

As population, interest in outdoor recreation grow, more pressure likely for northern forests

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Americans began heading outdoors en masse 60 years ago, and the magic has endured. Forest Service research suggests that in 20 northern states, the growth in both the population and popularity of outdoor recreation's will likely create pressure for available state and federal recreation areas. Credit: US Forest Service

Despite just modest gains in population and participation in outdoor recreation compared to the rest of the nation, there is a strong likelihood of increasing pressure on forest and other undeveloped lands in northern states as the population grows and recreation demands shift.

"Outdoor Recreation in the Northern United States," a report recently published by the U.S. [Forest Service](#)'s Northern Research Station as GTR NRS-100, evaluates recent [population trends](#) and forecasts within

the context of other U.S. regions, demographic composition of population, recreation participation by residents age 16 and older, trends in activities and time spent outdoors by its youth, and the changes occurring in recreation resources, both public and private. "Outdoor Recreation" is part of the ongoing Northern [Forest](#) Futures Project in which scientists are describing current [forest conditions](#) and projecting future conditions in the 20 states extending from Maine to Minnesota and from Missouri to Maryland. The publication is available at: <http://nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/41528>

"More people engaging in outdoor recreation is a wonderful thing, but it also translates into greater demand for venues for outdoor recreation and a dilemma for the North's shrinking supply of undeveloped lands," said Michael T. Rains, Director of the Northern Research Station. "The Northern Forest Futures Project is generating information that will help natural resource managers and communities respond to this challenge."

By 2060, Federal and State parkland per person in northern states is projected to decrease to 0.13 acres, about 79 percent of the 2008 level. Currently, more than 31 percent of total land area in the North is non-Federal forest, or 1.19 acres per person. By 2060, per capita non-Federal forest is predicted to decrease to 0.88 acres per person, or 74 percent of the 2010 level, lower than all other regions and the Nation as a whole. Less than 3 percent of Federal land, about 17.9 million acres, is in the North, and about 69 percent of that is managed by the Forest Service.

Meanwhile, the population of northern states is steadily, if slowly, increasing. Between 1990 and 2009, total population in the North grew 11 percent, less than half the national growth of 23 percent. Projected growth for the North is expected to be 26 percent, much less than other regions of the nation.

While the increase in total outdoor recreation participants and total

activity days was also lower than the national rate, northern states saw an increase of about 4 percent, from about 90 to 94 million, in people ages 16 and older who engage in [outdoor recreation](#).

The activities people are pursuing outdoors are broadening from traditional sports like hunting and fishing to include activities such as orienteering, snowboarding, kayaking, off-highway-vehicle driving, and mountain biking. The report notes that new outdoor activities will undoubtedly emerge as the 21st century continues to unfold.

Today, the most popular activities in the North are walking for pleasure, attending family gatherings outdoors, gardening or landscaping, viewing/photographing natural scenery, visiting outdoor nature centers, and picnicking. Activities oriented toward viewing and photographing nature (scenery, flowers/trees/other plants, birds, and wildlife) have been among the fastest growing in popularity.

Contrary to the widely held notion that children in today's United States are not spending time outdoors, the National Kids Survey results used in the report suggest that kids may actually spend quite a bit of time outdoors, even though significant numbers are using electronic devices when doing so.

Provided by USDA Forest Service

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