

Indicator 2.10:

U.S. Forest Sustainability Indicators <https://www.fs.fed.us/research/sustain/>

Area and Percent of Forest Land and Net Area of Forest Land Available for Wood Production

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What is the indicator and why is it important?

The information provided by this indicator enables calculation of wood production capacity of existing forests and shows how much forest is potentially available for wood production, compared with total forest area. The availability and capability of forest land to provide desired goods and services is a critical indication of how to balance potential end uses of forest ecosystems. The Nation's diverse forest owners have diverse management objectives and planning guidelines spanning multiple time scales, making it difficult to summarize the area of forest available for wood production at a given point in time, much less consistently over time. Within the context of this report, forest available for wood production is defined as forest land not precluded by law or regulation from commercial harvesting of trees (hereafter, timberland). In practice, the area of timberland at any given time will always be a value less than total forest land. Determining the availability of timberland depends on the ownership mix and management constraints in place at the time of analysis. This adjustment affects all other indicators in criterion 2. This indicator defines forest differently from the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. This indicator uses an internationally accepted definition that maintains an "in-situ" height growth requirement. Thus, the total forest area given in this report may differ from FIA reports.¹

What does the indicator show?

Forest area in the United States has plateaued following modest increases over the last 5 decades or more (see indicator 1.01). As of 2017, 766 million acres were classified as forests in the United States, with an additional 57 million acres classified as woodlands. About 67 percent (514 million acres) of forest land in the United States is considered available for timber production.

A little over half of the Nation's forest land (55 percent) is in the East and most of that area is considered available for timber production (fig. 10-1). In contrast, only 41 percent of forest in the West is available for timber production.

The area of forest available for timber production is, in large part, a reflection of land ownership patterns in the United States. Fifty-six percent of all forest land in the United States is privately owned, and 81 percent of that privately owned forest is classified as timberland. In contrast, of the 322 million acres of public forest land in the United States, only 48 percent is available for timber production. Thus, only 30 percent of all timberland is publicly owned, while 70 percent is privately owned, nationwide.

Privately owned timberland is concentrated in the East, while publicly owned land occupies more area in the West and in Alaska (fig. 10-2). In the North, private ownerships comprise 78 percent of timberland, while 88 percent

¹The definition used in this report for forest land is reserved for land with 10 percent or more tree cover, where trees are woody plants with a more or less central stem capable of achieving a height of 16.4 feet (5 meters) at maturity in situ. Users who wish to include "woodlands" or "other wooded land" in their estimates of forest area may refer to the FIA Database.

