

Change of Forest Ecosystem in the Long Sweep of History: An Economic Perspective (13)

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Forest ecosystem is one of the most important ecosystems on the earth. Forest ecosystem is not only a productive system that provide wood and forest-related goods and services, but also supporting system that maintain the integrity of the earth, including water and atmosphere balance. Probably one of the biggest impact on the earth by human beings in history is reflected on the change in forest ecosystem. Expansion or contraction of forest ecosystem on the earth has been driven by the changes in relative scarcity of the products and services from the lands. For a long history worldwide, food has been relatively scarcer than wood, so forests have been largely changed into agricultural uses. However, due to the dramatic decrease of forests in the world during the last century, wood products as well as forest ecological services are becoming relatively scarcer than food and therefore many agricultural lands have been converted back into forestlands. Meanwhile, plantations have replaced natural forests as a major timber supply in most countries. This paper first briefly explains the evolution of forest land use/cover from economics perspective, then uses land use changes in the Europe, U.S.A, New Zealand, China as examples to support our argument. Finally a perspective of the future forestland change and forest ecosystem is presented.