

FACT SHEET

No. 22

Timber & Timber Harvesting in West Virginia

Fall, 2002

Timber Harvesting and the Public

Many West Virginians raise concerns over the harvesting of timber. These concerns, though very real to the individual, are often founded on myth and emotion and not on scientific fact.

A concern often raised is that very few trees are planted or replanted in our State. However, West Virginia forests, being primarily hardwoods, regenerate by natural regeneration. As trees are removed from the forest, the canopy is opened up and thus more sunlight reaches the forest floor. New seedlings begin to grow from the years of seed that has been deposited in the forest litter and also sprouts begin to grow from the harvested tree stumps. Generally, each tree harvested will be followed by a minimum of a few scattered to several thousand new seedlings starting to grow naturally.

Wildlife is also mentioned by individuals concerned with the harvesting of timber. Wildlife biologists promote timber harvesting as a way of manipulating the forest habitat to insure food and cover for the various wild animal species we in West Virginia so like to hunt and observe.

Tourism is mentioned as a concern by some as not being compatible with timber harvesting. However, the two fastest growing industries in West Virginia over the past decade have been tourism and forestry. Trees grow back and even in small areas where cutting may be visible, disturbance to the forest vista is only temporary. All common tourism and recreational uses of the forests involve forest management (timber harvesting) unless the forest is to be left to stagnate as a wilderness area.

Forest sustainability is another concern that has been mentioned recently as new wood processing plants have expanded to West Virginia. The U.S.D.A Forest Service and the WV Division of Forestry monitor the health, growth and size of our forests. Their surveys continue to show a positive net growth of wood for West Virginia. West Virginia is not running out of trees and it continues to be ranked third in the nation in the overall percentage of land covered by forests.

More recently, timber harvesting has been mentioned as a cause of flooding. This issue is fueled on emotion due to the tremendous loss many citizens endured during the extremely heavy rainfalls that occurred in some locations in 2001 and 2002. Scientific studies have proven that flooding is caused primarily by large amounts of rainfall falling

over a very short period of time and overriding all other considerations (See Fact Sheet 28).

The forest community continues to provide the public with scientific information so it can make informed decisions on matters of timber harvesting. This factual information helps to answer many of the public concerns which begin with myth and emotion and continue due to the lack of knowledge

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