

# Eastern Forests

**OUR WILD BACK YARD**



THE  
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SOCIETY

# The Forests Out America's Backdoor



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## The forests of the eastern United States

once stretched almost unbroken from Maine to Florida, covering most of 22 states and the District of Columbia. These Eastern Forests boasted towering pine, spruce and fir trees and magnificent hardwoods, including American chestnut. The immense wood bison grazed and flocks of migrating birds darkened the skies for hours at a time.

Today, these beautiful and productive forests, although much changed, continue to bless the region's people and communities with myriad environmental and economic benefits. They are the forests out America's backdoor, as more than 60 percent of Americans live within a day's drive of Eastern Forests.

Whether it is the county park where we picnic with friends, the national forest that provides our drinking water or our family's weekend retreat, or private woodlots that supply forest products and wildlife habitat, these forests enrich our health, safety and quality of life.

These values are at risk since less than 15 percent of Eastern Forests are currently protected within a patchwork of public and private conservation lands. Seventy percent of America's timber comes from Eastern Forests, increasingly from the South, with trees being logged faster than they can grow in many areas. More than eight million acres of rural land were developed in the 22 eastern states between 1992 and 1997, an area larger than Vermont and New Hampshire combined.

As Eastern Forests are scarred and fragmented by unsustainable logging and swallowed up by sprawling development, their capacity for providing water filtration, air purification, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation is lost as well - imposing new health and economic burdens on taxpayers, and robbing our children and future generations of their natural heritage.

For more information contact us via:

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Eastern Forests are largely unprotected, with little designated Wilderness

Federal Wilderness:  
2,243,557 (acres)

Other Public & Private  
Conservation Lands:  
44,669,326 (acres)

Eastern  
Forests Area:  
423,669,162  
(acres)

# The Eastern Forests

-  Public & Private Conservation Lands
-  Forest Land
-  Urban Area
-  Lake
-  Other Land
-  Appalachian Trail
-  Major River
-  State Boundary
-  Major Highway



Data sources: USGS/USEPA NLCD 1999,  
Conservation Biology Institute PAD 2005,  
USFS Ownership, ESRI Data & Maps 2003,  
Maine Cooperative Fish and Wildlife  
Research Unit, Maine Gap Analysis

**EASTERN  
FORESTS  
BY THE  
NUMBERS:**

**8** Million acres of rural  
land were developed in  
the 22 eastern states  
from 1992-1997

**60** Percent of  
Americans live  
within a day's drive  
of Eastern Forests.

# The Wilderness Society's Eastern Forest Program:



## Protecting the Wildest Remaining Eastern Forests

In order to safeguard the many continued benefits that Eastern Forests provide to millions of Americans, including beautiful scenery, clean air and water, diverse wildlife and abundant recreation opportunities, The Wilderness Society is seeking protection of the wildest forests that remain in the East.

Since many of these wild forests are found within eastern national forests, we believe that these forests must be managed for the values and resources that are less likely to be provided by private lands, including clean water, backcountry recreation, roadless areas, wildlife habitat, and old-growth forests. We are bringing our unique expertise on public land management and working with local groups and citizens across the region to strengthen national forest management plans and to expand the number of

Wilderness areas designated within these forests and other special places.

Since the vast majority of Eastern Forests are privately owned, protecting the wildest forests of the East will also require expanding the base of protected lands in these areas, including securing key additions to existing public lands and protecting other critical private lands through public acquisition or purchase of development rights from willing landowners. The great challenge is in harnessing sufficient federal, state, and private funds to conserve these lands. The Wilderness Society is leading an eastern-wide effort as part of the Eastern Forest Partnership, a growing network of organizations from Florida to Maine, to defend and increase funding to federal land conservation programs, including the Land and Water Conservation

Fund and Forest Legacy Program, and to advocate for other innovative ways to direct additional funding to protect Eastern Forests.

To achieve these goals, The Wilderness Society will build and strengthen coalitions with diverse interests who care about wild forests, including hunters, anglers, religious groups, businesses and civic organizations. We will assist local citizens in making their voices heard on these issues in order to lift protection of our Eastern Forests above partisan politics. As we advocate for protection of wild forests in the East, we will work closely with local communities to fully explore natural resource values and economic trends and to foster economic development strategies that recognize the linkages between land conservation and local economic and community well-being.