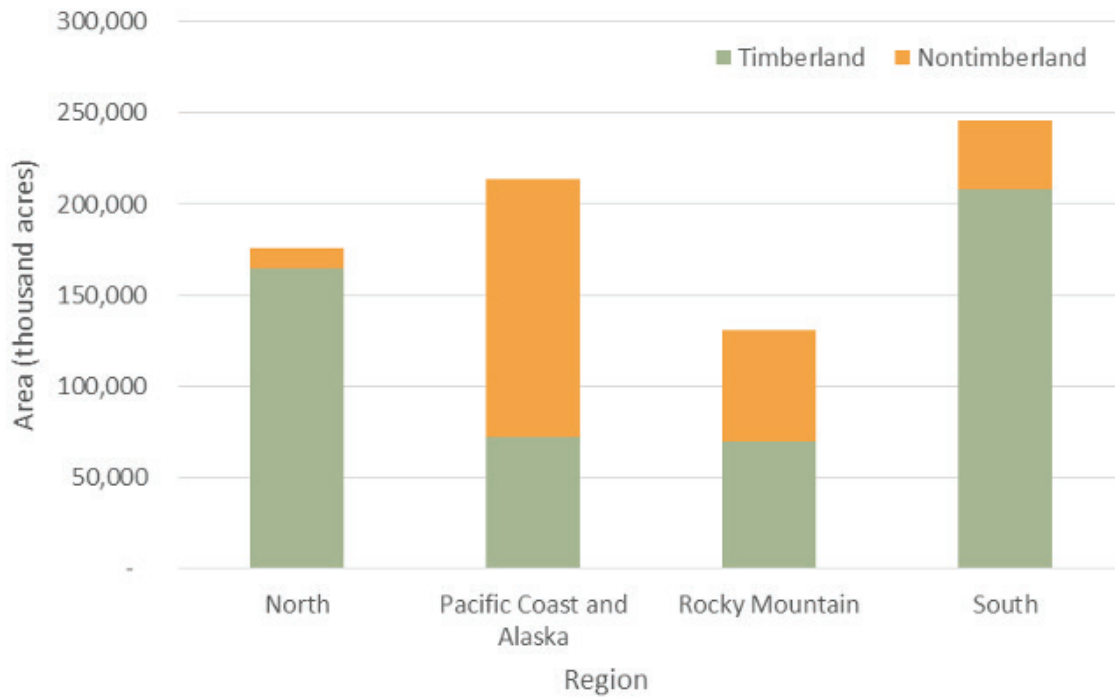


Figure 10-1—Area of U.S. timberland and nontimberland by region, 2017 (Source: Oswalt et al. 2019).

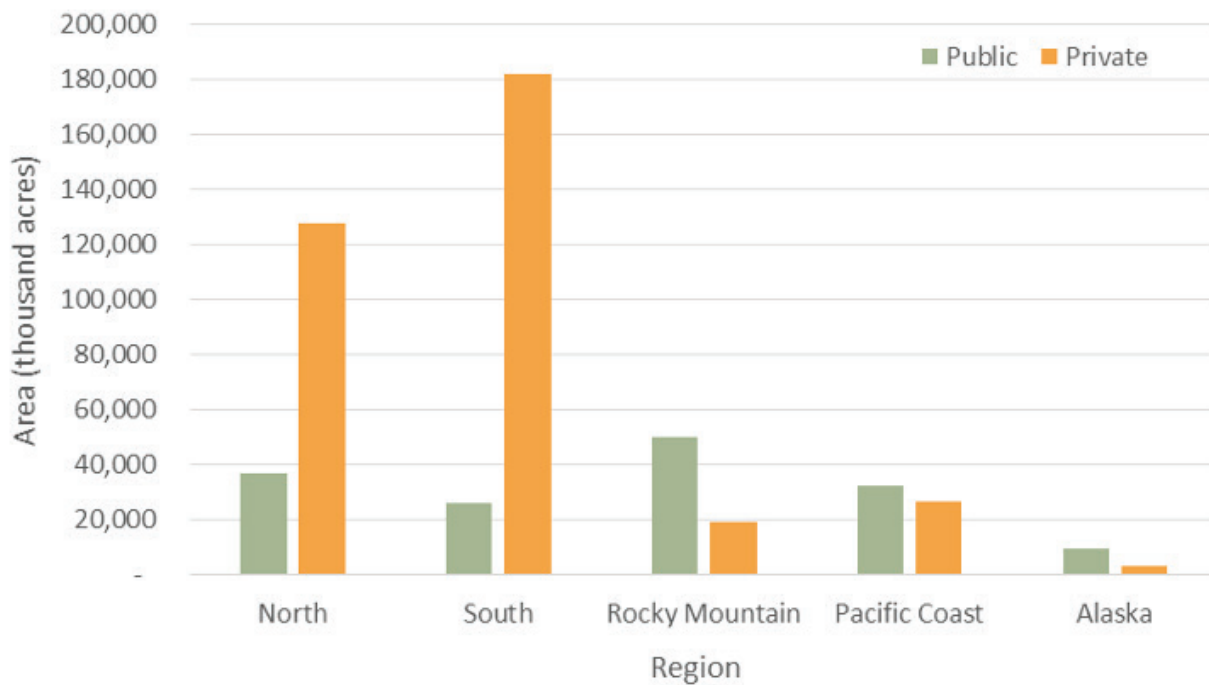


Figure 10-2—Area of U.S. timberland by ownership category and region, 2017 (Source: Oswalt et al. 2019).

of timberland in the South is privately owned. This is in strong contrast to the 28 percent of privately owned timberland in the Rocky Mountain Region, 45 percent on the Pacific Coast, and 25 percent in Alaska.

