

FOREST OWNERSHIP

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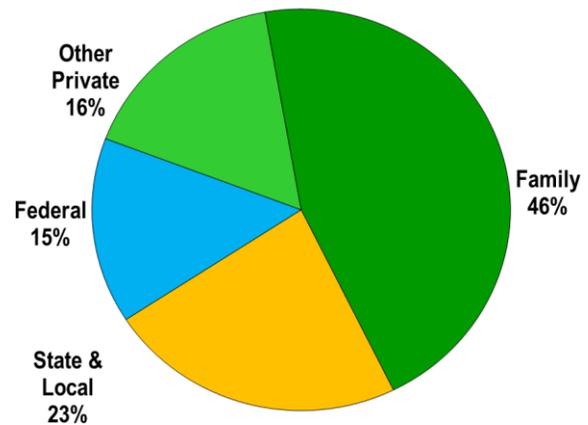
A little more than half of Michigan is covered with about 20 million acres of forest, one of the largest forest areas in the nation. The ownership of forest has a lot to do with how it is managed (or not), as well as the amount and quality of products and services derived from the forest. There are public and private forests. The public forests can be subdivided into the various government agencies responsible for their management. In Michigan, the two large public forest ownerships are managed by federal and state agencies. Other public ownership categories exist. Private ownerships can also be divided into smaller categories, primarily corporate owners and those smaller properties owned by private, non-industrial forest (PNIF) owners. These PNIF ownerships are sometimes called “family forests” or “NIPF” (non-industrial, private forest).

Ownership also determines who can legally access forest land and what users may be allowed to do. Public forests have the greatest access and widest range of allowable activities. Although, some public lands will have restricted uses due to various ownership and special management goals, some of which are prescribed by government legislatures. Most corporate forest land is open to the public for hunting and fishing; foot traffic only. However, most of these public lands, enrolled in the Commercial Forest Program, allow additional uses as long as they don't interfere with the management activities of the company.

PNIF ownership is very diverse and includes about 440,000 owners.¹ Ownership size varies from several acres to thousands of acres. Reasons for ownership also vary widely, from scenic values to investment. Some of the best and some of the worst forest management practices can be found on PNIF ownerships. Michigan does not have forest management regulations that apply to private land.² These ownerships can provide revenue, public good, great personal satisfaction, and serve as the focus of family activities. Kuipers et al. identified four groups of owners in the northeastern Lower Peninsula based on their reasons for ownership.³ There have been other studies of different aspects PNIF ownership, even though these data are difficult to acquire. Additionally, the complexion of ownership constantly changes as forest land is transferred to other owners. One of the state's largest ownership successions in history is expected over the next decade.⁴

The greatest threats, arguably, to PNIF forest lands are parcelization and the conversion to non-forest uses, a common fate when a parcel is sold or inherited. Additionally, many

Forest Ownership in Michigan (2008 acres)



Source: USDA Forest Service, Forest Inventory and Analysis Data, 2008.

ecological, economic, and socio-cultural factors influence how PNIF owners use their forest lands. Publically owned forests have policies and natural resource professionals helping to manage them. However, most PNIF owners don't have those skills and are best served by hiring professional services to help them care for their forest.

What Is A Forest?

This seems like an obvious question for the most part, but there exists a “gray area” where definitions become important. Statewide forest statistics have been collected by the U.S. Forest Service since 1935. Those federal definitions are used for most statewide statistics, although other ownerships have their own inventory systems. The Forest Service inventory unit defines forest in the following ways; 1) at least one acre, 2) meets specific length and width minimums, 3) has a minimum stocking of trees, and 4) is capable of growing at least 20 cubic feet of wood per acre each year. Furthermore, “Timberland” is forest that is legally available to timber harvesting. “Forestland” includes all forest that meets the definition criteria. Therefore, and for example, the forests in national parks, state parks, and national forest wilderness areas would be considered “Forestland” but not “Timberland”. About 97 percent of Michigan's “Forestland” is classed as “Timberland”. Most private forest land would be considered “Timberland”.



Private, Non-Industrial Forest

Nearly half of Michigan's forest land is owned by this large group of owners. The majority consists of smaller parcels, under 100 acres, but there are also larger pieces of PNIF land owned by hunt clubs, smaller companies, and other private groups.

National Forests

There are three national forests in Michigan; the Ottawa, Hiawatha, and the Huron-Manistee. These forest lands are owned by the citizens of the USA to provide a wide range of products and services. Designated wilderness areas are examples of restricted use through legislation and policy. There are about 91,000 acres of national forest wilderness areas in Michigan. The USDA Forest Service has three main branches; 1) national forest system, 2) state and private forestry, and 3) research.

Other Federal Forests

National park lands and wildlife refuges occupy about a quarter million acres. These lands are in the Department of Interior, quite different than the national forests. Most of these federal lands are legislated for specific uses, such as recreation or research. Michigan has four units in the National Park system; 1) Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, 2) Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, 3) Isle Royale National Park, and 4) Keweenaw National Historic Park. Michigan has several National Wildlife Refuges with the largest being the Seney National Wildlife Refuge in the central Upper Peninsula.



State Forest Lands

The Michigan State Forest system is the largest in the country, depending on definitions of state forest. These forests are owned by the citizens of Michigan and managed by the Department of Natural Resources. State forest lands are managed for a wide range of products and services. The Michigan DNR also manages 96 State Parks that cover 250,000 acres. The largest state parks are the Porcupine Mountains and Tahquamenon. These forest lands are dedicated largely to recreation uses.

Other Public Forest Land

Unlike Wisconsin and Minnesota, Michigan counties typically don't own large amounts of forest land. Two exceptions are Gogebic and Marquette Counties. They are owned by the citizens of their respective counties and managed by county governmental units. There are also smaller amounts of forest lands managed by Tribal governments and other local governmental units.

Corporate Forest Lands

About two million acres of forest land are owned by corporations of one sort or another. Most of these forest lands were once owned by paper companies but were sold in the middle 2000s. The majority of these forest lands remained enrolled in Michigan's Commercial Forest Program and is accessible to the public for hunting and fishing. Nearly all of these lands are located in the Upper Peninsula.

¹ Butler, B.J. 2008. **Family Forest Owners of the United States, 2006**. Gen. Tech. Rep. NRS-27. Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station. 72 p.

² Forest owners who enroll in certain tax programs are obliged to develop and follow a state-approved forest management plan. Also, while there are no forest management regulations on private forest land, there are certain related activities, such as stream crossings, that are regulated and require permits.

³ Kuipers, B.T., G.C. Shivan, K. Potter-Witter. 2012. **Identifying Appropriate Communication Means for Reaching Nonindustrial Private Forest Owners**. Journal of Forestry 111(1): 34-41.

⁴ USDA Forest Service. 2010. [Future of America's Forest and Rangelands: Forest Service 2010 Resources Planning Act Assessment](#). Gen. Tech. Report WO-87. Washington, D.C. 198 pp.