

The Sensible Environmentalist

Reforestation: More Than Planting Trees

(NAPSA)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**

How many trees are planted each year compared to the number harvested?

It would put a lot of minds to rest if we could make this calculation, but it isn't that simple. Harvesting is measured by area (acres/hectares) or the volume of wood and not the number of trees. The fact that 1.6 billion trees are planted each year in North America doesn't even tell half the story, because harvested areas are often seeded or allowed to regenerate naturally, depending on the characteristics of the site.

A better way to determine the success of reforestation is by comparing forest growth to the amount of timber harvested. Satellite tracking shows that North American forests have grown in volume of timber by 20 percent since 1970 and cover about the same area now as they did 100 years ago. There are two reasons for this. The amount of timber harvested has been consistently less than forest growth and there has been no net expansion of farmland during the past century.

The laws governing reforestation depend on whether the land is public or privately owned. On public lands, regulations are in place to keep harvest levels in check and ensure prompt regeneration. The main incentive for private landowners is the fact that sustainably managed forests keep providing value. There's

also the need to satisfy customers, which is why many forest companies seek sustainable forest certification. In the U.S. and Canada, about 250 million acres have been independently certified as sustainably managed to one of three main standards (equivalent to more than twice the size of California).

Interestingly, most deforestation in North America has nothing to do with forestry. It's caused by urban development and the conversion of lands for agriculture. The good news is that this goes both ways—almost any piece of land can be returned to a forested state by replanting and tending.

One of my favorite examples is the New York State Forest Program, which started early in the last century when new rail and canal systems sparked an exodus of farmers to the prairies. Beginning with the reforestation of abandoned farms, New York increased its forest cover from about 20 percent in 1890 to 62 percent today.

Reforestation is an obvious and essential part of forest management. As a sensible environmentalist, I'm encouraged that North American forests continue to increase in volume and by the fact that governments, industries, environmentalists and the public all seem to share this common goal.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com.



Dr. Moore