

## Indicator 4. Extent of Area by Forest Type in Protected Areas as Defined by Age-Class or Successional Stage

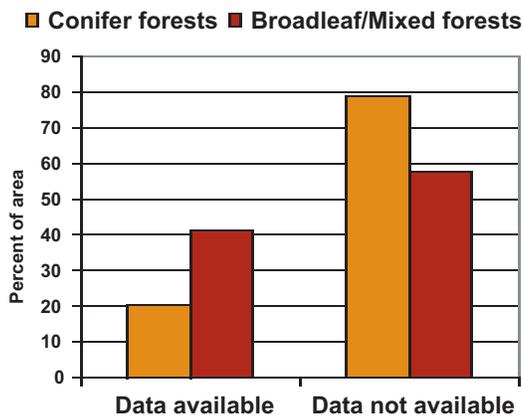


Figure 4-1. Availability of descriptive data for protected forests in the United States, 2001.

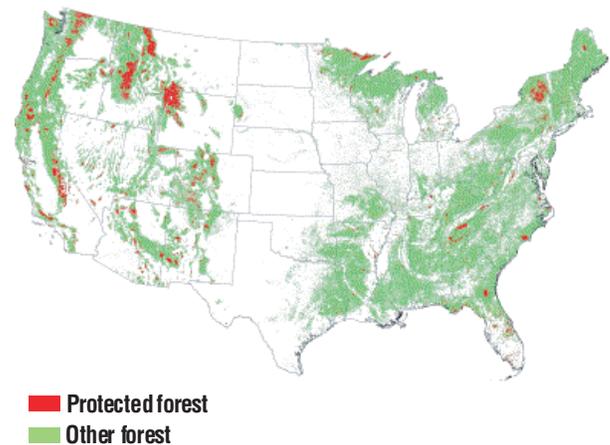


Figure 4-2. Location of protected forests in the United States, 2001.

### What Is the Indicator and Why Is It Important?

In the broadest sense, the area and proportion of forest ecosystems reserved in some form of protected condition provides some indication of the emphasis a society places on preserving representative ecosystems as a strategy to conserve biodiversity.

Important forest management questions also can be addressed by maintaining information on a network of representative forest types within protected areas. Traditionally, protected areas have been set aside, in part, for their conservation, scenic, and recreational values. The ecosystems they contain might not represent the full range of biodiversity. If protected areas are part of a national conservation strategy (including rare and endangered species), then some indication of what is protected is required. Over time, forest types within protected areas will change. This change must be monitored as part of an overall sustainability strategy.

### What Does the Indicator Show?

Currently, descriptive data is available for only about 25 percent (26 out of 106 million acres) of the forest area designated as protected in indicator 3. The largest areas of protected forest thus far inventoried are in conifer types. Although they constitute a smaller portion of the total protected area, broadleaf/mixed types have nearly half of their total forest area inventoried.

Protected broadleaf/mixed forests inventoried thus far have a fairly even distribution of ages. By contrast, protected conifer forests inventoried thus far are heavily skewed to the stands more than 100 years old. As stands continue to remain in protected status, their age distribution primarily will be determined by natural disturbances such as fire, weather, and insect or disease outbreaks.

Currently, data on age or successional class of U.S. forests in protected areas is sparse. Changes in inventory protocols are being established to rectify this situation, and new field inventory data is being collected in these areas.