

# Land use changes, housing demographics shift in Washington State

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A recent government report reveals that the number of houses in dispersed rural settings in western Washington has doubled over the past 30 years, and that 20 percent of nonfederal land is currently developed.

"Resource lands in Washington are being lost at a rate of a football field every 18 minutes," says Andy Gray, a research ecologist at the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest (PNW) Research Station. "People are concerned about losing capacity to grow local [food crops](#) and wood products, and about how patterns of development are impacting water quality, wildfire risk, and wildlife."

Gray is the lead author of a recent report, *Changes in Land Use and Housing on Resource Lands in Washington State, 1976-2006*. The study covers information on all 39 counties in Washington. The analysis is grouped into five areas: Puget

Sound, [Olympic Peninsula](#), southwest Washington west of the crest of the Cascade Mountains, and Central and Inland Empire east of the crest of the [Cascade Mountains](#).

Key findings from the report include:

- The loss of 4.7 percent of nonfederal [forestland](#) in Washington over 30 years to development could represent a significant impact on resource availability, including timber production as well as wildlife habitat.

- Conversion of nonfederal resource lands (forestry, range, and agricultural) to low-density residential and urban lands was lower in 1994-2006 than between 1976-1994, despite similar increases in population.
- Most new development was close to existing development, but more so in western than eastern Washington.
- Increases in housing in and around resource lands were similar in eastern and western Washington, which could affect acceptance of industrial practices near residential areas, introduction of pets and invasive species, and wildfire ignitions.
- Providing comprehensive, consistent, information on the type and location of land-use changes in Washington, enables the assessment of desirable and undesirable impacts and provides a foundation for future assessments.

**More information:** The study began in 2009 and was completed in 2012. To read the full report, visit [www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/42975](http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/42975)

Provided by USDA Forest Service

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