

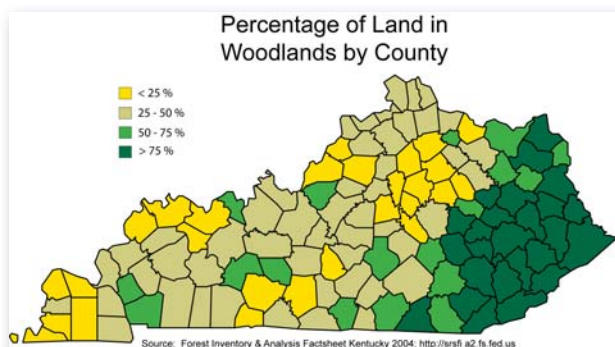
Kentucky Woodland Facts

by Billy Thomas and Jeff Stringer

Kentucky's woodlands have always occupied a significant portion of our landscape. Woodlands is the term we use to describe all of our wooded areas, whether it is a small woods surrounding a house or a vast forest covering hundreds of thousands of acres. Regardless of the size of the woodlands, all are important, and new surveys indicate changes in this valued resource. This article highlights some of these changes, focusing for now on the area of Kentucky covered in woodlands as well as their distribution and ownership, and the diversity of tree species in our woodlands. Obviously, there are many more Kentucky woodland facts, and they will be discussed in future articles.

Kentucky's Woodland Landscape

Kentucky is 47% woodlands, a higher percentage of woodlands than occurs overall in the United States (33%) or the entire world (30%). While Kentucky's woodlands are a dominant part of our landscape, this fact is changing. The most recent survey of Kentucky's woodlands (referred to as forests in these surveys) completed by the Kentucky Division of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service shows that Kentucky lost more than 700,000 acres of forest between 1988 and 2004. Although this loss was not unexpected, the most striking fact is that for the first time these losses were not due to converting forests to farms but rather to development. The growth of urban areas and the urbanization and mining of rural Kentucky have taken a toll on the land area occupied by woodlands.



Kentucky's Forest Ownership and Distribution

Kentucky's woodlands, like those of many other states in the eastern United States, are overwhelmingly privately owned. This is in stark contrast to states in the West that have more than 50% of the woodlands in federal ownership. Eighty-nine percent of Kentucky's woodlands are privately owned. This ownership represents individuals and their families (78%) as well as privately owned corporations (11%). The remainder of Kentucky's woodlands is owned by the wood industry (2%), national forests (5%), and other public entities (4%).

Trees, Trees, Trees

Kentucky has some of the most diverse woodlands in the nation. Our temperate climate and varied land-

forms play a large role in that diversity. The eastern part of the state is home to the mixed mesophytic forest that is one of the most biologically diverse temperate regions on the planet. There are a large

number of trees native to Kentucky. Although many of the different types of trees can be found across the state, others are very limited in their distribution.

According to the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission, there are 120 native tree species in Kentucky. The list includes 19 different oak species and 10 different hickory species. You can find the complete list at www.naturepreserves.ky.gov/inforesources/factsheets.htm. The dominant forest type in Kentucky is oak-hickory.

Forestland vs. Timberland

We expect our woodlands to provide us with a wide range of uses from the aesthetic backdrop for our many state parks, lakes, and homes to the backbone of our rural forest industry. Because of the significance of our woodlands to provide a renewable and sustainable economy, the forest survey differentiates between forestland (or woodland) and timberland. The U.S. Forest Service defines the terms this way:

- Forestland is land at least 10% stocked by forest trees of any size or formerly having had such tree cover and not currently developed for non-forest use. The minimum area considered for classification is one acre at least 120 feet wide.
- Timberland is forestland that is capable of producing 20 cubic feet of wood per acre annually and not withdrawn from timber utilization.

In Kentucky, the vast majority of our woodlands are considered timberland. In fact, more than 97% of Kentucky's 12 million acres of woodlands are classified as timberland; this acreage has decreased 6% since 1988. For more information about Kentucky's forests, visit www.ukforestry.org and www.forestry.ky.gov.

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Ownership of Kentucky's Woodlands

