IMPACT OF U.S. FOREST PRODUCTS CONSUMPTION, IMPORTS, AND EXPORTS ON FOREIGN TIMBER HARVESTS

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ABSTRACT. The U.S. has historically been a net importer of wood and paper products. During the 1990's, the U.S. trade deficit widened, implying an increasing U.S. impact on timber harvests in foreign supply regions. An analysis was made of historical and projected trends in U.S. consumption and trade in terms of the roundwood volume required to make products consumed and traded. Results show that historically, the U.S. has increased its net imports and that the estimated harvest of roundwood overseas to make imports to the U.S. has increased faster than the estimated reductions in overseas harvest due to exports of U.S. products overseas. However, Draft projections from the USDA Forest Service RPA Timber Assessment indicate net imports may slowly decrease and level off after 2010 and remain level through 2050. Likewise, the net roundwood harvest overseas associated with our net imports may decrease and remain stable through 2050.

KEY WORDS. international trade, trade impacts, roundwood equivalent volume, timber harvests

BACKGROUND

Draft projections from the USDA Forest Service RPA Timber Assessment indicate the net roundwood harvest overseas associated with our net imports may decrease and remain stable through 2050. This trend is due to expected future increases in the supply of softwood timber in the U.S. South, making U.S. domestic production of softwood timber products more competitive. As a result, an increasing share of U.S. consumption is expected to come from domestic sources rather than imports. In addition there will be continued increases in U.S. exports of recovered paper for recycling, which will tend to reduce future foreign timber harvests.

This analysis is limited and further research is needed to confirm these estimates. The analysis assumes that imports to the U.S. take the same roundwood to make as making the same products in the U.S. Likewise it is assumed that our exports offset as much harvest overseas as they would take to make in the U.S. If our trading partners are improving production efficiency faster than the U.S. then our imports would be causing relatively less harvest overseas than we estimate and our exports would be saving relatively less harvest overseas than we estimate. Further analysis is needed to see if these trends would be offsetting or if they may tend to increase or decrease our impact on harvesting overseas.

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Washington, DC • November 16–20, 2000