

The True Value of Forests

Trees and forests provide us with essential health, recreational, aesthetic, and other benefits, many of which we literally can't live without.

Unfortunately, forest management in this country and around the world has traditionally focused less on the services produced by trees and more on the timber that could be produced. Forest **management has**, quite literally, failed to see the forest for the trees. It's time for everyone who cares about trees and forests to demand that forest **management protects and grows** the total value of forests.

Look at the benefits that approach would provide:

- Cleaner drinking water and less erosion.
- Cleaner air that's free of pollutants
- Processing of harmful carbon dioxide, helping to slow global warming
- Better control of rain runoff and snow melt, resulting in fewer problems with flooding in rural areas and overflowing storm sewers in urban areas
- More habitat for wildlife.
- Cooler temperatures—and lower heating and cooling bills--thanks to increased tree canopy in urban areas.
- Improved quality of life in urban and rural areas alike.

This approach makes good civic and economic sense. Experience has shown that if we don't take care of our trees and forests, we have to replicate the essential public services they provide through costly man-made devices like power plants and storm drains. Forests can provide these services more cheaply and more effectively than any replacement we can generate. Thus it is essential to protect, restore and enhance our forests to guarantee they will continue to provide the services we need.

With that in mind, American Forests will focus its efforts in 2005 on three programs that we think are key to communicating the value of trees and forests for their long-term values.

- We will continue to expand our touted environmental education initiative, which pairs CITYgreen GIS software with lesson plans and trees as an effective way to teach math, science and geography with real-world applications.
- We will continue to work with cities and towns to calculate the environmental and economic value of their forests.
- We will continue to protect and enhance our nation's forests by planting Global ReLeaf trees to heal damaged ecosystems. And we will monitor the values these trees provide for cleaner air and water, reduced erosion, cooler temperatures, and improved habitat.

In our cities, many of the benefits and services provided by trees and forests actually save money that would be spent on such things as water purification, stormwater runoff and health care. The estimated value of the services provided by urban forests of the United States is about \$400 billion, according to research compiled for American Forests' State of the Urban Forest report.

A failure to recognize trees' financial and ecological benefits and services leads to a failure to protect these valuable assets. When communities lose trees and forests, they

must incur additional expenses to replace lost services. Houston, for example, lost an annual value of \$38 million in air pollution-removal services and \$237 million in stormwater management services by allowing its tree canopy to decline

The problem is not just regional and national—it's global. As states, nations, and corporations become increasingly aware of the threat of global climate change, the value of our forests will become overwhelmingly apparent. On a global scale, we must halt and reverse the loss of forest canopy. We need more trees to process and remove from the atmosphere increasing amounts of carbon dioxide that threaten to overheat the planet.

As we begin 2005, American Forests will strive to redouble our efforts to grow a healthier world with trees and forests. We propose a three-part plan to protect, restore and enhance our forests and safeguard the services they supply:

1. Though our target areas for 2005—environmental education, urban infrastructure and Global ReLeaf, we plan to increase public awareness of the multifaceted benefits of trees and forests.
2. We will continue to develop and implement sound, reliable assessment tools to generate true values for our trees and forests.
3. With our balanced approach to working with all sides on an issue, we will strive to effect change at every policy level from local to global to institutionalize forest management practices that reflect the true value of trees and forests.

Putting this plan into action will involve countless partnerships with government agencies, nonprofits, citizens' groups, corporations, media outlets, and others. We will seek to lead and coordinate these partnerships, but it will take many voices working together to make our forests and trees healthier. Please join us.