

Indicator 6.41.

Area and Percent of Forests Available and Managed for Public Recreation and Tourism

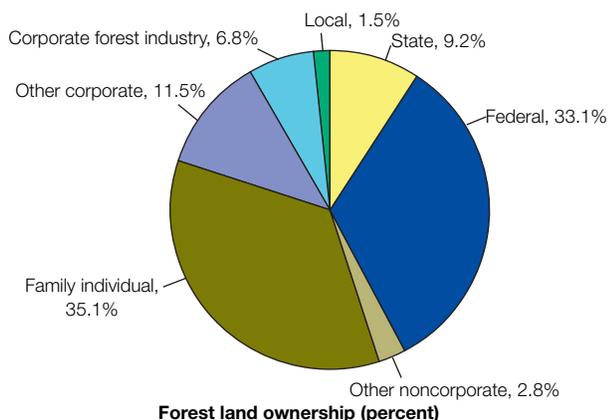
What is the indicator and why is it important?

This indicator is intended to measure the extent to which forests are managed to provide opportunities for recreation and tourism as a specific objective in forest management plans of public agencies and private landowners. When the economic well-being of a country increases, transportation infrastructure is improved, and disposable income grows, public use of forests for recreation grows. These activities are increasingly important as a source of forest-based employment and income. Engaging in outdoor recreation and tourism in forests tends to build support among participants for protecting and managing those forests, indirectly building support for sustainable forests.

What does the indicator show?

Forest area in the United States is estimated at just more than 751 million acres, and has remained relatively constant for the past 100 years. Almost 44 percent of U.S. forest land area is publicly owned (fig. 41-1); one-third is federally owned. More than 18 percent of forest land is owned by private corporations, and almost 38 percent is privately owned by noncorporate entities. Of this noncorporate private forest land, more than 92 percent is family or individually owned. With negligible

Figure 41-1. Percent of forest land in the United States by ownership category, 2007 (percentages sum to 100) (Almost all forest lands are open for some form of recreation, although who may have access may be restricted).



Source: USDA Forest Service

exceptions, even including Federal experimental forests, government forest lands at all levels are open to someone for some form of outdoor recreation. Given, however, that an inventory of forest tracts by management objectives is not available for the United States, it is not possible, for the most part, to ascertain the degree to which forests under different ownerships are managed specifically for recreation and tourism.

Government, corporation, and organization-owned forest lands

Open Federal forest lands include forested national forests, national parks, Bureau of Land Management lands, wildlife refuges, and any other federally managed public land. State forest lands include forested State forests, State parks, and other State management areas. Local forests include municipal watersheds, local parks, local forest preserves, greenways, and other local government forests. Private forest lands include those that are owned by forest-industry, by other types of corporations, by individuals and families, and by other noncorporate entities. Like public lands, it is assumed for this indicator report that forest industry, other corporate, and other noncorporate lands are open to someone for some forms of recreational uses, although access to them is most likely restricted. For corporation lands, data are not available for estimating the acreages generally open to anyone versus acreages restricted for use by employees, executives, lessees, or exclusively to others. More than one-half of the forest industry forests are in the South. Large portions of other corporation lands not owned by forest industry are located in the Pacific Coast and South regions. Other noncorporate private forest lands (not including family and individual ownerships) lie mostly in the Northern and Rocky Mountain Regions.

Family and individual forest lands

Almost one-half of the family and individually owned private forest land is in the South Region, nearly 36 percent is in the North Region, and much smaller percentages are in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast Regions. Figure 41-2 shows the percentages of family and individually owned forest land nationally by category of recreational access. More than 42 percent of this forest land is posted to limit access. Posting does not mean

not used for recreation, it means access is restricted. The percentage of land posted is highest in the Pacific Coast Region and lowest in the North Region. The National Woodland Ownership Survey estimated that about 54 percent of family forest land was open only to family or friends and no others. Just 14.6 percent of the family forest area was open to the public with permission of the owner. Almost 8 percent of the family forest area was leased in the past 5 years for recreational uses. Percentages open to the public were highest in the North and Rocky Mountain Regions. Leasing was greatest in the Rocky Mountain Region.

Figure 41-3 shows area of family forest land by reasons for owning in 2006. Beauty appreciation is at the top with 65 percent of owners, followed by passing the land to heirs, gaining privacy, protection of nature, and having it as part of a home or cabin site. Smaller percentages of owners considered owning forest land important because of hunting, fishing, or other recreation opportunities.

What has changed since 2003?

