

SYSTEM DIMENSIONS	CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL	BIOLOGICAL COMPONENTS	HUMAN USES
Extent Pattern	Nutrients, Carbon, Oxygen Contaminants Physical	Plants and Animals Communities Ecological Productivity	Food, Fiber, and Water Recreation and Other Services

## ● Forest Area and Ownership

**What Is This Indicator, and Why Is It Important?** This indicator reports how much forest land there is in the United States and who owns it.

Knowing how much land is forested and who owns that land is vital to making informed decisions about forests. Gains and losses in forest area directly affect the public's continued enjoyment of the goods and services that forests provide—recreation, lumber, watershed protection, and many other things. Public and private owners often have very different goals and assumptions, differences that are reflected in management priorities and practices.

**What Do the Data Show?** Forests today cover about 747 million acres, or about a third of the total land area of the United States, down from about 1 billion acres at the time of European settlement. Most forest clearing occurred in the East, ending by 1900. In recent decades, the amount of forest land has been nearly stable, with an increase of about 1%, or 8 million acres, from 1987 to 1997.

There are striking regional differences in patterns of ownership: in the East, more than 80% of forest land is privately owned, while in the West, about two-thirds is publicly owned. Forest industry ownership accounts for about 13% of eastern forest land and 4% of western forest land; a wide variety of individuals and corporations own the rest.

The technical note for this indicator is on page 239.

