

# 7 ways to spot a healthy forest



growth.

Sizing up the health of a forest may be hard to do with the naked eye. There's a lot going on in there. Plants, animals, people and businesses all play critical roles behind the scenes.

Forests are critical from every angle. Animals and people rely on them for food, clean air and fresh water. Businesses count on them to supply materials for products we need every day. Local and global economies depend upon them to create jobs and foster

Sustainable forestry maintains a delicate balance among all these demands, so forests can serve as a viable resource now and in the future. Numerous factors indicate whether or not a forest is being managed sustainably. Get familiar with these key seven.

## 1. Balanced Management Practices

When forests are managed sustainably, there are ecologically sound plans in place for protecting watersheds, harvesting timber, reducing hazards and reforestation. Trees may be thinned to prevent overcrowding, reduce disease or enhance access to recreational users. Some management practices are tailored to help conserve habitat for species that would otherwise be lost. The forest may even be burned in a prescribed way to promote growth and prevent higher-intensity natural fires from occurring. Reforestation can be allowed to take place naturally through the growth and spreading of seeds from remaining trees or it can be prompted by new plantings. In a sustainably managed forest, all this activity is carried out by design with a long-term view.

## 2. Economic productivity

Thirty percent of the world's forests are used primarily in a production capacity to bring us wood, fiber, fuel and food. This production employs millions of people, supporting local and national economies. A healthy forest is highly productive, yielding an ample supply today without compromising the ability to produce in the future. Achieving this health is directly related to how the forest is managed—how materials are harvested and replenished. In addition to reforestation, there is a growing trend toward afforestation, or the planting of new forests on non-forested lands to take some of the production pressure off of existing forests, or to help reduce harmful soil erosion.

### 3. Environmental protection

In addition to a production function, forests have what is known as a protective function. They absorb greenhouse gasses, filter air pollution, protect soil from water and wind erosion, maintain coastlines, mitigate floods and help control avalanches and mudslides. A healthy forest can be identified as much by what isn't happening as what is. Some of the negative environmental impacts we see on the daily news can be traced back to forests that are being prevented from doing the protective part of their job. In arid zone countries in the Middle East and Africa for example, overexploitation of forests and unsustainable deforestation practices have led to growing desertification, or the turning of fertile land into barren desert.

### 4. Biodiversity

Forests are complex ecosystems with lives of their own, and every leaf counts. Even the smallest piece of the system, from a bird to a beetle to pond bacteria, is needed to support every other piece. All forest animals, in particular, need a clean, safe water supply, as well as specific foods for nourishment. Some animals require certain "microclimates", which are the unique conditions resulting from particular groups of plants or land forms.



Biodiversity represents the diversity of life in a thriving forest, which helps make it stronger and better able to withstand outside threats that can destroy it, like infestations and disease.

### 5. Wildlife

The loss of species' habitat and the extinction of species is one of the major threats to biodiversity. It's like removing one link from a chain. A healthy, sustainable forest operates with wildlife conservation in mind, primarily by conserving habitat so species can move freely, feed and reproduce. For example, bears need to roam across long distances. Breaking up this habitat with commercial development, without planning for corridors that can provide safe passage, can isolate them to the point of population decline.

### 6. Recreation

A healthy forest is not only one that supports the living creatures within it, but also provides a place for us to visit and enjoy through hiking, boating, camping and other recreational activities. About 86% of US forestland is available for recreation, and U.S. National Forests welcome nearly 150 million visitors per year. In Canada, about 42% of the land mass is covered by forests, and the eco-tourism dollars generated number in the billions.



## 7. Certification

Forest certification programs, such as the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) work to ensure the health and future of our forests, with credible, transparent and auditable standards that enable a sustainable resource for today and generations to come. For example, landowners certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard have implemented and been audited for measures to protect the water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and species at risk that are critical to the health of their forests. The SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard is used throughout Canada and the U.S. by mills and manufacturers as a means to proactively influence millions of landowners through education, training, and outreach. This in turn helps the landowners implement the right practices, helping give companies and their customers assurance that the products have come from responsible sources. The SFI label on those products enable customers to identify wood and fiber products as a responsible choice when they shop. When consumers buy products with the SFI label, they are helping grow future forests, sustainable communities, conservation research, youth education, logger training and **much more**.

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) is an independent, non-profit organization that aims to make the world a better place by promoting sustainable forest management through standards, research, community building and conservation partnerships. To find out more about what makes a forest sustainable and how SFI helps, visit <http://www.sfiprogram.org/>.



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