



## Working Forests Work

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Good morning/afternoon/evening! I am excited to be here with you today to talk about Working Forests! October 18-24 is Working Forests Awareness Week in Florida, so this is the perfect time to talk about an industry that is so important to us, our area/state, our environment and our future.

To begin, I'd like to tell you a little about myself so you can have a better understanding of why I am so passionate about working forests... (insert appropriate info)

Now let's talk a little about Florida's forests.

There are 17.3 million acres of forests in Florida. Most of those are in the north and central parts of the state. Forest ownership breaks down into:

- 66% Private
- 29% Public
- 5% Industry

The forest industry's economic impact on the state is a significant \$16.1 billion. It employs almost 78,000 of your friends, family and fellow Floridians. And more than 5000 items are made from products that come from Florida's working forests.

Working forests? What is a working forest? Why should a forest have to work? Why can't it just lie around and look pretty? Some days I admit I would like to try that, but neither the forest nor I can do that if we're going to live up to our best potential.

Living up to its best potential requires proper management, which we will go into later, and proper management requires money. Few landowners have the financial resources to manage their land properly without it producing income in some way.

In short, forests, like us, have to earn their keep if they're going to survive.

How do forests work? The same way that people do – they produce something that has economic value. So the short definition of a working forest is a forest that produces something of economic value.

The money that landowners get for their timber pays for the necessary land management and for taxes, which is important to the landowner. That money also allows the landowner to keep the land forested, which is important to the rest of the world. People might not care about a landowner's management expenses or taxes, but they do care if the land is converted to another use, like a neighborhood or a strip mall.

There are many reasons that people care when forestland is lost. To touch on just a few of them:

- **Green space/natural beauty.**

- **Habitat for wildlife.** Florida has an amazing array of wildlife, many of which make their homes in our forests.
- **Clean air.** As you probably remember from elementary school science, trees and plants absorb carbon dioxide from the air and replace it with oxygen.
- **Clean water.** Forests provide natural filtering and storage for water. As I'm sure everyone in this room is aware, sound water management is a big need for Florida today, and it's going to get bigger. Florida's forests can play an important part in the solution to our water quantity and water quality struggles.

A 2015 study by the University of Florida shows that collectively these natural ecosystem services would cost thousands of dollars to replicate if lost. As much as \$5000 per acre over the course of a growing cycle!

People often mistakenly believe that the best thing that could happen to a forest would be to return to its totally natural state. False.

The best thing that can happen to a forest is proper management. That's where working forests come in.

In addition to the inherent benefits of forestland, owners of working forests also protect their land from invasive species, which are nonnative plants and animals that can take over an ecosystem. One example of this is Cogongrass. This unwelcome visitor is on the global Top 10 List of bad weeds. It affects pine productivity and survival, destroys wildlife habitat by pure domination and makes wild fires worse by literally adding fuel to the fire.

Forestland owners also manage against devastating wild fires. With apologies to Smokey Bear, not all forest fires need to be prevented. Prescribed burns are actually a very effective weapon in the war against wild fire. The practice is permitted by the Florida Forest Service and has many benefits.

People in forestry work very hard to stay up to date with the latest science and management techniques. In fact, the forest industry blazed the trail in the development of Best Management Practices -- not only in Florida but in the entire South. Forestry in Florida first developed BMPs regarding water and then, most recently, for wildlife.

Sustainability is also an important keystone for our industry. We take trees out of the ground; we put more trees back in the ground. That goes hand in hand with our efforts in reforestation, finding ways to incentivize landowners to continue planting trees instead of houses or more profitable row crops.

There are two major forest certification programs in Florida to help landowners with sustainability issues: Tree Farm and the Florida Sustainable Forestry Initiative-State Implementation Committee.

So now that you are convinced that working forests work, you're probably wondering how you can support working forests.

First and foremost, you can support working forests by buying items made with forest products. That is amazingly easy to do, because there are more than 5000 products made from Goods from the Woods.

Having a good hair day? Thank a working forest! Forest products are used in shampoo, conditioner, styling products and hairspray.

Recovering from a cold, headache or other ailment? Thank a working forest! Forest products are used in the coatings of pills and other pharmaceuticals, as well as in some medicines, including cancer treatments.

Feel like playing sports? Thank a working forest ! Baseball bats, football helmets, and skateboards all include goods from the woods.

The list goes on ... cell phone screens ... toilet tissue ... cosmetics... food (ice cream!) ... bandages.... diapers... crayons ... paints ... laundry detergent ... car tires ... root beer! You would be amazed if you realized how many times in your day you come in contact with some form of forest products. Buy them all! Keep the market for trees strong so we don't lose forestland to other uses! Your best bet is to use products from American forests that practice sustainable forestry management.

You can also help by supporting legislation that supports working forests. One example is Greenbelt, which is a special, lower tax assessment for agricultural properties than developed properties have to pay. It makes sense – pine trees don't go to school, call the police or need hospitals. Studies in several counties across the state have shown that even with the lower Greenbelt rate, ag properties only use a fraction of the tax money paid on them for services.

Finally, the best way to support working forests is to educate others..... or at least challenge the mis-information that's out there. And there is an enormous amount of misinformation out there. People simply do not realize how very well working forests work on so many levels.

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you a few things about our under-recognized and under-appreciated working forests.

Thank you for your time and your attention.

*(Slides about FFA are also included for your convenience)*