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East Texas, nation’s ‘wood basket,’ prepares to rise

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Photos by Mark Mulligan

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/article/East-Texas-nation-s-wood-basket-13707045.php>

LUFKIN, TEXAS — Tall pines blanket much of East Texas. Amid them, hunters stalk the deer, hogs and fowl that flit between the trees. The forests cover more than 75 percent of Hardin, Tyler, Polk, Jasper, Newton and Marion counties and take up more than half the land in two dozen more.

And if you look closely, at just the right angle, the apparent wilderness resolves into perfect rows, like a field of corn.

The region’s native trees have been harnessed into what’s known as the “wood basket” of the nation by foresters such as Rob Hughes, president of the Texas Forestry Association. More than 7 billion trees are being grown for harvest in East Texas, mostly on private land. On a recent Monday, Hughes drove through Lufkin, a city of 36,000, pointing out tree farms of various ages and the logging trucks hauling lumber down the other side of the road.

Mostly used until now to frame single-family home and for everyday products such as paper and furniture, the southern yellow pine grown along the Gulf Coast could soon be destined for structures unlike anything United States has ever seen: wooden high-rises 18 stories tall.

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