

Introduction

The concepts of forest sustainability, sustainable forestry, and sustainable development embrace people's expectations that the Nation's forests, indeed *all* natural resources, should be used wisely to meet today's needs and be available to meet the needs of future generations. Sustainability embraces the desire to preserve the health of forest ecosystems in perpetuity and to meet human social, physical, and economic needs.

To address forest sustainability on a regional level, the USDA Forest Service's Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry and the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters sponsored a comprehensive assessment for the Northern United States (figure 1). The highlights presented here are excerpts from the assessment, which uses an international system of criteria and indicators of forest sustainability to describe forest conditions and important environmental, social, and economic trends that affect forests. This system is referred to as the Montreal Process.

The Montreal Process developed as a result of efforts following the 1992 Earth Summit. The United Nations Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe sponsored an international seminar in Montreal, Quebec, to provide a forum for discussions on how to measure and track progress toward the goal of forest sustainability. These discussions provided the conceptual basis for subsequent regional and international initiatives to develop *criteria*, categories that provide a large-scale reflection of public values, and *indicators*, specific measurements within each criterion. The criteria address biological diversity, the productive capacity of the forest, ecosystem health, soil and water resources, global carbon cycles, socioeconomic benefits from forests, and the legal, institutional, and economic systems that can impede or enable progress in sustainability. The full list of criteria and indicators can be found in appendix A.

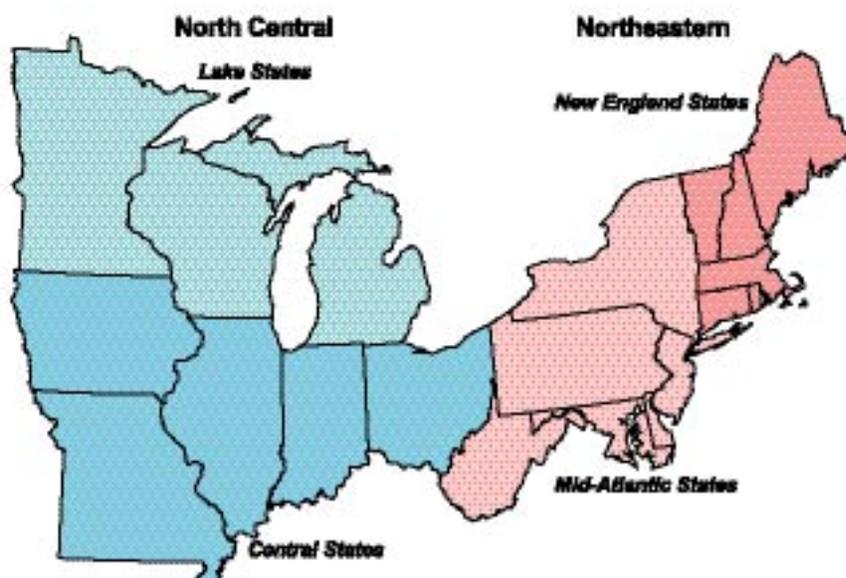


Figure 1. **The Northern United States.** The 20 States covered in this report may be subdivided into the multistate units shown for reporting purposes.

