The Eastern Forests

Air, Water, Life
Treasures Worth Protecting

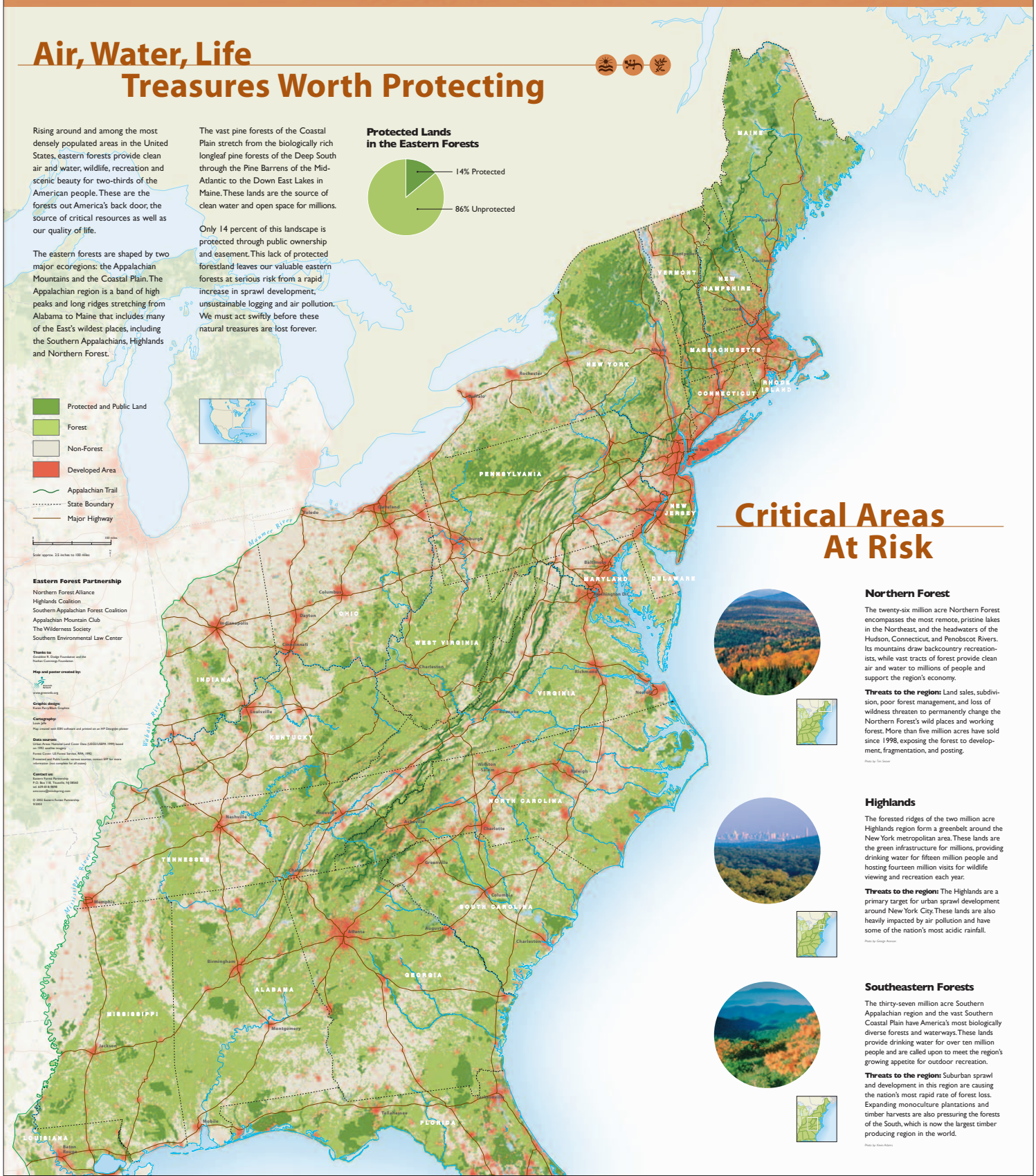
Rising around and among the most densely populated areas in the United States, eastern forests provide clean air and water, wildlife, recreation and scenic beauty for two-thirds of the American people. These are the forests out America's back door, the source of critical resources as well as our quality of life.

