If you have even a passing interest in things environmental, and you keep yourself relatively well-informed, then no doubt you saw Justin Gillis' superb page one NYT story on Saturday, about the decline (and at times possible increase) of forests; how forests provide critical carbon sinks to mitigate climate change; and how that climate change is itself threatening the forests that mitigate it (aka negative feedback loop, vicious circle, etc. etc.). As they say, read the whole thing.

One might think that if forests are so valuable, and they are diminishing, then one key strategy would be to try to increase their footprint. Gillis casts doubt on this:

> Forests are re-growing on abandoned agricultural land across vast reaches of Europe and Russia. China, trying to slow the advance of a desert, has planted nearly 100 million acres of trees, and those forests, too, are absorbing carbon.
>
> But, as a strategy for managing carbon emissions, these recovering forests have one big limitation: the planet simply does not have room for many more of them. To expand them significantly would require taking more farmland out of production, an unlikely prospect in a world where food demand and prices are rising.
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> "We're basically running out of land," Dr. Kurz said.

Really? I'm not sure I buy it, for a couple of reasons.

First, to the extent that climate change continues (which of course it will), that means that some areas not previously amenable to forestry might become more so. Think the Yukon Territory, for instance. Okay: of course in Canada, the boreal forest covers large parts of the northern stretches of the country, but so does ice and snow. More temperate climates might make for greater and different kinds of forests. This does not mean that everything will be hunky-dory: far, far from it. But it does say that in the same

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way that there will be negative feedbacks from climate change, there will be some positive feedbacks. The current science indicates that the negatives will far outweigh the positives, but if so, all the more reason why we need to get as much mitigation mileage as we can out of the positives.

Second, using food prices as the justification for the inability to forest more of the earth's surface seems to me to be a red herring. Food prices are going up for many reasons, but surely one of the reasons is the massive subsidies for ethanol and other inefficient biofuels. If we got rid of those subsidies, we could take half of that land and grow crops for food, and the other half for forests. The only loser would be parasites like Archer Daniels Midland. Ditto here in California, where there is no ecological justification for growing water-thirsty crops like alfalfa and rice. Put another way, if we are indeed "running out of room," it is only because we have chosen to do so. This is choice, not inevitability.

Of course, all of this is yet one more reason to make sure that all the wood products you buy are either post-consumer content or certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (and accept no substitute certifications!). But let us not give up on finding creative solutions to deforestation before we have even tried them.