

Several harvesting systems are used in Canada. Clearcut harvesting (also called regeneration harvesting in other countries), which is used extensively in Canada's boreal forest region, encourages natural regeneration and typically produces stands of light-demanding species, such as jack pine, lodgepole pine, black spruce, trembling aspen, and white birch. Other forms of harvesting, such as partial cutting or shelterwood or selection cutting, may be used in forest regions where shade-tolerant species readily regenerate. Over the past 20 years, new information and a better understanding of forest ecosystems have led to changes in harvesting guidelines and to an emphasis on maintaining wildlife habitat, protecting soils, and retaining natural landscape patterns. For example, in 1998, a major forest company developed a new and cost-effective logging technique in its efforts to phase out clearcutting. The technique involves climbing a tree, cutting off the branches, painting the top to make it visible from the air, and cutting around the trunk deeply enough to enable a helicopter pilot to grapple the tree and snap it off before flying it to a roadside landing.

Some of Canada's forests are protected from harvesting by policies and legislation. For example, forests located on sensitive sites, such as those close to streams or on steep slopes, are protected from harvesting by forest management policies. Other forests are protected by legislation as part of Canada's commitment to preserve a network of areas that are representative of its land and freshwater. According to the Canadian Conservation Areas Database, in 1995, more than 7.6 percent of Canada's forests were located in protected areas. Since 1995, provinces have greatly increased the number of protected areas. Moreover, Canada restated its commitment to protected areas in its new National Forest Strategy.

The People's Forests

Ninety-four percent of Canada's forests are publicly owned. Under the Canadian constitution, the provinces were given ownership and legislative authority over most publicly owned forest land — 71 percent of Canada's total forest land.

The federal government's jurisdiction over forestry is based on its ownership of 23 percent of Canada's total forest land, most of it in the territories. (The federal government devolved responsibility for forest management to the Government of the Northwest Territories in 1986, and a similar transfer is being finalized with Yukon.)

Canada is unique in that the vast majority of its forests (94 percent) are publicly owned. On behalf of the public, provincial governments manage 71 percent of the nation's forests, while the federal and territorial governments manage approximately 23 percent. The remaining 6 percent are privately owned — the property of more than 425 000 landowners.

The complexity of forest management in Canada is growing as new forest values are identified for consideration in forest management planning.

Private Forests

Surveys show that the majority of Canadian woodlot owners do not harvest any wood from their land. Most simply enjoy the scenic beauty of their surroundings. Numerous woodlot owners use their forests for recreation. Some maintain trail systems for horseback riding, snowmobiling, skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking. Others fish, hunt, and trap on their property for leisure or for extra food and income. Some owners actively manage their woodlots to attract wildlife by creating brush piles for animal shelter, by building nesting boxes for birds, and by protecting the plants, fruits, and berries that animals feed on. More and more forest owners recognize the value and marketability of certain specialty forest products, such as wild mushrooms, essential oils, wild herbs, and medicinal plants.