The eastern forests are shaped by two major ecoregions: the Appalachian Mountains and the Coastal Plain. The Appalachian region is a band of high peaks and long ridges stretching from Alabama to Maine that includes many of the East's wildest places, including the Southern Appalachians, Highlands and Northern Forest.

The vast pine forests of the Coastal Plain stretch from the biologically rich longleaf pine forests of the Deep South through the Pine Barrens of the Mid-Atlantic to the Down East Lakes in Maine. These lands are the source of clean water and open space for millions.

Only 14 percent of this landscape is protected through public ownership and easement. This lack of protected forestland leaves our valuable eastern forests at serious risk from a rapid increase in sprawl development, unsustainable logging and air pollution. We must act swiftly before these natural treasures are lost forever.

Protected Lands in the Eastern Forests



Protected and Public Land
Forest
Non-Forest
Developed Area
Appalachian Trail
State Boundary
Major Highway

0 100 miles
Scale: approx. 2.5 inches to 100 miles

Eastern Forest Partnership
Northern Forest Alliance
Highlands Coalition
Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition
Appalachian Mountain Club
The Wilderness Society
Southern Environmental Law Center

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Forests Cover: US Forest Service, RPA, 1992
Protected and Public Lands: various sources, contact EFP for more information (not complete for all states)

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Critical Areas At Risk

Northern Forest

The twenty-six million acre Northern Forest encompasses the most remote, pristine lakes in the Northeast, and the headwaters of the Hudson, Connecticut, and Penobscot Rivers. Its mountains draw backcountry recreationists, while vast tracts of forest provide clean air and water to millions of people and support the region's economy.

Threats to the region: Land sales, subdivision, poor forest management, and loss of wildness threaten to permanently change the Northern Forest's wild places and working forest. More than five million acres have sold since 1998, exposing the forest to development, fragmentation, and posting.

Photo by: Tim Seaver

Highlands

The forested ridges of the two million acre Highlands region form a greenbelt around the New York metropolitan area. These lands are the green infrastructure for millions, providing drinking water for fifteen million people and hosting fourteen million visits for wildlife viewing and recreation each year.

Threats to the region: The Highlands are a primary target for urban sprawl development around New York City. These lands are also heavily impacted by air pollution and have some of the nation's most acidic rainfall.

Photo by: George Anderson

Southeastern Forests

The thirty-seven million acre Southern Appalachian region and the vast Southern Coastal Plain have America's most biologically diverse forests and waterways. These lands provide drinking water for over ten million people and are called upon to meet the region's growing appetite for outdoor recreation.

Threats to the region: Suburban sprawl and development in this region are causing the nation's most rapid rate of forest loss. Expanding monoculture plantations and timber harvests are also pressuring the forests of the South, which is now the largest timber producing region in the world.

Photo by: Kevin Adams

Threats to Our Forests

Sprawl Development

Land is being subdivided and developed at a rising rate throughout the East, consuming an area larger than New Hampshire from 1992 to 1997.

Remedy: Fund land protection programs, and create policies and financial incentives that discourage sprawl.

Photo by: Gary Lapsley

Unsustainable Logging

Eastern forests now see over 70 percent of the nation's logging, including widespread conversion of native forest types to monoculture plantations and whole regions where harvest exceeds growth.

Remedy: Protect more eastern forestland and certify sustainable forest practices that maintain economies and the land.

Photo by: John McNeill

Air Pollution

The eastern forests are cloaked in the nation's worst air pollution and levels are rising. The results are unhealthy air quality, hazy vistas and acid rain.

Remedy: Adopt new laws that will clean up the power plants and other sources that foul the skies.