

Indicator 1. Extent of Area by Forest Type Relative to Total Forest Area

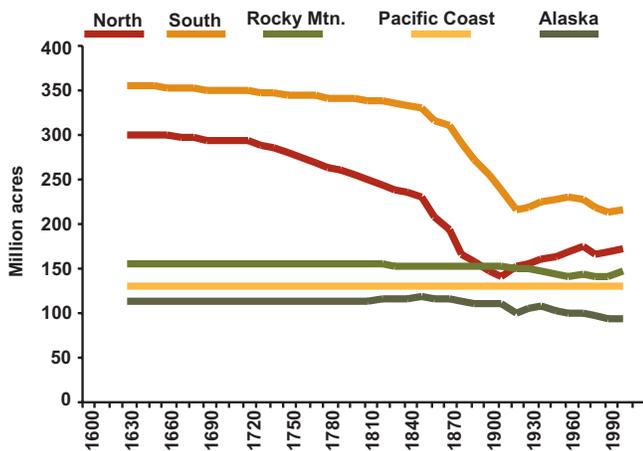


Figure 1-1. Area of forest land by region, 1630–2002.

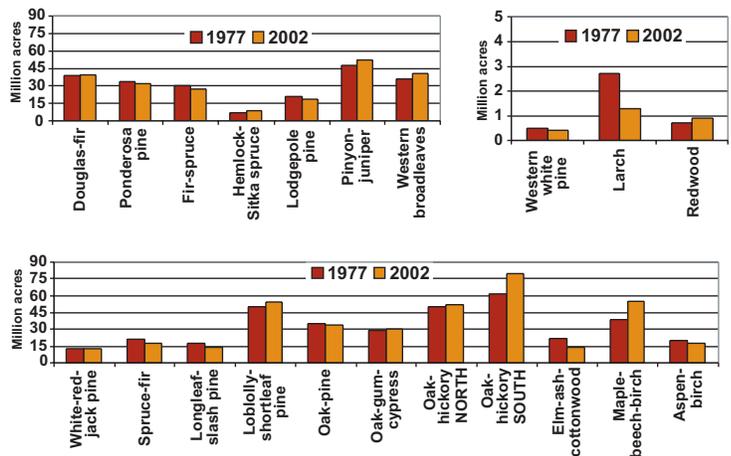


Figure 1-2. Forest by major type in the United States, 1977 and 2002 (excluding Alaska).

What Is the Indicator and Why Is It Important?

Forest type is a coarse representation of land cover based on major tree species associations. As individual trees respond to natural or human-induced change, forest composition and structure change. Monitoring changes in the location and distribution of forest types is useful for resource managers and analysts interested in forest resources to track the sustainability and diversity of the Nation's forest cover and the desired future condition of that forest cover.

The current forest area in the United States is 749 million acres, or about one-third of the Nation's land area. The U.S. forest area was about 1 billion acres at the time of European settlement. Of the total forest land loss of 300 million acres, most (nearly 200 million acres) occurred in the East (North and South regions) between 1850 and 1900, with the loss consisting predominantly of broadleaf forest cleared for agriculture. For the last 100 years, the total forest area has been relatively stable, while the U.S. population has more than doubled. Today, conifer forests cover 412 million acres in the United States and are found predominantly in the West (315 million acres) and South (67 million acres). Broadleaf forests cover 273 million acres, and are located predominantly in the North and South (223 million acres).

Broadleaf forests. At 132 million acres, oak-hickory (*Quercus/Carya spp.*) is the largest single forest cover type. It constitutes more than 17 percent of all forest land in the Nation and nearly half of all broadleaf forests. Covering 55 million acres, maple-beech-birch forests (*Acer/Fagus/Betula spp.*), are also dominant in the Eastern United States. Combined, these two upland forest types constitute nearly two-thirds of all broadleaf forests, which have increased 18 and 42 percent, respectively, since 1977.

Conifer forests. Pines (*Pinus spp.*) are the single-most dominant group of conifer forests. Loblolly-shortleaf pine (*P. taeda, echinata*) and longleaf-slash pine (*P. palustris, elliotii*) types in the South and ponderosa and lodgepole pine types (*P. ponderosa and contorta*) in the West combine to cover 115 million acres, or more than one-fourth of all conifer forest types. The largest single conifer type, with 61 million acres in interior Alaska, is the spruce-birch (*Picea/Betula spp.*) type. Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) follows closely, with 40 million acres found predominantly in the Pacific Coast Region.

Mixed forests. Virtually all mixed forests of oak-pine (*Quercus/Pinus spp.*) and oak-gum-cypress (*Quercus/Nyssa/Taxodium spp.*), with 59 of the 64 million total acres, are found in the South. While oak-gum-cypress is found in the wet lowlands of the South, oak-pine is usually found on the drier uplands.