the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI). “That’s different from sustainable forest harvest, where a part of the forest is harvested and removed and then it regenerates or trees are replanted. In active forest management, you are cutting less than what’s growing, and you’re doing it in a way that respects those environmental consequences.”

## Healthy demand for boxes and paper goods gives landowners incentive to plant and grow trees

In North America, where forestland has been steady for decades, deforestation is not a problem. However, the industry does see long-term pressure on forestland from land conversion, when forests are used for purposes other than tree production. More than half of U.S. forestlands are privately owned and managed by about 11 million forest owners, who supply 90% of the wood to make forest products.

“The most important thing that anybody can do to forestall land conversion away from forests is to create an economic incentive for these landowners to keep their lands forested,” says David Struhs, Vice President for Corporate Services and Sustainability at Domtar, a North American paper manufacturer.

## Benefits of healthy forests

Healthy forests are as essential to our environment as they are to the wood fiber products that we use, and sustainable harvesting practices protect animal and plant life in our forest ecosystems. Healthy forests can mitigate climate change by reducing atmospheric buildup

of greenhouse gases in three ways: sequestration, emissions reduction and fossil substitution. Forests capture and naturally filter our drinking water, and help reduce risks of natural disasters caused by soil erosion, like landslides and flooding.

“You want to make sure that you’re taking wood out of a forest so that it can grow more efficiently,” says Beth Cormier, Vice President for Research, Development and Sustainability at Sappi, a South Africa-based paper and pulp company with global operations. According to Cormier, younger trees actually sequester more carbon than old-growth forests. “It’s amazing how quickly it will regenerate, assuming the forest is healthy,” she adds.

## Changing perceptions with outreach and education

Paper and packaging manufacturers recognize the importance of sharing these benefits with the younger generation. Sappi recently partnered with the Technical Association of the Pulp & Paper Industry (TAPPI) to create a STEM curriculum for Girl Scouts of the USA.

“The renewable nature of trees allows us to grow and make essential products,” Cormier says. “Fiber coming from trees is the most abundant polymer on Earth.”

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