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May the Forest Be With You

A playoff on the famous line from the Star Wars cinematic series, the phrase “May the forest be with you” is surprisingly relevant in Florida. While some may think of forests only as the pretty green spaces lining the roadways between one place and another, our state’s working forests have an amazing impact on all areas of our lives.

Florida’s forests are with you on an economic level. A recent study by the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences places the forest industry’s economic impact upwards of \$25 billion. In addition to helping create a strong and stable economy, revenues from working forests also contribute \$880 million in state and local taxes.

Running neck and neck with horticulture as the state’s top agricultural commodity, the forest industry provides jobs for more than 124,000 people. Those jobs are not limited to North Florida as one might assume. A list of the top ten counties in regards to industry employment includes Miami-Dade, Polk, Hillsborough and Broward Counties, illustrating forestry’s statewide importance.

Forests are, of course, also with you on an environmental level. Forests filter our air and water and aid with carbon sequestration. They provide both habitat for our state’s astounding array of flora and fauna and beautiful places for people to play and relax.

Forests are also with us in their role in the manufacturing of more than 5,000 items that are part of our daily lives. Forest resources are used to make everything from the obvious (paper, furniture, tissues) to the unexpected (cancer treatments, cell phone screens, ice cream, cosmetics).

The forests are with you today, but whether they are with you in the future is in your hands. Healthy markets for forest resources are vital to the sustainability of Florida’s forests. Without the ability to continue the cycle of planting and harvesting, few landowners can afford to keep their woodlands forested.

So print your emails (and everything else). Request paper bags at the grocery store. Replace that cracked cell phone screen. Proudly support the sustainable use of forest products in every way that you can.

And may the forest be with you always.

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