

WOOD PELLET INDUSTRY HARMS BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN IN THE U.S. SOUTHEAST



Wood pellet cut on the Roanoke River, North Carolina

Operation of the wood pellet industry in the southeastern United States contributes to irrecoverable loss of ecologically valuable forest ecosystems and further imperils many bird species that depend on those forests, while at the same time contributing to climate change.



Prothonotary Warbler

The rapidly expanding wood pellet export industry in the southeastern United States is contributing to steep declines in the area's bird populations by degrading the native forests on which birds depend.

The vast majority of wood pellets are made from living trees, which are often harvested by clear felling, before being ground into chips, dried, and formed into pellets. Wood pellets are transported to ports where they are shipped to Europe to be burned instead of coal to produce energy. Flawed European climate policies consider biomass energy to be "carbon neutral" when, in fact, burning wood pellets instead of coal actually puts more carbon into the atmosphere per unit of energy produced. The carbon debt created by harvesting whole trees will exist for 40 to 100 years, resulting in more, not less, carbon in the atmosphere for decades to come. This destructive industry is propped up by billions of dollars annually in UK and EU government subsidies.

Nearly all of the sourcing of wood pellets in the United States for export is from the North American Coastal Plain, the flat coastal region that stretches from Virginia to Texas. This region provides access to forests and ports, and essentially no regulation of forest harvest activities. The North American Coastal Plain is one of only two world biodiversity hotspots in the United States. It was designated a biodiversity hotspot in 2016 because of its high species richness, uniqueness, endemism, and because less than 30% of its native vegetation remains. The world's 36 biodiversity hotspots cover 2.4% of Earth's surface but support half the world's plant species and 43% of the world's bird, mammal, reptile, and amphibian species as endemics. In a word, these areas are irreplaceable.

At-Risk Bird Species Harmed by Pellet Harvesting



Cerulean Warbler



Brown-headed Nuthatch



Bachman's Sparrow



Black-throated Green Warbler



Yellow-billed Cuckoo



Painted Bunting



Swallow-tailed Kite



Red-headed Woodpecker



Prairie Warbler



Wood Thrush



Wood Stork



Kentucky Warbler

- Northern Bobwhite ^{1, 2}
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo ²
- Chuck-will's-widow ^{1, 2, 3}
- Eastern Whip-poor-will ^{1, 2, 3, 4}
- Chimney Swift ^{1, 2}
- Swallow-tailed Kite ^{3, 5}
- American Woodcock ^{4, 5}
- Bald Eagle ^{3, 5}
- Red-headed Woodpecker ^{2, 3, 4}
- Red-cockaded Woodpecker ^{1, 2, 4, 6}
- Wood Stork ^{5, 6}
- Ivory-billed Woodpecker ^{1, 2, 4, 7}
- American Kestrel ³
- Brown-headed Nuthatch ³
- Wood Thrush ^{2, 3, 4, 5}
- Bachman's Sparrow ^{1, 2, 3, 4}
- Rusty Blackbird ^{1, 2, 3}
- Bachman's Warbler ^{1, 2, 4, 7}
- Blue-winged Warbler ³
- Prothonotary Warbler ^{2, 3, 4, 5}
- Swainson's Warbler ³
- Kentucky Warbler ^{2, 3, 4}
- Cerulean Warbler ^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}
- Prairie Warbler ^{2, 3, 4}
- Black-throated Green Warbler ^{2, 3}
- Painted Bunting ³

¹ IUCN Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, or Near Threatened.
² Partners in Flight, North American Landbird Conservation Plan (Species of Continental Concern/Species of Continental Importance) (2016).
³ US Fish & Wildlife Service, Birds of Conservation Concern (Southeastern Coastal Plain Region) (2008).
⁴ American Bird Conservancy WatchList (2016).
⁵ National Audubon Society WatchList.
⁶ Federal Endangered or Threatened.
⁷ Federal Endangered, possibly extinct.

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Use our hashtags **#birdersagainstbiomass** and **#cutcarbonnotforests** to share the news of biomass and its impacts on birds.

Bottomland hardwood forest along the Roanoke River, North Carolina

CUT CARBON
NOT FORESTS



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