## A CALL TO CONSERVATION:

**Join with us in building a strong, diverse and bipartisan eastern-wide community of elected leaders, organizations and citizens working together to protect the wildest remaining forests in the East as a proud legacy for our children and future generations.**

**For more information, please visit us at:**  
[www.wilderness.org/ourissues/easternforests/](http://www.wilderness.org/ourissues/easternforests/)



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# Special and Threatened Eastern Forests:



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## SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS:

The Southern Appalachians host one of the richest ecosystems on our planet. Neotropical songbirds summer in giant old-growth trees. Healthy black bear and river otter populations still thrive. Spectacular gorges, soaring peaks, and mysterious coves host world-class backcountry recreation. The region's National Forests – including the Jefferson in Virginia, the Nantahala in North Carolina, the Cherokee in Tennessee, the Chattahoochee in Georgia, and the Sumter in South Carolina – are a treasure trove of natural benefits. The Wilderness Society works with the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition and local groups to protect these forests and secure Wilderness designations for the region's last best wild places. We also work to secure funds to purchase key additions to these national forests and to conserve critical private forestlands in the region.

## CUMBERLAND PLATEAU:

The Cumberland Plateau spans over 400 miles stretching from Alabama to West Virginia and is one of the most biologically rich ecosystems not only in the East, but in the world. Increasing development pressure, resource extraction and the potential sale of timber company lands threaten the biological diversity and wildness of the region. The Wilderness Society is supporting efforts to protect priority lands in the region by increasing and securing funding for land conservation projects at the federal and state levels.



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## NORTHERN MAINE:

Maine's 15 million-acre North Woods contains the wildest part of the 26 million-acre Northern Forest region that stretches through northern New Hampshire and Vermont to the Adirondacks in New York. Since 1998, massive land sales have swept the region, threatening traditional public access to these lands and local timber-based economies. As part of the Northern Forest Alliance, The Wilderness Society is playing a leading role in securing the federal, state and private funding needed to protect wildlands in northern Maine. Our Maine WoodNet program helps small, locally-owned wood products manufacturers collaborate and become more competitive in an increasingly global marketplace.



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## MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST:

The Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia contains some of the most beautifully rugged and remote wildlands in the region. The Wilderness Society is working with the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition to develop a protective forest plan and to convince Congress to make 15 special places in this popular forest part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. We are also working with local partners to secure funds necessary to purchase key additions to the National Forest and to conserve critical private forestlands in the region.

## PENNSYLVANIA WILDS:

The dense forests of north-central and northwestern Pennsylvania form one of the largest blocks of wild forests in the East and support the largest elk herd east of the Mississippi. The Wilderness Society is working with local conservationists to secure new Wilderness designations for key areas in the Allegheny National Forest. We will also advocate for increased federal and state funds to purchase key additions to the Allegheny National Forest and to conserve critical private forestlands in the region. We have included the Allegheny National Forest region in an eastern-forest-wide study of the economic benefits of wildland protection to local communities, and will be working with the Friends of Allegheny Wilderness to communicate the study results to local business, conservation and community leaders.



## MID-ATLANTIC HIGHLANDS:

The 3 million-acre Highlands region is the wild backyard to the Philadelphia, New York and Hartford metropolitan areas. The forested watersheds of the Highlands provide clean drinking water to over 15 million people and are increasingly threatened by poorly-planned sprawling development. The Wilderness Society is a leading member of the Highlands Coalition, an alliance of over 100 organizations working to protect the region's forests from inappropriate development.

## CENTRAL GEORGIA:

In the wild heart of Central Georgia, the Weyerhaeuser Company recently sold 330,000 acres of timber lands to private investors, threatening two state wildlife management areas and other critical private lands with development. Unless the land is brought into public ownership or management, this land sale could lead to major fragmentation of habitat critical to the black bear, bald eagle, Swainson's warbler, the red-cockaded woodpecker, and other threatened species. The Wilderness Society is playing a leading role within the Central Georgia Rivers Partnership to secure the necessary federal and state funds to protect these important lands.

