Timber Supply

South Carolina has an abundant supply of timber. Conner et al. (2009) reported that in 2006 the total live volume on timberland in South Carolina was 21.5 billion cubic feet. This is the highest volume ever reported in the state. All live volume was split almost evenly between softwoods and hardwoods. The loblolly-shortleaf pine species group accounted for 83 percent of all live softwood volume.

South Carolina's supply of timber is still increasing. Net growth of all live softwood trees averaged 817.0 million cubic feet per year between 2002 and 2006. Softwood removals during that same period averaged only 596.1 million cubic feet per year. Hardwoods during the same period averaged 387.3 million cubic feet per year. This growth was substantially more than the average hardwood removal of 217.7 million cubic feet per year reported for the period (Conner et al. 2009).

While the growth/drain ratio for South Carolina bodes well for the near term, a survey of forest tree nurseries indicates a decline in the artificial regeneration of pine in the state (see Figure xx below).

Figure xx: Acres of tree planting in South Carolina

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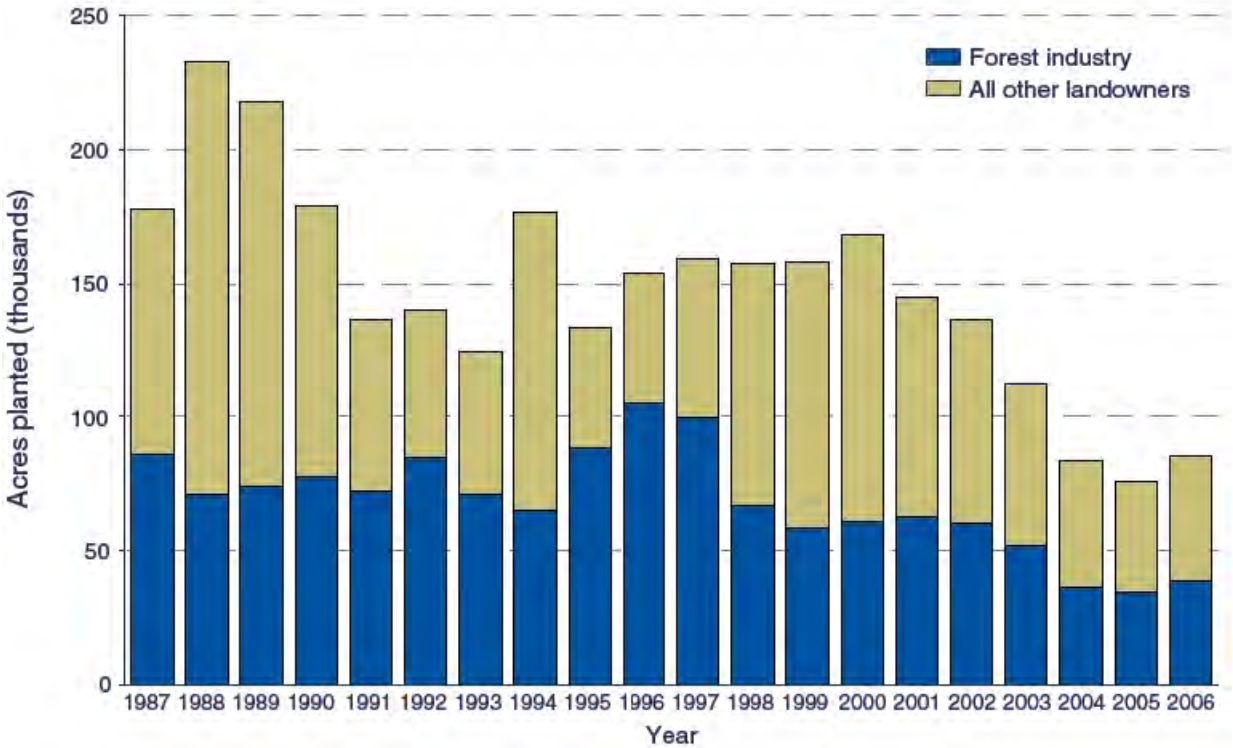

The decline in tree planting over the past six years has been abrupt, decreasing from 168,000 acres in 2000 to approximately half that acreage in 2006. Continued reductions in tree planting throw into question the abundance of the state's future timber supply, making it difficult to maintain the pine resources at their current levels and causing negative consequences for South Carolina's forest industries.

Another issue that may affect the availability of timber for use by the forest products industry is the capacity of harvesting contractors. Current studies have shown that logging capacity has fallen to a level that will not be able to sustain manufacturing demands if they return to pre-recession levels (Lewis 2009). With the tightening of credit, many loggers have not been able to stay in business. In addition, lower market demand for finished goods coupled with landowners pulling stumpage off the market due to falling prices has resulted in inadequate markets to deliver wood and insufficient stumpage to harvest (WSRI 2008).