

Protecting the Forest Together

In your lifetime, how many national parks would you say you've been to? Five? Ten? No matter how many you've been to, I'm more than positive that all of us can agree they're a sight to behold. From the copious amounts of trees stretching beyond what we can see to the smallest of creatures working in harmony to create colonies, the parks are like environmentally friendly playgrounds for people of all ages. Now, what if one day you woke up and all of these things were gone? No trees, no plants, nothing. What if I told you that we were heading to this point with the habits we have now?

Forests benefit people all around the world. From Africa to France and back to us, we all can benefit from the plentiful properties of our local forests; and it's not just us humans that benefit from them. Forests are one of the top biodiverse ecosystems, housing up to 1,000 different species per ecosystem. One thing forests don't get very much recognition for is the fact that they contribute to important functions such as the water cycle, as trees take in excess rainfall and release water vapor into the atmosphere. Just by looking at a forest, it's hard to see all of the ways we can benefit from them, other than the fact that numerous activities such as camping, hiking, and even sometimes fishing take place in forested areas. We truly do rely on forests for so many things, as these areas take in around 16 billion metric tons of CO₂ per year, which is more than 40% of the globe's fossil fuel emissions. They control the overall temperature of the atmosphere to oversee possible overheating from a natural cooling standpoint. The water Kentuckians use daily is more than likely sourced from a forested watershed, seeing as they contribute over 75% of the world's fresh water for all beings and their needs.

While these areas are sacred to us, they are slowly being killed day by day. Studies show that if we continue our overcompensation when it comes to deforestation, we could end up like the world renowned Amazon rainforest, which in the last 50 years has lost over 17% of it's area. If we look at it from a paper point, we tend to use up to 4 dozen sheets of paper in a day; and that estimate is not counting toilet paper, or paper towels. In 2022 alone, the world as a whole lost around 10 million acres of its forested areas, which is around the size of Illinois. And if this is from human overconsumption, imagine the damage over 60 invasive species can do; across all boards, that's the number that Kentucky unwillingly houses. These numbers may be small, but considering that 48%, or 12.4 million acres of our state is forested area, these are dangerously close to capacity. In the modern day, many don't account for the stress they put on themselves, let alone the area around them. Many believe the saying "no single raindrop believes it is to blame for the flood", and while this seems to be the exact thought process, it is entirely incorrect. While it does take multiple people to contribute to a negative action, everyone contributes a percentage to these events. If we continue these bad habits, who knows where we could end up in the next 50 years; let alone 20.

If we want to make a change for our future and those of the next generations, we clearly need to start practicing some better habits. One less than popular way to help is by encouraging reforestation, which is planting new trees in areas that may have been damaged by fires, or storms. By nurturing these areas with new seeds, we are ensuring that these areas will grow new, healthy trees in order to recover from the damage caused by the disaster. This act should not be considered difficult or impossible, as reforestation mainly relies on the seeds of past trees to

support new growth. Avoiding overconsumption can help with deforestation as well. Simple things such as using the full front and back of paper, or maybe taking less paper towels or toilet paper can help these paper products stay stocked longer, which can slow down production. It's not just paper we need to be thinking about, but fossil fuels as well. When you drive down a highway, you'll see cars driving for miles on end; and most of these are gas-powered cars, meaning every second is another fossil fuel emission of toxic chemicals into the air we breathe. While electric cars can be useful, they run expensive, so if you can't afford one, you can simply save your gasoline by taking sporadic, or spread out trips, saving you fuel for when you truly need it. While precautions taken outside of the forest are needed, so are ones inside the forests. We know about the high amount of invasive species, so we should work to counteract it with native species. While 60 invasive species is a sizeable amount, this stands no chance against the growing 19,400 native species Kentucky houses as well. We as a whole need to ensure these native species continue to thrive, no matter the circumstances they may be in.

In conclusion, trees are our rock. They provide us with everything we need to live a mentally and physically balanced life. Since they've been giving us life since the beginning of time, it's now our turn to return the favor. It doesn't take a lot to go out and experience this wonderful world we get to call our home. I hope now that you can do your part to protect our forests; even if it's just replanting trees in your front yard, or putting less chemicals into your plants, it's one more step closer to protecting our forests together.

Bibliography

"Benefits of Forests." *Pefc.org*, [pefc.org/what-we-do/why-forests-are-important/the-benefits-of-forests](https://www.pefc.org/what-we-do/why-forests-are-important/the-benefits-of-forests).

Bra, Kaitlyn. "14 Reasons Why Forests Are Important." *Sustainable Travel International*, 7 June 2021, sustainabletravel.org/14-reasons-why-forests-are-important/.

World Wildlife Fund. "Deforestation and Forest Degradation." *World Wildlife Fund*, 4 Dec. 2018, www.worldwildlife.org/threats/deforestation-and-forest-degradation.

"Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Nuisance Species Plans." *Ky.gov*, 2019, fw.ky.gov/More/Pages/Nuisance-Species-Plans.aspx.

Why Does It Matter to Me ? It Is Important for Private Forest Landowners to Prepare for the Likelihood of Increasing Threats to Their Forest Lands. Private Forests Make up the Largest Holdings of Forestlands in the Southeastern U.S. These Properties Collectively Will Be Crucial in Protecting the Overall Health of Our Landscape. Management That Uses the Most Current Forest Science Will Better Enable

Landowners to Protect Their Land and Resources, and to Contribute Positively to the Conservation and Productivity of Content Summaries, Design, and Unattributed Images By.

“Forest Facts - Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet.” *Eec.ky.gov*,

eec.ky.gov/Natural-Resources/Forestry/Pages/Forest-Facts.aspx.

“Climate-Wildlands.” *Ky Conservation Committee*, kyconservation.org/climate-wildlands.

“Reforestation.” *US Forest Service*, 25 July 2022,

www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/forest-management/vegetation-management/reforestation.

[onetreepanted](http://onetreepanted.org). “Reforestation.” *One Tree Planted*, 2023, onetreepanted.org/pages/reforestation.