



SYSTEM DIMENSIONS

Extent
Pattern

CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL

Nutrients, Carbon, Oxygen
Contaminants
Physical

BIOLOGICAL COMPONENTS

Plants and Animals
Communities
Ecological Productivity

HUMAN USES

Food, Fiber, and Water
Recreation and Other Services

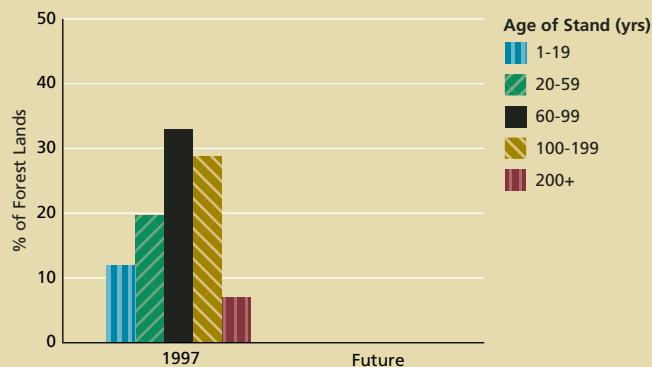
Forest Age

Forest Age

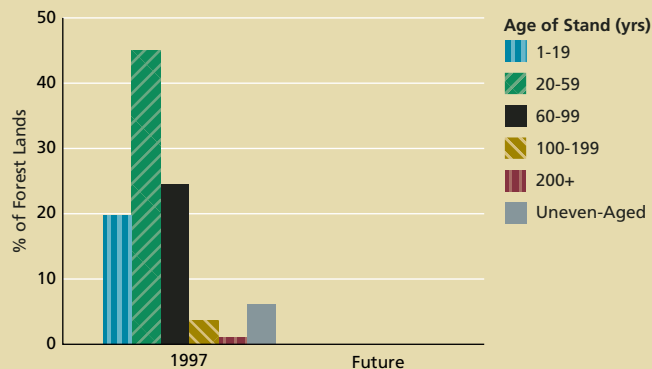
Data Not Adequate for National Reporting on

Forest Lands Other Than Those Classified As Timberlands

Partial Indicator Data: West (Timberlands Only)



Partial Indicator Data: East (Timberlands Only)



Data Source: USDA Forest Service. Coverage: all 50 states (timberlands only.)

Note: "Timberlands" is a USDA Forest Service designation for lands that grow at least 20 cubic feet of wood per acre per year, which is considered be sufficient to support commercial harvest under current economic conditions. Lands on which harvest is prohibited by statute are not included as "timberlands." Note also that the term "uneven-aged" is being phased out; such stands are composed of intermingled trees that differ considerably in age.

What Is This Indicator, and Why Is It Important?

This indicator reports the percentage of forest lands with stands in several age classes. Forests of different ages often provide different goods, services, and values. For example, woodpeckers and species that need trunk cavities for nesting find older forests, with their dead trees, a suitable habitat. Younger forests, with their rapid growth and smaller trees, provide habitat for species such as the Kirtland's warbler, which can only live in forests recently regrown after fire.

What Do the Data Show?

Sixty-five percent of eastern timberlands, where most of the nation's timber products are produced (see Timber Harvest, p. 130), are less than 60 years old, and 90% are less than 100 years old. Most of the nation's older timberland stands are in the West—about 35% of western timberlands are more than 100 years old, and about 30% are less than 60 years old. Although not included in this indicator, most of the nation's forests in wilderness areas and national parks, which contain many old stands, are also in the West (see Forest Management Categories, page 119).

Why Can't This Entire Indicator Be Reported at This Time?

Data are currently available only for timberlands. Data on the age class of forest trees are not available for national parks and wilderness areas and other forest land not classified as timberlands. These data will be available for future reports.

Discussion

Forest age structure reflects historic and current management as well as natural factors. For example, the high percentage of younger forests in the eastern United States reflects such factors as the reforestation of former agricultural land, the management of many private landholdings for commercial harvesting, and the fact that very old stands are much less common in the East.

The technical note for this indicator is on page 242.