

Chapter 15: Questions and Answers

Q: How much of Minnesota is forested?

A: That depends on how you define forest and whom you ask. In Minnesota, land use and land cover are measured in a variety of ways. Land ownership records, U.S. Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) assessments, and the DNR's Cooperative Stand Assessment data all yield different numbers. In addition, forest land and timberland are defined differently.

Here are some numbers commonly used to describe the extent of Minnesota's forested land:

- 54 million acres comprise Minnesota's land base, including water.

Source: *Minnesota Land Use and Cover: 1990s Census of the Land*

- 51 million acres comprise Minnesota's land base, not including water.

Source: *Minnesota Land Use and Cover: 1990s Census of the Land*

- 16.3 million acres in Minnesota are considered forest land (approximately one-third of Minnesota's land base).

Source: *Minnesota Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) 2002 data*

- 15 million acres of Minnesota's forested land are considered timberland.

Source: *Minnesota Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) 2002 data*

- 5.6 million acres of Minnesota's land base are administered by the DNR.

Source: *DNR Division of Lands and Minerals—Land Records System 2003*

- 4.5 acres of land administered by the DNR are considered forested.

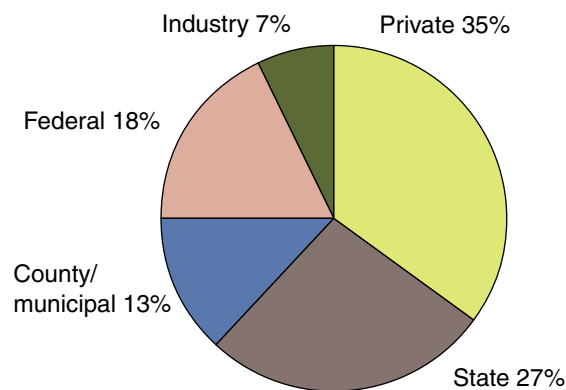
Source: *Cooperative Stand Assessment data*

Q: What's the difference between forest land and timberland?

A: Forest land is all forested land, including timberland and land reserved from harvest or not suitable for growing trees for harvest. Timberland is land considered useful for growing and harvesting trees. More than 1 million acres of Minnesota's public forest land is reserved from or off-limits to timber harvest. This includes the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Voyageurs National Park, state parks, scientific and natural areas, and county parks.

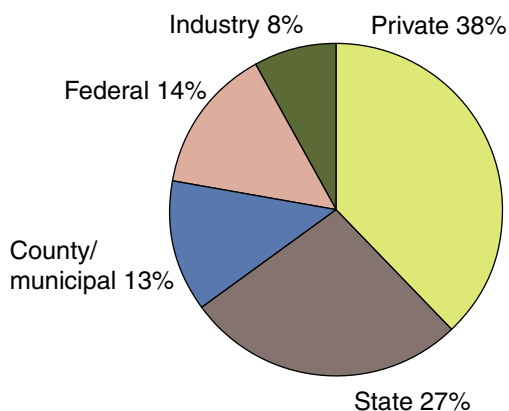
Q: Who owns Minnesota's 16.3 million acres of forest land?

A: According to Minnesota Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA) 2002 data, forest-land ownership breaks down as follows:



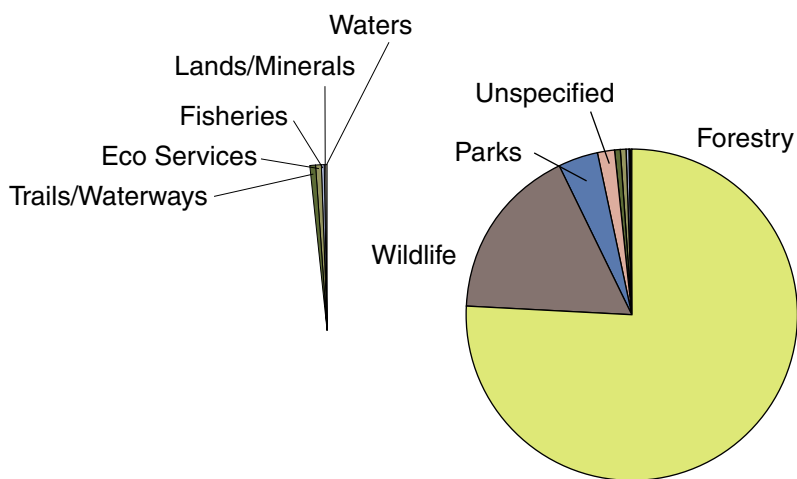
Q: Who owns Minnesota’s 15 million acres of timberland?

A: According to Minnesota Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA) 2002 data, Minnesota’s 15 million acres of timberland breaks down as follows:



Q: How much land does DNR administer?

A: DNR administers 5.6 million acres of land (DNR Division of Lands and Minerals—Land Records System 2003). Various divisions administer the land as follows:



Q: What are the threats to Minnesota’s forests?

A: The biggest threat to Minnesota’s forest land is our desire to be near it. Vacation houses and urban sprawl reduce the amount of forest, complicate the forest ownership picture, and break forests into fragments that are less able than an intact forest to support a diversity of living things.

Q: Is forest land declining in Minnesota?

A: Not right now. Over the past century and a half some 16 million acres of forest were lost to land clearing for agriculture and urban development. Projections today suggest that forest area in northern Minnesota will continue to decline due to development. However, forest area in southern Minnesota is increasing as land reverts from agriculture. Overall, forest area in Minnesota is expected to increase slightly from now until 2040.

