

Conversion of Natural Forests to Plantations

Excerpts from "A Review of the American Forest & Paper Association's Sustainable Forestry Initiative," American Lands Alliance, November, 2003.

A large portion of SFI companies' own lands in the U.S. have been converted to ecologically simplified plantations. Ongoing conversion continues to be a problem in some parts of the U.S., especially the South. Between 1953 and 1999, pine plantations in the South expanded to 32 million acres, an increase of 1,600%.ⁱ During the last two decades, 75% of the region's pine plantations were established at the expense of native forests and wetlands.ⁱⁱ On the Southern half of Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau, plantations increased by 101% between 1981 and 2000, with the conversion rate increasing, rather than decreasing, during recent years.ⁱⁱⁱ By 2040, plantations are projected to comprise 25% of the South's forests.^{iv}

Plantations are often established on SFI companies' own lands, or on other forests logged to feed SFI mills.

The Bowater company, for example, has continued converting native hardwoods to loblolly pine plantations on the Tennessee Cumberland Plateau in recent years, and continues to purchase logs from the conversion of other landowners' forests.^v

In 1999, Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) acknowledged plans to convert 70% of its 1.4 million acres of California forests to even-aged, short-rotation pine plantations largely lacking oaks, firs, and other native species.^{vi} This conversion is associated with a sharp rise in clearcutting on SPI lands in the Sierra Nevada region, losses of habitat for California spotted owls and other imperiled species, intensive chemical applications, and other harmful practices. According to the California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection (CDF), SPI's annual clearcutting increased from 943 acres to 23,823 acres between 1992 and 1999 – an increase of 2,246%.^{vii}

Even in the Pacific Northwest and other parts of the U.S. where most industry lands have already been converted to tree farms, companies are converting their last remaining wild forests. Plum Creek Timber, for example, is logging late successional forests and other previously unlogged forests on its lands in the Carbon River, Green River, Little Naches, and Upper Yakima watersheds in Washington.^{viii}

Conversion is also a serious problem in wild, unlogged forests in the tropics and temperate forest regions outside the U.S. Conversion continues to be a significant problem in British Columbia and Alberta, for example, including in forests being logged by SFI companies.^{ix}

ⁱ USDA Forest Service. 2001. Southern Forest Resource Assessment.

ⁱⁱ USDA Forest Service. 2001. Southern Forest Resource Assessment.

ⁱⁱⁱ 14.4% (or 65,660 acres) of native forests on the Southern half of Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau were converted between 1981 and 2000, with the rate of conversion being twice as high between 1997 and 2000 than 1981 and 1997. The acreage change for plantations was presumably higher than the change for native forests due to the additional establishment of plantations on lands already logged in 1981. (Evans, J., N. Pelkey, & D. Haskell. 2002. An Assessment of Forest Change on the Cumberland Plateau in Southern Tennessee. Small Area Assessment Forestry Demonstration Project for the Southern Forest Resource Assessment. March, 2002. Landscape Analysis Laboratory, University of the South, Sewanee, TN.)

^{iv} USDA Forest Service. 2001. Southern Forest Resource Assessment.

^v Doug Murray & Cielo Sand, Tennessee ForestWatch, LaFollette, TN, personal communication, June, 2003.

^{vi} Lippe, T., & M. Graf. 2001. Opening Brief Filed in the California Superior Court, Nevada County, on Behalf of Petitioner, Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch vs. California Dept. Forestry & Fire Protection and Sierra Pacific Industries. October 12, 2001. Law Offices of Thomas Lippe, San Francisco, CA.

^{vii} Shih, T. 2000. Forest Practice by Sierra Pacific Industries in California from 1982 to 1999. California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection, Sacramento, CA. This increase far exceeds increases in SPI's land holdings, which have increased by only roughly 200% during comparable periods. (Associated Press, "Sierra Clearcutting on Rise," May 4, 2000.)

^{viii} Charlie Raines, Cascade Checkerboard Project, Seattle, WA, personal communication, May, 2003.

^{ix} Tan, A. 2003. On the Ground: Forest Certification: Green Stamp of Approval or Rubber Stamp of Destruction? Commissioned by ForestEthics, Greenpeace, & Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter. Available at www.goodwoodwatch.org.