



Florida's Forest Resources: Condition and Trends 2005-2030 SUMMARY

Introduction

For more than 12,000 years, Florida's forests have been sustaining people and enhancing their quality of life: from the earliest indigenous people, Spanish explorers and settlers, to the 17 million people who call Florida their home today. We look upon our forests as a source of wood, a filter that helps keep our water clean, a place to go to relax and unwind after a busy week.

Today, half of our state is forested: 15 million acres support 15 billion cubic feet of growing wood, enough to circle the planet more than 15 times or make five trips to the moon and back! They've survived wildfires, insects and diseases, hurricanes, droughts, tornadoes, rising and falling seas and floods.

Even though we have numerous state forests, national forests, and other public lands, the future of Florida's forests lies in the hands of private landowners, who own twelve million of the fifteen million acres.

How will these owners care for their land in the future? Will they sell it for development? Clear it for agriculture? Manage it with the future in mind or harvest it for a quick return on their investment?

Will they sustain its many values? Protect it from fire, disease, and insects? Make it available for thousands of recreational users who hunt, fish, bird-watch, canoe or hike? We cannot know for sure, but we can look at today's forest and make some predictions based on past events and current trends. We ask for your help as we seek answers to these important questions and chart a course to secure a healthy future for our forests and those who depend on them.

This report is a summary of a more in-depth forest assessment. It describes the forest's current condition, both positive and negative. After weighing the pluses and minuses, do you think our forests are healthy and sustainable?

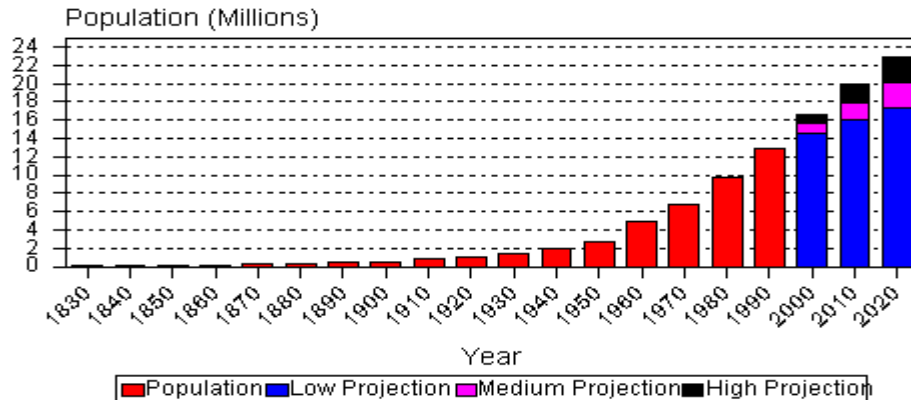
What is Going Well?

- In 1995, 57% of the forest was in good condition, but recent hurricane damage has lowered this figure
- **More new wood grows each year than is cut or dies**
- 10 million acres are open and available for outdoor recreation such as hiking, hunting, fishing, and camping
- A third of our communities have nationally-recognized urban forestry programs and we have many greenways, parks, and shade trees
- 90% of our residents drink water filtered by forests
- Forests shelter more than 100 species of animals including Threatened and Endangered species such as the Florida Panther, Black Bear, and Red Cockaded Woodpecker
- All of our public and industry lands and some non-industrial private ownerships have multiple use conservation management plans
- State programs help protect forests from wildfire, insects and diseases, and non-native invasive species
- Florida's forests supply hundreds of medicines including saw palmetto

What Are Some Current and Future Concerns?

Rapidly increasing population is the number one cause for many of forest resource concerns. The table below shows historic and projected population growth.

- Florida's population is expected to grow by 10 million by 2030, meaning more loss of forest land to housing and commercial development.
- More than 25% of our forests, some five to six million acres, have been lost to agriculture or development since the 1930's.
- Pine plantations, which make up more than a third of our forests, are more susceptible to diseases, windstorms, and other problems if not properly managed
- The 2004 hurricanes damaged 10 million acres of forest; two million were severely damaged
- In 1995, 43% of forest stands needed some treatment to improve their health, but hurricane damage has raised this figure.
- ■ Forest industries are selling land for development as profits far exceed the profits from growing wood; wood prices are falling because of cheaper foreign wood.



- Large parcels of unbroken forest are being subdivided; studies indicate this process leads to less timber cutting, less conservation management, more posted land, and less habitat for species that need large forested areas such as the Florida Panther
- Non-native invasive species such as Brazilian Pepper and Kudzu are growing in number and becoming difficult to control as they crowd out native trees and plants
- The threat of damaging wildfires is increasing as population expands into once-rural areas (known as the wildland/urban interface)
- Two-thirds of Florida's communities have no recognized urban forestry program even though most Floridians live and work in urban environments
- We are losing more forestland each year than the number of acres protected each year by land conservation programs
- Land conversion, parcelization, and fragmentation are impacting ecosystems and threatening their capacity to provide us the goods and services we need

Where Can I Find More Information About the Forest Plan or About Florida's Forests?

Please contact us:

Florida Division of Forestry
 Michael C. Long, Director
 3125 Conner Boulevard
 Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1650
 850-488-4274

Visit our website at <http://www.fl-dof.com/>