



MISSING THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

Common Forestry Misconceptions




By Kat Peters, former Communications Intern

I've been working with the NCFAs as a communications intern for a year now. This is my first job adjacent to the forestry industry.

I grew up with a mother who was a self-proclaimed "tree-hugger" and who would make a face any time we passed a truck with logs on it on the highway. That was my introduction to the way the forestry industry works, as I'm sure many people outside the industry have experienced. I saw trees being cut and plots of land being left completely empty and wrecked from logging equipment and didn't think twice about forming a negative opinion about forestry. As I grew up and started spending more time outside, I started becoming a "tree-hugger" like my mother: anti-forestry without a good understanding of the forestry industry.

As someone looking in from the outside, I held some common forestry misconceptions that I have changed my perspective on since my time in a forestry industry-adjacent role.



 Abigail Ridge, education coordinator, and former NCFAs Intern Kat Peters visiting a sawmill tour during Kat's internship experience.

1 | Forestry is all about cutting down trees.

This is one I'm sure we've all heard, and from what I can gather, it's just something that the industry has to work with. Forestry does include cutting down trees, but due to a lack of education, most people automatically assume that cutting a tree down is the worst possible thing you can do. However, once you get a sense of what forest management can look like and understand all the things that can go into a management plan, you realize that cutting some trees is just as important as leaving others to grow.

One of my favorite things I've gotten to do with the NCFA was attend the Sustainable Forestry Teachers Experience (SFTE) programs throughout the state. We went to a game-lands preserve in the Piedmont that was undergoing management to rejuvenate the longleaf pine ecosystem. As the wildlife biologist was talking and we were driving through the area, you

could see examples of how the forest thrived in areas where management was active and how it wasn't flourishing in areas that hadn't been touched in a while. You really can tell a difference when you see all of it in action, and it's hard not to have an appreciation for the folks who are working to maintain healthy forests.

2 | Forestry is destroying trees.

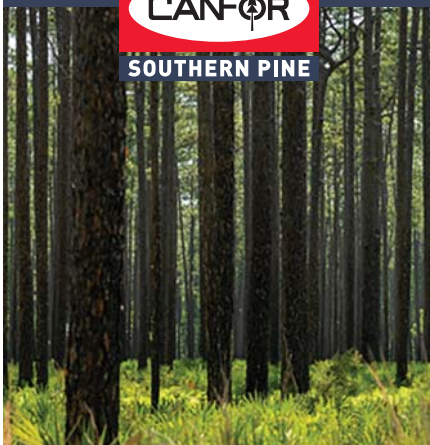
Another point I can make along these lines is one I believe is common sense: The forestry industry wouldn't exist without trees, so why would they cut down all the trees with no plan to regenerate the resource? We talk about renewable and nonrenewable resources in K-12 classes and one of those resources that should be described as renewable is trees. This would be a great place to slip in an introduction to sustainable forestry and how the industry runs. Yes, we can recognize that at the turn of the 20th century, forestry didn't exist as a science and this caused a lot of

issues. But thanks to the giants of the forestry industry (thank you, Dr. Carl A. Schenck), forest management and ecology are better understood now and used to inform the forestry industry on how to best conduct business.

3 | Forestry is a dirty industry.

I think I can identify the cause of this one: clear-cutting. Every time you pass a clear-cutting job, let me be honest here, it doesn't look very good. And while clear-cutting isn't generally a common industry logging practice unless you need a complete refresh on your tract, the common passerby isn't going to know that or even think to look it up. They'll look at the next log truck that passes them and say something along the lines of, "These loggers are destroying the forests." Once again, there's a great chance for education here. Clear cuts may not be the most aesthetically pleasing, but they provide an abundance of early succession habitat for wildlife while a new stand is being established.

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Another potential cause for this misconception are the outputs of the industry. Now, talking to people on either side of this issue, you're going to get so many different explanations for what the outputs of the industry are and how dangerous they are. I've heard people say lots of things about this and it is hard to know who to believe.

My thoughts on the issue:

- Forestry companies are going to try and make their operations as safe as possible for those working on site and those around them.
- Forestry companies don't want to destroy the environment with chemicals in the water, soil, or air, and also don't want to cut down all the trees without a plan for regeneration. Both of these things would harm the vital resource they depend on and could produce either a bad product or no product at all. Destroying the land will destroy their business.

I learned most of this valuable information from foresters themselves. It wouldn't have been something I learned in school and certainly wouldn't have been something I learned at home.

“It’s incredible the respect that foresters have for the resource that they work with and you can see it any time they get the chance to talk about what they do.”

4 | Forestry is a dying industry.

As long as we keep building houses and furniture and need things like toilet paper and pencils, there will always be a need for wood. There will always be a forestry industry as long as we continue to use wood for various purposes. Where else would it come from? The perception that forestry is dying is tied to the fact that fewer and fewer young people are interested in joining the industry. There's not enough education around forestry; certainly not as much as there is for other sciences, especially when it comes to K-12 education. I didn't learn about anything related to forestry or forest management until I got to the NCFA. The gap between

the established forestry community in North Carolina and young people who want to get outside needs to be bridged in order to maintain and grow North Carolina's robust industry.

My favorite thing about the industry is learning something new every time I get to talk with one of our members. It's incredible the respect that foresters have for the resource that they work with and you can see it any time they get the chance to talk about what they do. My message to our members: Go out, talk to people, advocate and educate for forestry in your community. Let's remember that we are all stewards of these resources, we love our land, and appreciate our way of life. Each of us can do our part to conserve our natural resources while adapting and evolving. ■

Gov. Cooper Proclaims FOREST PRODUCTS WEEK

For the second year in a row, the NCFA has received a North Carolina Forest Products Week proclamation from Gov. Roy Cooper's office. This is a testament to the hard work of those in our industry, which contributes **\$35.5 billion** to our state's economy. We are **#1** in manufacturing sectors in the state, supporting more than **139,700 jobs** and generating **\$184 million** in state taxes, plus **\$434.4 million** in federal taxes annually.

