

Georgia forests, 2011: Forest area remains the same, while ownership changes

July 27 2012

Georgia contains the largest area of forest cover of any state in the South, with forests making up 67 percent of land cover or 24.8 million acres, according to a Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA) Factsheet just released by the USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station (SRS). While this land area remains stable, timber inventory has increased.

"[Forest](#) area in Georgia remained relatively stable over the last 50 years," says Richard Harper, SRS forester and author of the analysis. "While forest area stayed about the same, timber inventory more than doubled over the same period—suggesting that Georgia's forest landowners are engaged in long-term strategies to improve sustainability of their forests."

"We are very proud of our forest resources here in Georgia, and our pride is evident in the findings of this report," said the director of the Georgia Forestry Commission, Robert Farris. "Our landowners demonstrate the pride they have in their land daily with every tree that is planted and every forest management strategy that is implemented. We praise each and every one of them for the steps they are taking today to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy all the benefits of our forests."

Commercial timberland area—defined as land available to produce forest products—makes up 98 percent of total forest land area in Georgia. The remaining 2 percent of forest area is in forest reserves where harvest is prohibited. Most of commercial timberland is privately

owned, placing Georgia in the position of having the most privately owned timberland in the nation.

"Private individuals own 91 percent of Georgia timberlands, some 22.2 million acres, with individual or family forests making up 13.5 million of these acres," says Harper. "In this group, we found a general decline in tracts of over 100 acres and a 7 percent increase in tracts under 100 acres, suggesting that larger tracts are being divided for financial need or opportunity, or as a result of estate transfers within families."

Since 1982, when forest industry peaked in its holdings, ownership of Georgia timberland in that category has shifted from industry (landowners operating a primary wood-processing plant) to non-industry corporate ownership. In 2011, forest industry held 2.1 million acres of Georgia timberland, while non-industry corporate ownership rose to 6.6 million acres. Over the past three decades, forest industry area declined 65 percent while timberland area owned by non-industry corporations increased 251 percent.

The analysis also includes information about forest types; volume by diameter class and stand origin for softwoods and hardwoods; and data on growth and removals for the survey period.

More information: Access the full analysis:
www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/40936

Provided by USDA Forest Service

Citation: Georgia forests, 2011: Forest area remains the same, while ownership changes (2012, July 27) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-07-georgia-forests-forest-area-ownership.html>

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