

The impact on our economy, environment and everyday life

# Celebrating Florida's forests

“Forests are the answer regardless of the question” is one of my favorite quotes from Congressman Bruce Westerman of Arkansas. Florida Forests Week is being celebrated across the state this week, providing us an opportunity to reflect on the significance of Florida's forests — to people and the planet! We are fortunate to live in the heart of our state's woodlands. Many families, like my own, have a deep history and heritage in the forest industry. Many more (again, like my own) are proud to be counted in the 124,000 Floridians who work in the industry today. However, many people don't always fully appreciate the extent of the impact of working forests on our economy, our environment and our everyday life.

An economic study by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) shows that forestry and forest products are the top agricultural commodity and leading agricultural export of Florida. Florida forests provide a \$25 billion boost to the state's economy. In fact, more than 5,000 items contain forest products. The assortment of “Goods from the Woods” is very diverse and continues to grow. For example, working forests provide building materials such as lumber and plywood that reduce greenhouse gases by storing carbon in the walls and roofs of our houses.

Forest products make it possible to print our newspapers and manufacture cardboard boxes, flooring and our furniture. Other forest products are found in the LCD screens of our cell phones, televi-



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sions and computers; in our shampoos and other cosmetics; in our medicines and foods we consume daily; in our sporting goods for

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play and much more. In the future, we will likely fly in jets fueled by Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF), and other biofuels for our vehicles will contain forest products!

From the water we drink, to the air we breathe, to wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration and conservation, forests offer natural solutions to the environmental issues that Florida faces. Fifty percent of the dry weight of a tree is carbon, and forests in the U.S. currently sequester almost 15% of industrial carbon emissions. Private working forests account for almost 75% of gross annual carbon sequestration by U.S. forests — more than the total annual emissions from U.S. passenger vehicles. But the forest sector can do so much more.

Climate mitigation strategies must prioritize keeping forests intact, which means supporting strong markets. Strong markets empower consumers to fight climate change every time they buy a forest product, particularly over environmentally unfriendly alternatives such as plastic, steel or concrete. Strong markets for forest products allow forest owners to re-invest in their forests and help them resist economic pressure to convert their land to other uses that are less carbon beneficial. In a state that continues to experience rapid development, they also offer much-needed green spaces that are not only beautiful but also offer habitat to our amazing diversity of Florida wildlife.

Too many well-intended emails these days feature signatures advocating against printing in order to save a tree. Florida Forests Week is the perfect time to correct the incorrect thinking behind that movement. The fact is that the use of paper and other forest products strengthens the market for trees which in turn encourages the planting of trees. We have more trees today than we had 100 years ago in America. If you would like to help keep Florida forested, please feel free to print those emails and ask for paper bags at the grocery store! Paper is a biodegradable, recyclable, renewable and sustainable product that actually promotes future forests.

For more information about working forests and Florida Forests Week, please visit [FLForestry.org](http://FLForestry.org).

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