

## Indicator 6.39.

### Area and Percent of Forests Used for Subsistence Purposes

#### What is the indicator and why is it important?

In many countries, indigenous groups, rural communities, and others use forests for subsistence purposes, although this use of forests may not be broadly recognized. This indicator measures the extent to which forests are used as a source of basic commodities, such as food, fuel, shelter, and medicinal plants. In addition to the tangible benefits it provides, for many people, subsistence use has a deep cultural, and often, spiritual significance.

#### What does the indicator show?

Our growing understanding of subsistence use of forests indicates that people from diverse ethnic backgrounds make use of subsistence resources from forests in every region of the United States. These activities have particular cultural importance for indigenous peoples. Three cannons of law provide legal guarantees for subsistence practices of selected populations: (1) treaty law, (2) the Hawaii State Constitution, and (3) the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA). Subsistence activities tend to be associated with poverty in the popular imagination. Many residents who hunt, fish, trap, and gather to meet their basic needs, however, regard these practices as a form of wealth, which frequently benefits not only the individual but also the extended family and a larger community. Access to forests for subsistence resources appears to be declining with changes in land use and land ownership that include increases in posting to restrict trespassing and the establishment of exclusive hunting leases.

#### What has changed since 2003?

We were able to gather more evidence of subsistence activities in the State of Hawaii, particularly on Molokai, where subsistence activities are reported to provide more than 50 percent of food for some residents and an average of 28 percent for all islanders. Additional data on Alaska, where subsistence access is guaranteed on Federal lands (fig. 39-1), was available, thanks to ongoing research by the Subsistence Division of Alaska’s Department of Fish and Game. Table 39-1 provides a summary of annual wild food harvests and contributions to food intake in Alaska’s 27 census areas. We also had more time to look into the contested nature of subsistence. Although subsistence is

guaranteed by ANILCA, the Hawaiian State Constitution, and treaties with Indian tribes, litigation over the exercise of those rights has been, and continues to be, ongoing. In several places around the country, Federal and State agencies have entered into Memoranda of Understanding and Agreement that assure access by members of local tribes to hunting, fishing, and gathering resources for purposes that include subsistence. In 2007, the Inland Consent Decree between the State of Michigan and five tribes affirms treaty-guaranteed access to hunt, fish, and gather on State and some private lands and inland waters in an area that covers 13,827,207 acres (fig. 39-2). Finally, Norris’s 2002 history of the National Park Service provides a detailed picture of how NPS policies toward subsistence have evolved during the past 90 years.

**Figure 39-1.** Federal lands in Alaska, which are generally open to rural Alaskans for subsistence harvest (map courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).



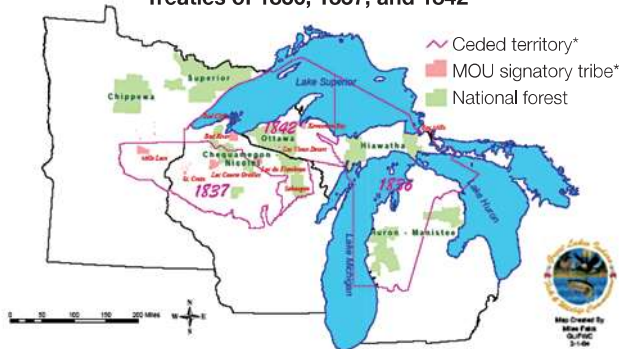
**Table 39-1.** Annual wild food harvests for 27 Alaska census areas

	Lbs./Person	Daily Protein (Percent)	Daily Calories (Percent)
Mean	268	173	24
Median	206	133	19
Minimum	16	10	1
Maximum	698	451	64

Source: Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Subsistence Division (<http://www.subsistence.adfg.state.ak.us/>)

**Figure 39-2.** The 2007 Inland Consent Decree area (map courtesy of the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission).

**Lake States National Forests and Cippewa Ceded Territories:  
Treaties of 1836, 1837, and 1842**



\* The ceded territory and tribal reservation boundaries are representation and may not be the legally binding boundaries.

### Are there important regional differences?

Yes, in Alaska, subsistence is formally recognized by the State and Federal Governments as a vital social, economic, and cultural activity. ANILCA (P.L.96-487, Dec. 2, 1980) provides for the subsistence use of forest resources by all rural Alaskans regardless of race or income. The Hawaiian Constitution protects the customary and traditional rights of Native

Hawaiians, including subsistence use of marine and terrestrial resources. Some federally recognized tribes retain treaty rights to hunt, fish, trap, and gather on specified off-reservation lands. Subsistence activities by other groups in other locations do not enjoy formal legal status under U.S. or State laws.

### Why can't the entire indicator be reported at this time?

The indicator addresses area and percent of forests used for subsistence, yet relevant data currently are collected by Federal and State agencies only in Alaska. These agencies quantify subsistence by metrics such as numbers of users, weight of subsistence resources harvested, and numbers of persons giving or receiving subsistence goods in barter or gift exchange. Providing a spatial display of forested areas used for subsistence is challenging because subsistence does not occur in discreet areas, but is diffused and, if anecdotal evidence is indicative, widespread. It is not possible to summarize these sorts of data into simple numerical measures.

The fact that Hawaii and Alaska have specific State provisions protecting subsistence use indicates the importance of subsistence in these States. The absence of such provisions (or data for that matter) in other States, however, does not necessarily indicate that subsistence activities are largely absent or unimportant.