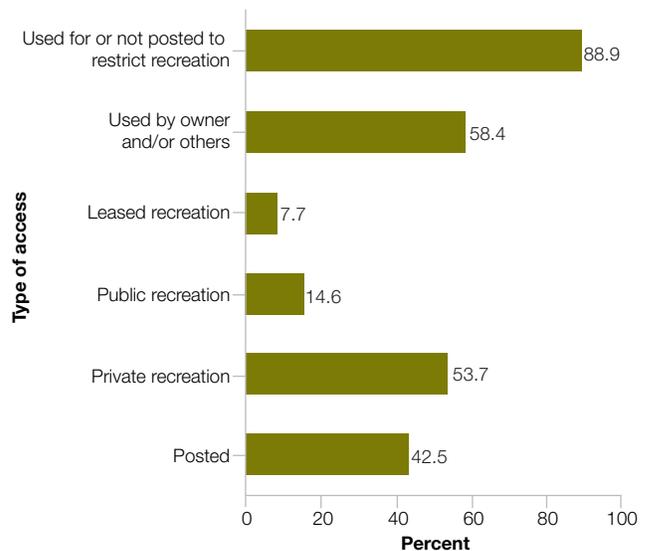
Total area of public forest land at all levels of government has increased slightly. Thus, the trend for public land available for recreation is up slightly. Percentages of nonindustrial land available to the public at large across U.S. regions, however, are modest and have been trending downward during the past several decades. From 1985 to 1986, nearly 25 percent of owners permitted some public access. This percentage dropped by 1995 to nearly 14.5 percent (Cordell 1999). In 2000 to 2001, it was estimated that only 10.9 percent of owners permitted access to the general public. The lowest percentage was in the West, at 8 percent, and highest was in the North, at 13 percent. Based on the National Woodland Ownership Survey, it was estimated that 14.6 percent of family forest owners allow public access. This estimate closely resembles those reported earlier, although the source is different and not directly comparable.

Are there important regional differences?

Almost all of the 751 million acres of forest land in the United States is open to someone for some form(s) of recreation. Almost 29 percent of this forest land is in the South, and just more than 28 percent is in the Pacific Coast Region, which includes Alaska. Almost 23 percent is in the North, followed by the Rocky Mountain Region with 20 percent. Most of the public forest land (especially Federal forests) is in the western two regions. Public lands in the West are essentially open to anyone for recreation, except for certain military or laboratory sites.

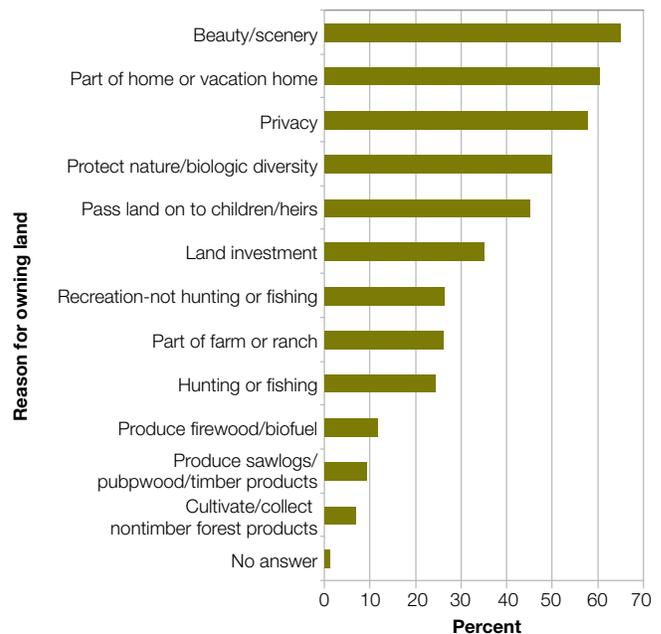
Most of the private land is in the Eastern States (North and South regions). Recreation use is more restricted on private lands than on public lands. The South has by far the greatest area of family or individually owned forest land in the United States, followed in order by the North, the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast regions. The North, however, has the greatest area

Figure 41-2. Percentage of family or individually owned forest land area by category of recreational access, 2006.



Source: Butler 2008

Figure 41-3. Percent of family forest owners in the United States by reasons for owning, 2006 (excluding interior Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, western Oklahoma, and western Texas).



Source: Butler 2008, includes owners who rated the objective as very important or important on a seven-point Likert scale, with seven defined as not important

of family forest land open to the general public, 17.2 million acres, 18.3 percent of the region's total. Next is the South with 12.2 million acres, 9.9 percent of the region's total family forest land. The South has the greatest area of family forest leased for recreation, at 12.4 million acres, or 9.7 percent. The next largest area of family forest leased for recreation is the Rocky Mountain Region at 4.1 million acres, 16.9 percent of family forest in that region.