



“Wood is Good: Use More of It!”

Forests are Missouri’s greatest renewable resource, providing many economic, environmental, and social benefits. Forests are a diverse resource of plants, animals, and other life forms. They sequester carbon dioxide, serve as a water filter, and provide much beauty and recreation to Missouri citizens.

Forest products are big business in Missouri contributing about \$4.5 billion dollars annually to Missouri’s economy. Most Missourians don’t realize the extent of forest related business activity. In addition to logging and sawmill operations, it includes secondary products such as cabinet and door manufacturing. Wood processing facilities in the state support over 32,000 jobs at a payroll of about \$1.1 billion dollars annually.

There are 747 million acres of forest land in the United States, 14 million of which are here in Missouri. Approximately 80 percent of Missouri’s forests are owned by private citizens, with the remaining held by federal and state government.

In the late 1890’s and early 1900’s, most of Missouri’s timber was harvested as the human population moved westward. Products from this harvest were primarily railroad ties used to lay track for rail expansion into the western United States. In the early 1900’s, Grandin, MO was home to the largest sawmill in the United States where they produced railroad ties. By 1930 most of the timber had been harvested. While some people tried to permanently convert the forest land to crops, others tried to graze the land with hogs, goats, and cattle. However, in most cases, the farmers gave up and let the land revert back to forests. The hardwood forests we have today originated after this major harvest of pine timber.

Since 1947, the volume of Missouri’s timber base has tripled by increasing more than 10 billion cubic feet. Obviously, timber management is considerably advanced since 1900. Modern timber management is based on sustainable forestry principles, where annual harvesting doesn’t exceed what is grown. This concept begs the question, “how much are we

growing and how much should we harvest in Missouri?”

U.S. citizens use a lot of wood, approximately 20 billion cubic feet annually, which equates to about 70 cubic feet per person. That 70 cubic feet of wood breaks down to about 361 pounds of paper, of which 50 pounds is toilet paper, 330 pounds of packaging material, 76 square feet of plywood, 58 square feet of particle board, 255 board feet of lumber, 2 pallets, and we each get a new house for every 62 households. Is this too much? I don’t think so and maybe we should use more.

Wood is a renewable resource which is environmentally appropriate to use to satisfy the needs of human population. Even though Missouri is home to 14 million acres of forest land and we are harvesting approximately one-third of what we grow annually, we still import more wood into Missouri annually than we produce. One might ask is this environmentally responsible?

By 2050 total U.S. wood consumption will increase by 40%, as a result of population growth. It is time to take advantage of sustained yield forestry practices available to us today in the U.S. and begin producing greater yields and more commodities from our forests to satisfy U.S. demand. Otherwise, we will continue importing wood products at unprecedented rates allowing the environmental consequences of these harvests to countries that do not utilize sustainable forestry practices.

With a little bit of practice you will soon be seeing your forest for the trees and on your way to a healthier forest.

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