

Criterion 6. Maintenance and Enhancement of Long-Term Multiple Socioeconomic Benefits To Meet the Needs of Societies

National Report on Sustainable Forests—2010

Indicator 6.43.

Area and Percent of Forests Managed Primarily To Protect the Range of Cultural, Social, and Spiritual Needs and Values

What is the indicator and why is it important?

This indicator measures the area of forest land managed primarily to protect cultural, social, and spiritual values. These values are important dimensions of social well-being for people concerned about forests—whether they live in or near forests or at great distances from them. Where people with unique needs for cultural, social, or spiritual values are only able to meet their needs in unique places; this places a premium on the protection and management of those locations.

What does the indicator show?

Americans favor protecting wild forest areas. Primary reasons for wanting protection are for air quality, water quality, and wildlife habitat, use by future generations, protection of unique plants and animals, and for protection of rare and endangered species. People living in different regions of the country differ very little in what they value about protected wilderness and other public lands (Cordell, 2008—<http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/nrrt/nsre/IRISWild/IrisWild1rpt.pdf>).

Protected public forests

Government-owned forest land in the United States by region is listed in table 43-1. This indicator assumes that all government land is protected to some degree. An estimated 328 million

acres of Federal, State, or local government forest land exist in the United States, about 44 percent of U.S. total forest area (USDA Forest Service, 2007).

The World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) employs a classification system to categorize protected natural areas. Using this system of categories, protected public forests in the United States are described. WCPA Category 1a (science natural areas) is represented by experimental forests across the country. A total of more than 940,000 acres of forest are designated as experimental forests in the United States. More than 58 percent of the total experimental forest area is in the Pacific Coast region; about one-fourth is in the Rocky Mountain Region. Experimental forests represent about 0.1 percent of the United States' total forest area. Table 43-1 also shows acres of public forest land in WCPA Categories Ib through VI. Just more than 20 percent of public forest is protected as wilderness (National Wilderness Preservation System, Category Ib), just under 7 percent, is in national parks (Category II), and 0.4 percent of public forest area is designated as natural monuments. Of government-owned U.S. forest, 13 percent is in WCPA Category IV, mainly wildlife refuges; and 0.2 percent is within the boundaries of protected national lakeshores and seashores. The largest category of government protected forest (Category VI) includes managed lands such as national forests, BLM lands, and other State and local government lands. This

Table 43-1. Acres (in 1,000s) and percent of public forest by region and by category using the World Commission on Protected Area (WCPA) classification system. (Percentages sum down to 100, except in the last column, where they represent all 751 million acres of U.S. forest land, both protected and not protected.)

WCPA Category	North		South		Rocky Mountains		Pacific Coast		U.S. Total		All U.S. Forest (percent)
	Acres	(%)	Acres	(%)	Acres	(%)	Acres	(%)	Acres	(%)	
Ia: Strict nature reserves	86.5	0.2	71.2	0.2	233.8	0.2	548.7	0.4	940.2	0.3	0.1
Ib: Wilderness	1,559.1	3.5	2,384.9	8.3	21,338.7	18.9	40,853.1	28.6	66,135.9	20.2	8.8
II: National parks	951.9	2.2	2,941.5	10.3	7,836.1	6.9	10,124.5	7.1	21,854	6.7	2.9
III: Natural monuments	3.7	0	28.7	0.1	865.2	0.8	423.0	0.3	1,320.7	0.4	0.2
IV: Habitat/species management	1,563.8	3.6	3,440.9	12	7,226.7	6.4	31,083.0	21.8	43,314.4	13.2	5.8
V: Protected landscape/seascapes	179.9	0.4	332.9	1.2	0	0	33.8	0	546.6	0.2	0.1
VI: Managed protected areas	39,634	90.1	19,479	67.9	75,255	66.7	59,720	41.8	194,087	59.1	25.8
All public forest	43,979		28,679		112,755		142,786		328,199		43.7

Sources: Include Government agencies, <http://wilderness.net>, USDA Forest Service, 2009 (appendix table 2)

category makes up almost 60 percent of total U.S. protected public forest lands. The region with the greatest acreage of government-owned forests is the Pacific Coast Region, which run from California to Alaska, and include Hawaii. The next highest government-owned acreage is in the Rocky Mountain Region.

