

LETTER: All life on Earth needs trees to survive

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We have reasons to be concerned and reasons to be hopeful about U.S. forests.



For centuries, 57% of the earth’s habitable land was forested. Now, only 31% remains. Trees release moisture into the air to regulate earth’s water cycle and global weather patterns. Without trees, land heats up and dries out.

Trees anchor the soil and release oxygen into the atmosphere. Seventy percent of land animals and plants live in forests and will die without trees.

Forests also serve as one of the largest natural “carbon sinks.” They play a significant role in the earth’s natural carbon cycle, a cycle that has been disrupted by human intervention.

In 1620, half of U.S. land was forested. By 1862, half of that forest had been cut down. Ninety-five percent of all old growth U.S. forests have been timbered. Even eastern U.S. forests used to have trees as big as Sequoias. Though some recovery is in progress, it will take many more years for the forests to fully recover.

In his Friends of White’s Woods Sept. 25 webinar, Michael Kellett, executive director of RESTORE: The North Woods, explained that we need to protect trees. Only 12% of U.S. forests and 2.5% of Pennsylvania forests are permanently protected.

Some biologists argue that we should leave 50% of our planet’s land in a natural state in order for humans to be able to survive. Experts are urging that we move to protect 30% of the land in the U.S. by 2030, because humans, animals, and plants need trees to survive.

Kellett’s proposal: triple the number of national parks by 2030. These parks would protect 21% of U.S. land (8.5% in PA), be established on land already owned by the federal government, and significantly promote the economies of many rural areas, particularly in the eastern U.S. where very few national parks are now located. Our national forests can become national parks!

We do need timber. But we don’t need timber from public land. Creating more national parks will help protect us all.

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