

LETTERS

Forests: Friend, Not Foe, in Climate Change

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To the Editor:

Re “Forests Won’t Save Us From Climate Change,” by David Wallace-Wells (Opinion, Sept. 9):

This article is an example of misleading messaging that distorts complex issues into something overly simplistic and provocative. Forests are critical in the fight against climate change!

Despite major investments in carbon capture technologies, vast tracts of trees remain the only effective, scalable way to capture and store massive amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Blaming forests for the carbon released from wildfires is like blaming homeowners for the 2007 real estate crisis.

Trees “breathe in” carbon dioxide and provide us oxygen in return, all while storing carbon in their tissues. Enemies? Hardly. We cannot survive without them. Now they are among the frontline victims of climate change, and it’s up to us to take care of *them*.

Excellent examples lie to the north, where Indigenous governments and organizations across the Boreal Forest of Canada are advancing the world’s most significant conservation proposals for their traditional territories.

Let’s move forward with real solutions rather than foster confusion that slows progress in the fight against climate change.

Jeff Wells

Gardiner, Maine

The writer is vice president for boreal conservation at the National Audubon Society.

To the Editor:

“Forests Won’t Save Us From Climate Change” argues that, because of climate-change-driven wildfires, forests are making the climate crisis worse, not better. But in many parts of the world, including the eastern United States, wildfires are not the biggest threat to carbon-sinking forests — logging is. As the author notes, logging releases much of the carbon stored in forests, carbon that will not be recaptured for decades or centuries at best.

Yet agencies like the U.S. Forest Service routinely target carbon-rich forests for timber projects. In North Carolina, for example, the agency recently announced plans to more than quadruple the amount of logging in the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests without any provision to spare our oldest, healthiest and most carbon-dense forests.

Forests are and can continue to be an essential and cost-effective climate solution. But for these incredible landscapes to live up to their climate potential, we must condemn and push back on reckless policies that put mature and old-growth forests — and the centuries’ worth of carbon that they store — on the chopping block.

Sam Evans

Asheville, N.C.

The writer is a senior attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center and leader of its National Forests and Parks Program.

To the Editor:

Intensive industrial logging and plantation forestry have led to many of our forests emitting more carbon than they store. However, David Wallace-Wells missed a hopeful development: the growing number of landowners opting for legal agreements that permanently conserve their carbon-rich forests through sustainable management while retaining private ownership.

These agreements, working forest conservation easements, offer an incentive for landowners to become allies in the climate battle. They allow owners to continue producing various forest products while focusing management on more climate-resilient conditions, ensuring that their lands remain thriving, biodiverse forests forever.

Unlike extensive tree planting initiatives, which require decades of careful management to transform into carbon-absorbing forests, a working forest can achieve significant carbon sequestration and climate resilience gains immediately.

Given that nearly 60 percent of U.S. forests are privately owned, these easements are a proven tool to ensure that forests remain our “climate friend.”

Laurie Wayburn

San Francisco

The writer is co-founder and president of Pacific Forest Trust.