Q: Why do we harvest trees?

A: Wood is one of America’s most important raw materials. The amount (by weight) used each year in the United States exceeds the amount of all metals, plastics, and cements combined. Unlike many other materials, wood is renewable. That means we can grow more to replace what we harvest, so we can use it without using it up. If we were to stop harvesting timber, we would increase our use of nonrenewable raw materials such as fossil fuels. Timber harvest is also a primary tool for creating desirable habitat for wildlife. When done properly, tree harvesting is an environmentally sound choice for meeting human needs.

Q: Who harvests timber on state land?

A: In Minnesota, independent loggers do most timber harvesting. The DNR sells the right to harvest a specified amount of timber in a specific location in a specified way through a legal tool called a timber sale permit. The permit ensures that loggers cut only the trees we want them to cut using methods that protect soil, water, wildlife, aesthetics, and other forest benefits.

Q: What is clear-cutting? Where and why is it used?

A: Clear-cutting means removing all trees except those reserved for special purposes. In most cases, scattered trees or small groups of trees are left to provide diversity and wildlife habitat and forage.

Clear-cutting is used to encourage growth of tree species that require full sunlight when they are young (for example, jack pine, aspen, paper birch, tamarack, and some oaks). Clear-cutting also encourages the growth of ground vegetation, which provides food for wildlife.

Clear-cutting is not used with species such as maple and basswood because they regenerate best under the canopy of older trees. Clear-cutting is also not recommended on steep slopes, near open water, or on fragile soils because it can result in erosion.

Q: Is state land reforested after harvest?

A: The DNR is required by law to reforest acreage equal to that harvested each year. Each year we seed 4,000 to 5,000 acres, plant seedlings on 4,000 to 5,000 acres, and encourage natural regeneration on more than 20,000 acres.

Q: Why do DNR foresters pay so much attention to trees and so little attention to other parts of the habitat?

A: They don't, anymore. Since 1982 we have had a multiple-use/sustained-yield mandate. Trees are the primary component that defines a forest as a forest (rather than prairie, brushland, etc.). As a result, foresters focus on managing forest types—including the shrubs and forbs associated with these forest types—to provide certain mixes of tree species and age classes for diverse habitat. The location of these forest types on the landscape is also an important consideration in enhancing habitat and biodiversity.

Q: Who can help me manage my forest land?

A: If you own 20 to 5,000 acres of land, at least 10 acres of which is or will be forested, we will provide a woodland stewardship plan for you at no charge. The plan will help you manage your land for personal benefit while protecting soil, water, plants, and animals. If you have less than 20 acres, you can find valuable management advice in *Beyond the Suburbs: A Landowner's Guide to Conservation Management*. Download a copy at www.dnr.state.mn.us/forestry (look under Tree Care and Management) or contact the DNR Information Center, 651-296-6157 or 888-646-6367. Consulting foresters are another valuable source of advice. Contact your local DNR Forestry office (see page 4) for a list of consulting foresters near you.

Q: Can I buy tree seedlings from the DNR?

A: Yes. DNR nurseries sell seedlings in lots of 100, with a minimum purchase of 500 trees. Seedlings must be planted in Minnesota, and must be used to establish or reforest wood lots, windbreaks, and shelterbelts; for erosion control; for soil and water conservation; or for permanent food and cover for wildlife. They may not be planted for ornamental purposes or resold with roots attached for 10 years. Orders for seedlings are accepted from August 15 until early spring or until supplies run out. For more information, including information on available tree and shrub species, see www.dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/nurseries or call the DNR Information Center at 651-296-6157 or 888-646-6367.

Q: How can I find out how to take care of the trees in my yard?

A: Contact your local community forester or tree inspector. If you don't have one, contact your local DNR Forestry office (see page 4).

Forest Type: A way to categorize a forest based on the predominant tree species found there (see figure on page 7 for examples).

Q: When do I need a burning permit?

A: You need a permit to have an outdoor fire (except for a recreational campfire or cooking fire) whenever the ground does not have complete snow cover. Obtain a burning permit at your local DNR Forestry (see page 4) or fire warden office. Check with local officials to see if there are special burning regulations in your area.

Q: May I ride my off-highway vehicle (OHV) in state forests?

A: OHV teams are evaluating trails in Minnesota's state forests as to whether they are closed to OHV use or opened to limited OHV use. Contact the DNR Forestry office closest to the state forest you're interested in visiting (see page 4) to get the current status of OHV trails in that state forest.

Q: May I remove trees or other plants from state forests?

A: You may take fallen pine cones and harvest fruits and mushrooms. In general, you may not cut trees or dig up plants in state forests. In some areas you may cut trees for fuel, but you need a permit first. You also need a permit to harvest boughs for decorations. For permits, contact your local DNR Forestry office (see page 4).

Q: May I hunt in state forests?

A: Yes, if you follow all applicable hunting laws and regulations. State forests contain private holdings within their boundaries, many of which are signed for no hunting. State forest maps, available at DNR Forestry offices, can help you plan your hunt around these areas.



Photo: Mark Escher

State forest roads and trails are being classified as either "limited" or "closed" to OHV use. For more information visit: www.dnr.state.mn.us/ohv.