

## What is a Tree Farm?

The image that immediately comes to mind is that of a plantation of Christmas trees, where for a fee we can select and cut our holiday greenery! But that is not what we are talking about here.

A Tree Farm is a privately-owned tract of forest. The Tree Farm owner is a member of the American Tree Farm System, which was established in 1941 to encourage private forest landowners to conserve and protect their forests. The Tree Farmer usually owns 10 or more acres of forested land and has a written management plan by which he improves and enhances the health of his woodlands. He does this largely “out of his own pocket” and receives little or no thanks from the rest of us!



*Colorado Tree Farmers listen to Veta Mitchell, 2006 Colorado Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year, explain how management of aspen has improved the watercourse on their Tree Farm.*

These Tree Farmers do receive special opportunities to attend educational sessions and field trips to learn more about caring for their trees.

Why should we thank him (or her)? Why not just buy his “little wood lot”, cut it down and build another housing development or shopping center? After all, we have all our public forest lands.

Well, the answer is simple – the National Forests compose less than 10% of the forested land in our country; private landowners constitute 73%! As you drive down the road, visualize what the landscape would look like if 3 out of every 4 trees were sick or even gone!

## Why are Forests Important to You?

All of these forests work to protect our watersheds and clean our air in several important ways:

- **Oxygen** is arguably the most important element in the air that we breathe because without it, we would perish! Oxygen occurs in the air due to photosynthesis, a natural process in plants, algae, and phytoplankton, in which carbon dioxide is taken from the air and oxygen is returned to it. About ¼ of all oxygen in the air is produced by plants, and forests produce the vast majority of that share.
- Forests also act as **filters**. In a very simple sense, they “trap” the air moving near ground level, slowing it down and causing heavier airborne particles to sink to the ground. Additionally, the leaves and needles attract smaller particles, which are

later carried to the ground by rainwater or condensation on the leaves and needles.

- Forests **shade** the earth, reducing ground temperatures and supporting the growth of plant forms that might not survive in the unfiltered glare of the sun.
- Forests **protect** the ground surface from the uninterrupted impact of rain, hail and snow. They then help to bind the surface materials to reduce the erosive effects of water.
- Forests **house** a myriad of wildlife, including squirrels, birds, and insects, many of which are beneficial in that they help to control damaging insect populations.

So the forest that your Tree Farm neighbor supports is actually part of a global natural “machine” that is working 24/7 to keep YOU supplied with clean, oxygenated air and silt-free water! The next time you see the Tree Farm sign, just thank your lucky stars that some active conservationist is taking the effort to help keep our planet green and healthy!

## What should I do to help?

There are some steps that you can take to help us keep all of our forests healthy:

- Help prevent forest fires. Fire is a natural “cleanser” for our forests but many have not had a “bath” in so long that a fire now will literally destroy them. Then it will take many decades and even more dollars to get them back!
- Learn about the environment, how it works and what we humans can do to protect it. There are short classes available at your local community college to help you improve your understanding of the world

around us. If you cannot find such a class, ask for one to be presented!



***This stand of Ponderosa has been thinned to reduce fire potential..***

- Pay attention to governmental policies and actions that will have an impact on the environment.
- Take action to keep urban development and environmental protection in proper balance. Informed citizens have a tremendous role to play in making our planet healthy and viable.

Much has been said about conserving trees by use of other materials in building, by reducing use of paper, and so forth. These measures have their place but today there are tree plantations, mostly commercially owned, that replace every tree cut for pulp with another that will be available for harvest in 10 to 20 years.

The lumber cut from “Certified Sustainable Forests” comes from a source that will still be producing quality lumber centuries down the road! Iron and limestone, when dug from the ground and converted to steel and concrete, will

require significant energy costs to be recycled yet there are timbers today that were harvested over a century ago that are now being recut into quality homes, flooring and trim.

When you burn gas, oil, or coal for fuel, you are releasing into the atmosphere carbon that was deposited in the earth hundreds of centuries in the past. This carbon in the atmosphere in the form of carbon dioxide contributes significantly to global warming. When a tree is cut for firewood and another planted in its place, the carbon released will be reabsorbed by the new, growing tree, with no net increase in global carbon dioxide.

Often the wood used for fuel would otherwise become waste added to your local landfill. In a million or so years, it may become coal for some future civilization to use but it is no longer available to us.

So do not hesitate to use wood that comes from “Certified Sustainable” sources. These include:

SFI - Sustainable Forestry Initiative  
FSC – Forest Stewardship Council  
ATFS Certified Tree Farms

and other internationally recognized certification system.

For more information about Tree Farming and healthy Colorado forests, write us or send us an email at:

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## And Why You Should Care!

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