

Indicator 42. Area and Percent of Forest Land Managed in Relation to the Total Area of Forest Land To Protect the Range of Cultural, Social, and Spiritual Needs and Values

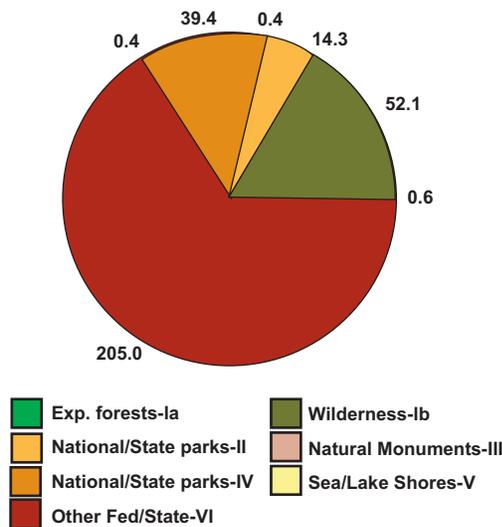


Figure 42-1. Millions of protected forest acres by category.

What Is the Indicator and Why Is It Important?

This indicator measures the amount of forest land placed under the range of tenure classifications and/or management/protection regimes that are designed to protect cultural, social, and/or spiritual values. It recognizes the cultural and spiritual connections of society to forests beyond the commercial or livelihood values of forest resources. It excludes forests owned and/or managed for strictly private or commercial purposes, and includes all known forest lands designated and managed to serve public purposes. Over the last several decades, evidence has shown that American society has been attaching greater value to natural forests, even as most of the population, more than 80 percent, live in urban environments. This indicator helps monitor the degree to which forest management recognizes public needs and values beyond private economic gains.

What Does the Indicator Show?

An estimated 312 million acres of forest in the United States are protected (figure 42-1). This includes 0.6 million acres of experimental forests, 52.1 million acres of forest area in the National Wilderness Preservation System, 14.3 million acres in national and State parks, 0.4 million acres in natural monuments, 39.4 million acres in Federal and State wildlife refuges, 0.4 million acres in lake and seashores, and 205.2 million acres in all other categories of Federal and State forest lands. Since most of the protected land is Federal, most is west of the Mississippi. Most forested national park, monument, and refuge land is in the Pacific Coast States, especially in Alaska. The most protected of forest lands are those in the National Wilderness Preservation System, which has some representation in all but six States. Protected Federal and State lands are very stable in area and percent over time. Most national forests, Bureau of Land Management lands, and State forests are managed for commodity production, in addition to being managed for other cultural, social, and spiritual values. An estimated 29.3 million acres of nonindustrial private forest land are protected by conservation easements with local/State agencies or private organizations. The overall trend in this indicator is modest growth through modest additions of Federal and State forest lands to protection systems and modest additions of private land under conservation easements.

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

Estimates are based on a coarse overlay of protected areas and forest cover by county. Area of forest land that is protected is not inventoried as such. Thus, indirect approaches are used. Area and percent of forest land can measure only the degree to which resources valuable for cultural, social, or spiritual reasons have been recognized. It does not measure how well the lands are protected to sustain social, cultural, and spiritual values.