

Forest-Use Land

Forest land used for all purposes totaled 749 million acres in 2002 (table 8), an increase of 2 million acres over 1997 (see Appendix for detailed descriptions of terms in **bold**). In the 48 contiguous States, the increase was 2.5 million acres, while Alaska lost 0.5 million acres from 1997 to 2002. Forest land increased in the Appalachian, Southeast, Mountain, and Pacific regions and either decreased slightly or remained constant in the other regions of the country.

More than two-thirds of the forest land in 2002 was **timberland**—forests capable of commercial timber production not removed from timber use by statute or administrative regulation—and the remainder was a combination of **reserved forest land** and **other forest land**. Of the total, about 67 percent was non-Federal (Smith et al., 2004). Most of the forest area serves multiple purposes. For example, livestock grazing occurs on about 134 million acres or 18 percent of the acreage (see “Grazed Forest Land,” p. 23) and large areas are available for recreational use (see “Special Uses,” p. 31). Forest land provides watershed protection, wildlife habitat, and parks, and serves other special purposes. Excluding **forest land grazed** and an estimated 98 million acres of **forest areas in special uses**, such as parks and wildlife areas, leaves 517 million acres of ungrazed **forest-use land**.

The “forest-use” category is based on the use of the forest land as opposed to the forest cover alone. The forest-use designation includes both grazed and ungrazed forests but excludes forest land in parks, wildlife areas, and other special uses. This reduced area is a closer approximation of the land

Table 8

Total forest land, by major class and region, 2002

Region	Timberland			Reserved and other forest land ² 1,000 acres	Total forest land		
	Federal	Non-Federal	Total ¹		Federal	Non-Federal	Total ¹
Northeast	1,588	64,883	66,471	6,455	2,236	70,688	72,924
Lake States	6,131	42,909	49,040	2,885	7,533	44,392	51,924
Corn Belt	2,510	28,794	31,304	1,425	2,857	28,872	32,729
Northern Plains	1,097	3,244	4,341	444	1,323	3,461	4,784
Appalachian	5,960	66279	72,239	2,324	7,842	66,722	74,564
Southeast	4,731	68,930	73,661	2,510	6,167	70,004	76,171
Delta States	5,078	45,588	50,667	496	5,424	45,739	51,163
Southern Plains	1,111	16,896	18,007	6,806	1,293	26,521	24,814
Mountain	46,332	19,955	66,287	73,275	98,783	40,777	139,560
Pacific	30,428	28,532	58,960	32,714	49,533	42,141	91,674
48 States ¹	104,966	386,009	490,975	129,335	182,989	437,316	620,305
Alaska	4,750	7,115	11,865	115,004	63,423	63,446	126,869
Hawaii	0	700	700	1,049	12	1,736	1,748
United States ¹	109,717	393,823	503,540	245,388	246,425	502,497	748,922

¹ Distributions may not add due to rounding.

² Includes 98 million acres of forest land in parks, wildlife areas, and other special land uses.

Source: Smith et al., 2004.

that may be expected to serve commercial forest uses as opposed to having forest cover. While forest-use land generally declined from 1949 to 2002, forest-use land increased by almost 10 million acres (about 2 percent) from 1997 to 2002.

Land area in forests is about equally divided between the eastern half of the country and the western half, including the Plains States and Alaska (Smith et al., 2004). Forest predominates in the Northeast, Appalachian, Southeast, and Delta States regions, comprising 56-65 percent of all land in these regions. Forest land is also a relatively large share of the Lake States and Pacific regions, accounting for 43-45 percent of all land in these regions. Acreages in the Mountain region and Alaska are quite large but make up a smaller proportion of total land area in those regions (25 and 35 percent, respectively).

About 46 percent of the reserved and other forest land—parks, wilderness, and wildlife refuges, for example—is in the Southern Plains, Mountain, and Pacific regions, where it accounts for over 44 percent of all the forest land in those regions. Much of the remainder (47 percent) is in Alaska, where it accounts for 91 percent of all forest land in that State. In contrast, acreages of reserved and other forest land in the Eastern States are relatively small, accounting for no more than 10 percent of all forest land in any region east of the Mississippi River (Smith et al., 2004).

Trends in Forest-Use Acreage

Forest-use land, which does not include the forest area counted under special uses, increased by 10 million acres (roughly 2 percent) from 1997 to 2002. This marked a reversal of a downward trend since 1949. The 651 million acres of forest-use land differs from the 749 million total forest acres estimated by the Forest Service because the latter includes multiple-use areas in special uses such as parks and wildlife refuges. Much of the 14-percent decline in forest-use land from 1949 to 2002 entailed reclassification of land from forest-use to **special-use areas** (see “Special Uses,” p. 31). Total forest land decreased less than 1 percent between 1953 and 2002 (Smith et al., 2004).

Total forest land, including multiple-use areas, declined from colonial times until about 1920, increased from 1920 to 1960, then trended downward until 1987 (USDA/FS, 1982; 1989). Total forest area has increased since 1987, rising by about 5 million acres between 1987 and 1992, by 10 million acres between 1992 and 1997, and by 2 million acres between 1997 and 2002. Forest land classed as timberland has followed a similar upward trend since 1987, when it was at a 35-year low of 485 million acres. Timberland area increased by 5 million acres over 1987-92, increased by 14 million acres over 1992-97, and stabilized over 1997-2002 at about 504 million acres (Smith et al., 2004).

Recent increases in timberland area are partially the result of a reclassification of some national forest lands due to standardization with protocols in use on other land ownerships. Some of the increases in total timberland since 1987 may also indicate a response to rising real prices for forest prod-

ucts. Based on a national analysis of National Resources Inventory data, Lubowski et al. (2003) estimate that the increase in net returns from timber production, combined with a decline in crop profits, were the major determinant of forest area change from 1982 to 1997. While timberland acreage increased nationally, changes were not uniform across the country. Some timber-producing States, such as California, Washington, and Michigan, experienced small decreases in timberland acreage from 1997 to 2002 (of 1, 0.4, and 0.3 percent, respectively).

Although grazed forest land constituted 14 percent of the total U.S. land area in 1949 (and 42 percent of the forest-use land), this share had dropped to less than 6 percent of the total land area (and 21 percent of the forest-use land) by 2002. Most of the forested land that had been grazed likely remained forested. However, forest-use land that was not grazed increased by just 77 million acres from 1949 to 2002, for an overall decline in forest-use land of 109 million acres (14 percent) during this period.

Forests under non-Federal ownership declined by 0.7 million acres (less than 0.5 percent) from 1997 to 2002. Acreage classified under all nonindustrial private ownerships remained at 291 million acres, while woodlands on farms declined by about 1 million acres (1 percent) from 1997 to 2002 (USDA/NASS, 1999a; 2004a). Federal timberland increased by about 0.6 million acres (1 percent) from 1997 to 2002, compared with a 13-million-acre increase from 1992 to 1997. Earlier declines in Federal timberland area from 1952 to 1992 were primarily the result of transferring timberland into reserved areas.