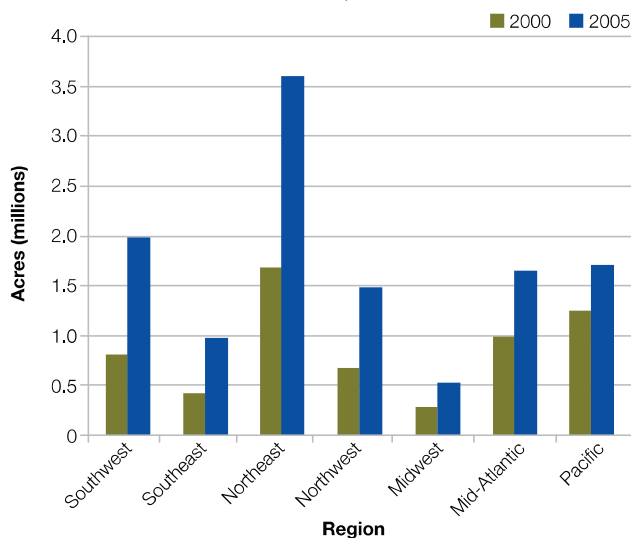
Protected private forests

Conservation of private land through land trusts has been increasing during the past few years. Figure 43-1 shows the increase in State and local trusts. The National Land Trust Census Report indicated that total acreage conserved through private means in 2005 was 37 million acres, representing a 54-percent increase, since 2000. This acreage includes land protected by local and State land trusts, and land protected by large national land conservation groups. Examples of large national groups include The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, The Conservation Fund, and The Trust for Public Land.

A land trust is a nonprofit organization that actively works to conserve land through conservation easements, direct fee simple acquisitions or by stewardship of easements. The Land Trust Alliance of the United States has been organized to unite organizations in local communities for natural area conservation (<http://www.landtrustalliance.org>). Internationally, organizations such as the World Commission on Protected Areas works within the framework of the United Nations to track and stimulate countries around the globe to designate forests and other lands as protected areas.

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is a Federal program managed by the Forest Service in partnership with States. This

Figure 43-1. Private land protected by local and State land trusts in the United States, 2000–2005.



Source: National Land Trust Census Report for 2005

partnership is aimed at protection of environmentally sensitive private forest lands. Mostly, FLP easements restrict development and require sustainable forestry practices. FLP can also directly support land acquisition. As of 2008 in the United States, almost 1.6 million acres of privately owned forest land have been protected (table 43-2). About 85 percent of this national total (roughly 1.3 million acres) has been protected through State-level conservation easements (FLP supported specifically). Another 0.2 million acres (about 15 percent) was protected through fee simple acquisition. Much of this protected private forest land is in the North Region, more than 70 percent. By far, the State of Maine was the most successful single State in protecting forest land through the FLP. Maine's program added well more than 600,000 acres through easements and purchases. New Hampshire and Montana were the next largest States for protecting forest land.

What has changed since 2003?

A significant total area of forest land has been added to the U.S. experimental forest system (national increase of 65 percent since 2003). Much of this increase has been in the Pacific Coast Region, mainly by adding a Hawaiian tropical forest (almost 313,000 acres of State land) and more than 7,000 acres of the Tahoe National Forest in California. Slight losses of public land overall in the North and South are primarily reflecting differences in land area estimation methods between the different time periods. For private forest land, a dramatic increase has occurred since 1985 in the total private forest acres protected through trusts and easements.

Table 43-2. Total private forest acres protected by conservation easements or fee simple purchases through the Forest Legacy Program as of February 2008 by Resource Planning Act (RPA) Region.

RPA Region	Protected Acres	Percent
North	1,116,810	70.9
South	114,099	7.2
Rocky Mountain	281,209	17.8
Pacific Coast	64,176	4.1
U.S. Total	1,576,294	100.0

Source: USDA Forest Service, Forest Legacy Program (http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/flp_projects.shtml)