

Young Peoples Guide to Mountaintop Forests

Mountain forests are full of life. Birds of every description fly over them. The trees and forest plants are home to some of those birds and lots of other animals. Trees also provide food and shelter for many birds and animals.



Our great rivers begin their lives in our mountain forests. Rainfall is greatest on our Allegheny Mountain ridges. Water is a powerful force. Heavy rain can wash away the soil on the forest floor, but trees and other plants use their leaves and branches to break big raindrops into little ones which fall gently to the ground where they can be absorbed.



Tree leaves protect the soil

Leaves shade the forest and help keep the temperature cool which is good for the birds and animals as well as humans who live nearby.



Trees use carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to photosynthesize and produce oxygen. The birds, animals and we humans must have oxygen to make the air we breathe. The trees hold on to that carbon dioxide while they are alive. This is called sequestration. Trees put some water back into the air. That helps form new clouds that can create rain. Without rain, the land we live on could become a desert.



Glossary

of Big Words found on this page:

absorb - to soak up like a sponge soaks up water

atmosphere - the envelope of gas that surrounds our earth

carbon dioxide - a gas we breathe out which is also produced by burning things

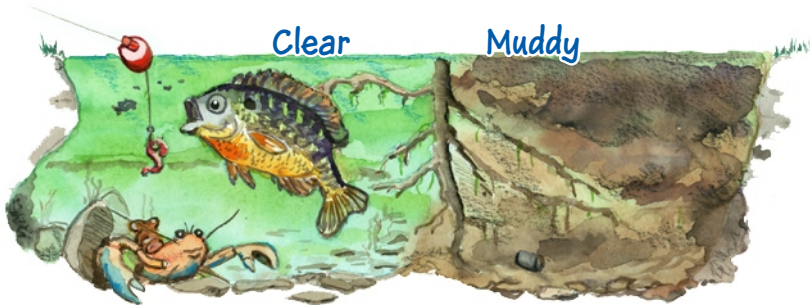
oxygen - a common gas in the air we breathe that is essential to life

photosynthesize - a process where plants take in carbon dioxide and water and release oxygen into the air

soil - the top surface of the earth which supports plants and trees

When mountain forests are removed, birds' and animals' homes are destroyed. Removing trees is called deforestation. Replacing forests with roads and grassy shoulders is called habitat fragmentation. Some song birds need to live deep in the forest. New clearings make it easier for predatory animals to find their nests and homes.

When trees are removed, there are no leaves and branches to break up rain drops; water flows rapidly across the ground's surface, flooding little creeks and brooks and causing erosion farther downstream increasing muddy sedimentation. Sedimentation can destroy the underwater homes of animals and fish who live in and under the water.



Deforestation allows the sun's rays to heat up the land, air and water. Some aquatic creatures must have cool water to live in. Humans like to be cool in hot weather too. Some power plants that generate electricity to run our air conditioners also release carbon dioxide into the air. When the trees have been cut down, they can't help cool the forest air or sequester carbon dioxide.



As you can see, a mountain forest is something to be protected as much as a life, a home and the air we breathe.

Glossary of Big Words found on this page:

- aquatic** - growing or living in or on water
- deforestation** - clearing land by removing trees and shrubs
- erosion** - wearing away over time by water
- habitat** - a place where plants and animals are at home
- fragmentation** - breaking into small parts
- predatory** - something that lives by capturing and feeding on other animals
- sedimentation** - something that has settled to the bottom of a liquid
- sequestration** - separated and held aside