

THE NORTHERN FOREST FUTURES PROJECT: EXAMINING PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE TRENDS AFFECTING FORESTS IN AND AROUND THE CENTRAL HARDWOOD FOREST REGION

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The Northern Forest Futures Project is intended to be a window on tomorrow's forests, revealing how today's trends and choices can change the future landscape of the Northeast and Midwest. The research is focused on the 20 states bounded by Maine, Maryland, Missouri and Minnesota—the most heavily forested and most densely populated quadrant of the nation. The three major components of the project are: (a) an assessment of forest resource management issues common to the region, (b) a multidimensional analysis of current conditions and recent trends that characterize the region's forests, and (c) projections of alternative future scenarios to assess the combined impacts of forest succession, land use change, invasive species, biomass utilization for energy, and climate change on the region's forests from 2010 to 2060. There is much to celebrate about Northern forests. In the past century, total forest area increased by 28 percent while total population increased by 138 percent. Volume, biomass, and sequestered carbon have increased steadily over the past 50 years. There are 441,000 jobs in the forestry, logging, forest products, pulp, and paper industries. One out of six forest acres is protected, and populations of 85 percent of forest-associated species appear to be secure. Most states require forest-related planning and provide guidance on best management practices. Nevertheless, there are looming issues that can benefit from a regional perspective on forest resources. Invasive insects and disease, forest fragmentation, loss of forest to development, climate change, and inattention to forest management on private lands are some obvious concerns. Less obvious, but no less important, are the imbalanced forest age-class distribution and associated impacts on biodiversity, matching the capacity of forest industry with compatible resource conservation objectives, and meeting the demands of 124 million predominantly urban residents for wood, water, and recreation.

The content of this paper reflects the views of the author(s), who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the information presented herein.

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