

5. Area of timberland

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5.1 Amount of timberland

This indicator calculates the wood production capacity of existing forests and shows how much forest is potentially available for wood production compared with total forest area. In practice, the area available for wood production at any given time will always be a value less than total timberland. The amount of the area adjustment that would be required to determine the actual availability of timberland depends on the ownership mix, accessibility, and management practices in place at the time of analysis. This adjustment would affect all other indicators in Criterion two as well.

Forest land in Wisconsin, totaling 16.4 million acres, is primarily in the northern half of the state. Timberland, including natural/semi-natural stands and planted forests comprise the largest category of forest (Figure 5.a) with 16.3 million acres. Timberland increased by 1.4 million acres (9.6%) in Wisconsin between 1983 and 2007 (Figure 5.b).

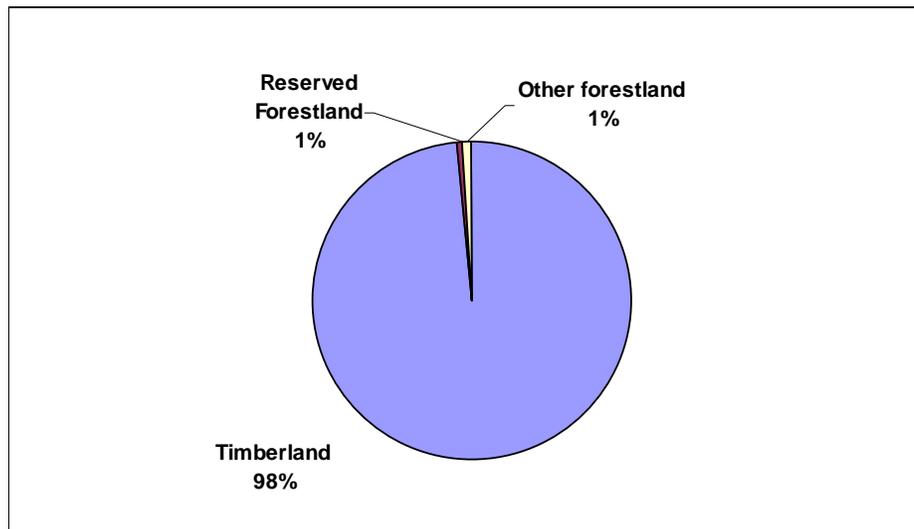


Figure 5.a: Percentage of forest land categorized as timberland compared to reserved and other forest land in Wisconsin, 2007

Source: FIA, 2007

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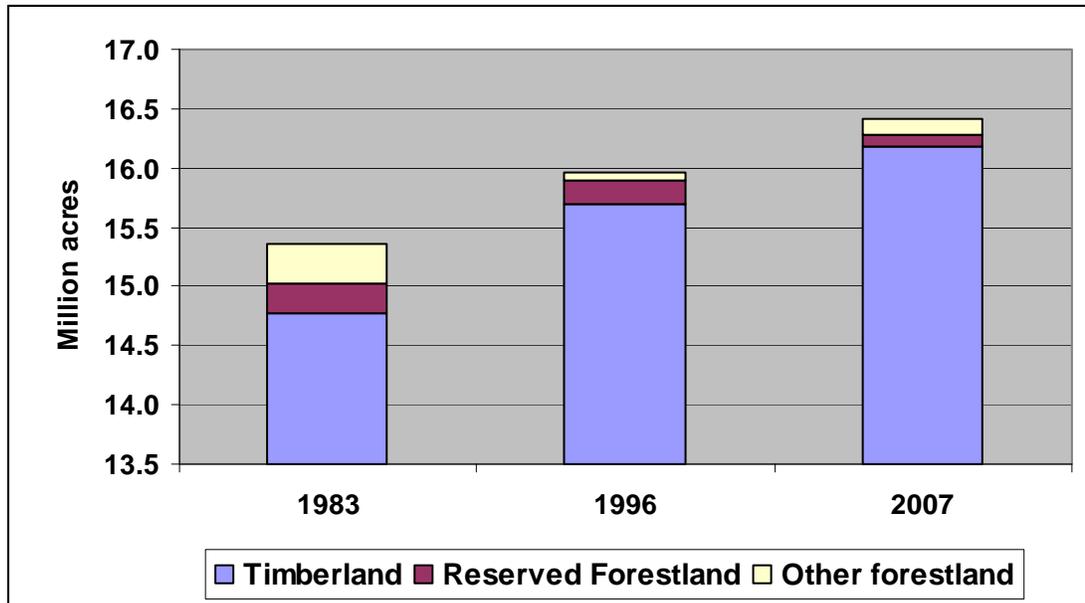


Figure 5.b: Amount of forest land categorized as timberland compared to reserved and other forest land in Wisconsin

Source: FIA, 2007

Ownership also plays a key role in the area available for the state's wood production. Timberland is concentrated on private lands in Wisconsin. Overall, private timberlands account for 11.4 million acres, or about 70 percent of all timberland available for wood production in Wisconsin. Private timberland includes all industry, non-industrial private, and Native American owned lands. Parcelization and housing development on private lands negatively impact wood utilization on timberland.

Timberland in Wisconsin has increased since 1983 with no sign of changing in the near future (Figure 5.b). Much of the increase likely came from the reforestation of marginal agricultural lands. The quality of the new timberland will slowly become evident as it grows to a large enough size to measure in the following metrics. The increase occurred in all Wisconsin counties except eight. Five of those eight counties are in the eastern part, which is more populated. Changes in timberland across the state ranged from a decrease of 17% in Fond du Lac County to an increase of 90% in Rock County over the 24 years.

The apparent decline in reserved forest land between 1983 and 2007 is likely due to the change in interpretation of the definition of reserved forest land. In the past, the definition of reserved forest land was based on land use. Reserved forest land was generally defined as land that excluded harvest but had no legal status specifically stating so. This more general definition allowed more land to be included in the reserved forest land category. Today, reserved forest land is considered a legal status in which harvesting is excluded specifically by law; fewer forest lands meet this more strict definition.

The availability of forest land for wood production is linked to the demand for these lands for other uses. Natural events and competing societal forces can also affect availability. Fire,

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weather, and insect and disease outbreaks can seriously impact supplies at any given time. Forest productivity can also be altered by pollution and human-caused degradation.