



HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Longleaf Pine Trees Give Us More than Just Wood

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The longleaf pine tree has deep connections with the history and life of the eastern part of America.

Forests of these trees once covered two-thirds of the southeastern United States. About 95 percent of those forests were lost in the past 100 years. Many of the forests were cut for their wood, but now they are returning, with the help of government programs that build ties with private landowners.

Strong, long-lasting wood

The wood of the tree is very strong. Most buildings built in the southern U.S. from the 1800s contained longleaf pine wood. Today, after a building made with longleaf pine is no longer wanted, people are re-using the wood because it is still good and resists water and insect damage.

The longleaf pine also captures carbon dioxide in the air. It stores the substance in its wood. So, the tree is valuable to the environment as a way to store carbon.

A place for birds and animals

In addition, the pine forests are places for animals to live. The U.S. government has several programs to protect and expand longleaf pine forests. One is the Safe Harbor Program. It uses voluntary agreements with private landowners to help endangered animals. One such agreement protects the red-cockaded woodpecker and also lets landowners use their land, as long as the birds and other related animals can safely live on it.

Now, farmers and landowners in the Southeastern U.S. are growing new longleaf pine trees. Instead of cutting the trees to use as building materials, they are finding ways to make money from the forest of living trees. One way to get income is by selling the leaves, or **needles**, of the trees as a ground cover.

Many uses for the forest

Farmers can gather the pine straw by hand or with use of a machine. Pine straw can be used instead of wood pieces or **bark** as a ground cover. It lasts a long time, is light weight and stays in place because the needles connect to each other. The straw is high in nitrogen, a nutrient that helps plants grow. And, it does not attract harmful insects!

Native American tribes, such as the Choctaw and Cherokee nations in Louisiana, make coiled baskets from the long needles of the longleaf pine. A basket made of the pine needles by Native American artists can sell for as much as \$750.

Another way forests can produce income is to sell hunting rights. Wild boars – a kind of pig – live in some forests. Their population has been growing out of control in recent years. The animals can damage the young longleaf pine trees, so landowners want to reduce their numbers. Hunting boar is a popular sport in the southern U.S. and the right to hunt on land can cost from \$200 to \$1,000 a day.

The Kisatchie National Forest in west central Louisiana contains most of the remaining longleaf pines in that state. In the past, Native Americans burned the forest every two to four years, if lightning did not cause fires naturally. Fire helps the young pine trees to grow by clearing away the other plants on the floor of the forest. Recent debate has centered on the value of letting some parts of the forests burn for this purpose.

I'm Jill Robbins.

Jill Robbins wrote this story for VOA Learning English. Mario Ritter, Jr. was the editor.

Words in This Story

needle – *n.* a long, thin leaf of a pine tree

bark - *n.* the outer covering of a tree

pest - *n.* an animal or insect that causes problems for people especially by damaging crops

bale - *n.* a large amount of a material (such as hay or wool) that is pressed together tightly and often tied or wrapped

What do you think of the longleaf pine tree? Is there a similar tree where you live? We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments Section.