The area of planted versus natural timberland also reflects regional patterns. Nationally, about 13 percent of the current timberland base originated from planted stock. The South and the Pacific Coast have the highest regional rates of planting, at 22 and 20 percent respectively, while the North, Rocky Mountains, and Alaska have negligible planting rates (fig. 10-3). Most planting occurs in softwood forest types, particularly short-rotation species like loblolly pine.

What has changed since 2015?

Timberland in the United States has remained stable since 2015. Forest land appears to have plateaued rather than continuing the upward trajectory noted in 2015 and in the 2010 National Report on Sustainable Forests.

References

Oswalt, S.N.; Smith, W.B.; Miles, P.D.; Pugh, S.A., coords. 2019. Forest resources of the United States, 2017: a technical document supporting the Forest Service 2020 RPA Assessment. Gen. Tech. Rep. WO-97. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington Office. 223 p. <https://doi.org/10.2737/WO-GTR-97GTR-97>.

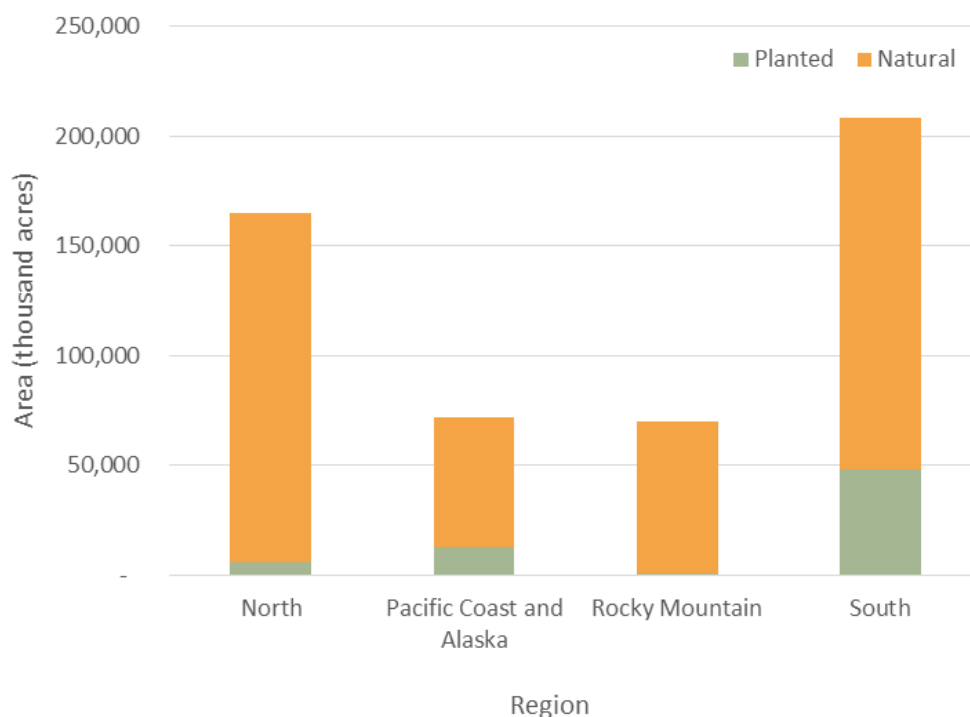


Figure 10-3—Area of U.S. timberland by stand origin and region, 2017 (Source: Oswalt et al. 2019).