

Forest Cover and Fragmentation

Forest Cover

About 41% of the total land area in the Northeast is forested, with northern New England and West Virginia having the highest percentages of forest cover (Figures 1a and 1b) (Smith and others 2001; U.S. Geological Survey 2003b). The amount of forest cover has remained steady for the past decade with minor decreases or increases within individual states.

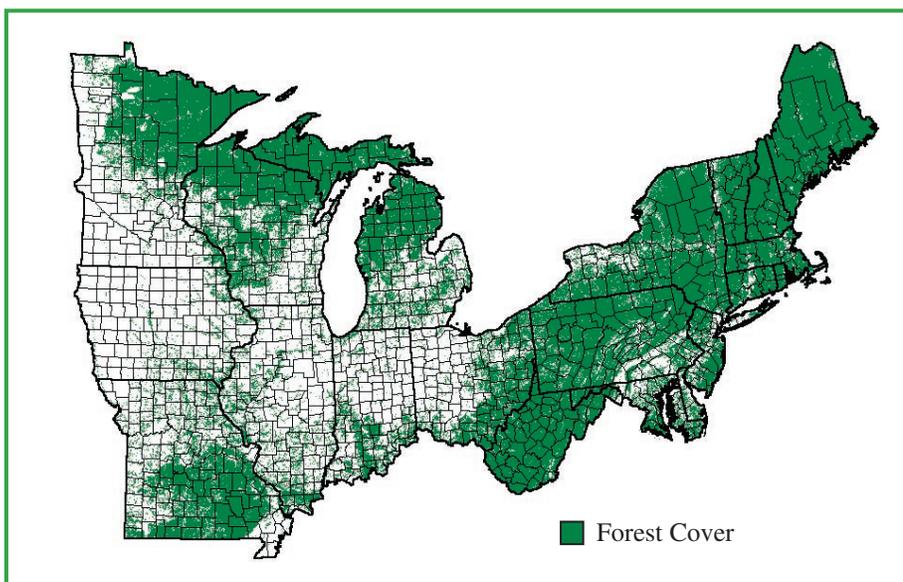


Figure 1a. Forest cover. (Source: U.S. Geological Survey 2003b).

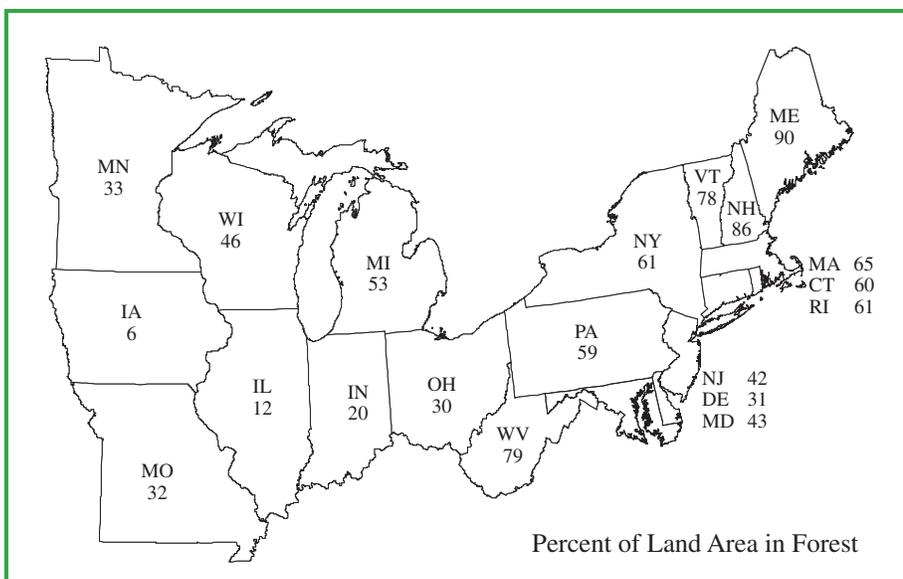


Figure 1b. Percent of land area in forest. (Source: Smith and others 2001).

Population Growth

The Northeast is the most densely populated region in the country, with many counties having more than 50 people per square mile (Figure 2) (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). The number of people in the region has increased 7% during the past decade, with greater-than-average increases occurring in Delaware (17%), Minnesota (12%), Maryland (11%), and New Hampshire (11%). States with the lowest population growth rates are West Virginia (1%), Pennsylvania (3%), Connecticut (4%), and Maine (4%).

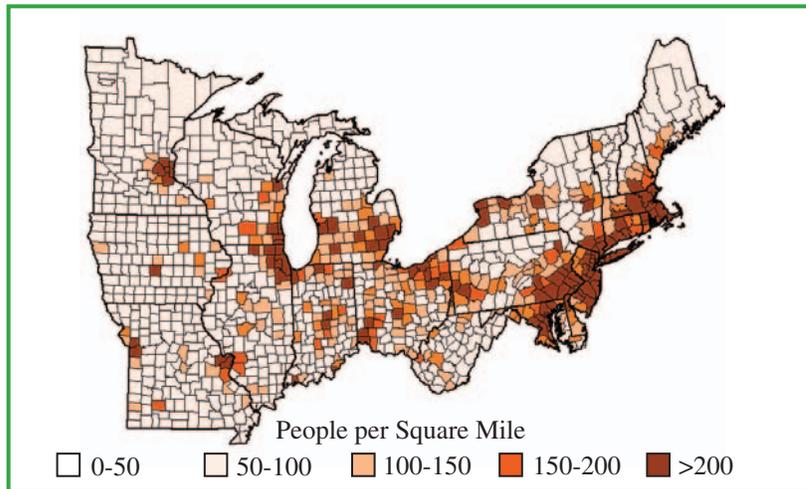


Figure 2. Distribution of people. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

Forest Fragmentation

Continuing increases in population and urban sprawl contribute to the fragmentation of forested ecosystems into smaller parcels of wildlife habitat and protective cover for watersheds (Wade and others 2003). Highly fragmented forests are common in the Northeast and occur mostly near highly populated areas and in agricultural surroundings (Figure 3) (U.S. Geological Survey 2003a). As population growth continues, it is expected that forests near expanding urban areas will become more fragmented.

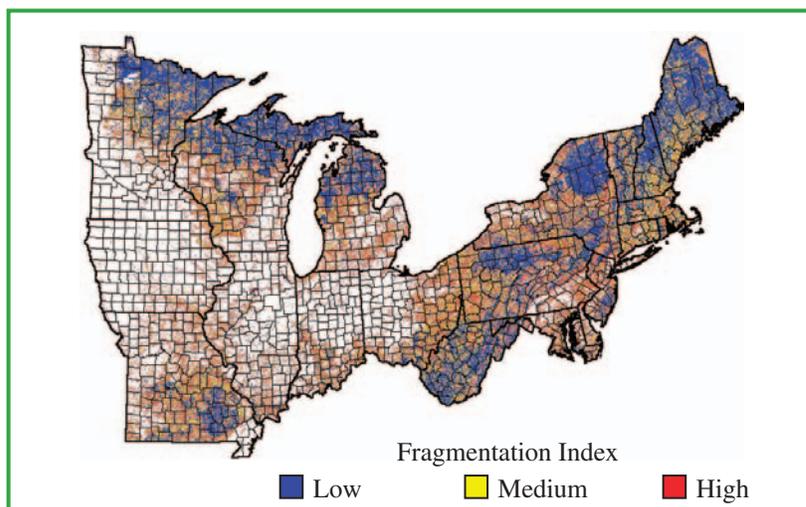


Figure 3. Forest fragmentation due to human causes. (Source: U.S. Geological Survey 2003a).