

A GRAPHIC SUMMARY

MAJOR USES OF LAND

As a country, the United States is large in terms both of its area and the number of its inhabitants. It has 6.9 percent of the world's land area and 6.4 percent of the world's population. Only three countries have more land area and more people. The Soviet Union with 8.6 million square miles of area, China with 3.9, and Canada with 3.8 are larger than the United States with its 3.6 million square miles. Brazil is slightly smaller with 3.3 million square miles. In 1960, China with an estimated 680 million people, India with 430 million, and the Soviet Union with 210 million outranked the United States with its 180 million inhabitants.

This report presents a graphic story about the uses made of their land resources by the 180 million people living in the United States. It is not only a story about the present major uses of land; historical changes are also discussed, since the present patterns of use can be more fully appreciated if the past is reviewed at least briefly.

The 50 States and the District of Columbia have a total area of 3,615,211 square miles, of which 3,548,974 square miles or 2,271,343,000 acres are classified as land area. The remaining 66,237 square miles, or 42,391,680 acres, are inland water areas such as lakes, reservoirs, streams, estuaries, canals, and deeply-indented embayments and sounds and other coastal water behind or sheltered by headlands or islands.

When European colonists began to settle along the Atlantic seaboard early in the 17th century, the United States as it exists today, a nation of 50 States, had a natural cover of vegetation approximately as follows:

	Million acres	Percent of land area
Forest and woodland.....	1,065	47
Grassland.....	726	32
Desert shrub.....	266	12
Tundra.....	214	9
Total.....	2,271	100

In 1959, more than 350 years after the settlement at Jamestown, Va., the major uses of the entire land area of the 50 States as reported by the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, were:¹

	Million acres	Percent of total land
Cropland ²	458	20
Grassland pasture and range.....	633	28
Forest and woodland (excluding reserved forest areas).....	746	33
Special-use areas ³	157	7
Miscellaneous other land (including 214 million acres of tundra).....	277	12
Total.....	2,271	100

¹ Includes all land, both in farms and not in farms.

² The cropland acreage reported by the Bureau of the Census was revised upward slightly by the Economic Research Service to compensate for some under-enumeration.

³ Includes reserved forest areas in National and State parks, wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas.

A considerable transformation has taken place. Nearly 320 million acres of virgin forest and woodland have been converted to cropland, pasture, and other uses. The total grassland area has diminished considerably, with millions of acres of the native grasses now used as cropland. Some of the present 633 million acres of pasture and range were originally desert shrub. Some of the deserts have also become highly productive areas of irrigated cropland. Nearly all of the original tundra and other unforested area in Alaska has its original vegetative cover.

Definitions of the major uses of land are as follows:

Cropland includes cropland harvested, crop failure, cultivated summer fallow, soil improvement crops, idle cropland, and cropland used only for pasture.

Grassland pasture and range (excluding cropland used only for pasture) is land in grass or other long-term forage growth that is used primarily for grazing. Shade trees or scattered timber trees with less than 10-percent canopy may be present, but the principal plant cover is such as to identify its use primarily as permanent grazing land. The term "pasture" is frequently used to designate areas primarily covered with introduced grasses. The terms "range" or "rangeland" are generally used to designate areas covered predominantly by native grasses; however, in some range areas introduced grasses such as crested wheat grass are replacing native range species.

Forest and woodland includes all lands that are at least 10-percent stocked by forest trees of any size and capable of producing timber or other wood products, or capable of exerting an influence on the water regime. Also included are lands from which the trees have been removed to less than 10-percent stocking, and which have not been developed for other use. Afforested (planted) areas and chaparral areas are also included.

Special uses of land vary widely. This category includes land used for urban areas, highways, railroads, airports, parks, national defense areas, wildlife refuges, farmsteads, farm roads and lanes, and so on.

Miscellaneous other land includes areas in marshes, sand dunes, bare rock areas, deserts, and tundra.

MAJOR USES OF LAND

In order to understand the "statistical transition" which has occurred with the attainment of Statehood by Alaska and Hawaii, the percentage distribution of major land uses in the 48 contiguous States is compared with that for the new 50-State total. Percentages shown on the accompanying chart are based on the 50-State total.

Major use	Percent of 48-State total land area	Percent of 50-State total land area
Cropland.....	24	20
Grassland pasture (excluding cropland used only for pasture).....	33	28
Forest and woodland.....	33	33
Special uses of land.....	7	7
Miscellaneous land.....	3	12
Total.....	100	100
	<i>Million acres</i>	<i>Million acres</i>
Total land area.....	1,902	2,271

