

Special Uses

Land for all **special uses**—including rural highways, roads, railroads, airport rights-of-way, parks, and related recreational areas—comprised 297 million acres in 2002, an 11-million-acre (3.8 percent) increase since 1997 (table 9; see Appendix for detailed descriptions of terms in **bold**). **Rural transportation land** accounted for more than 27 million acres, about 9 percent of the total. National and State parks and related wilderness and primitive areas totaled almost 141 million acres. An additional 102 million acres were administered by Federal and State fish and wildlife agencies, and nearly 17 million acres served defense and industrial purposes. Land in farmsteads, farm roads, and farm lanes accounted for 11 million acres in 2002.

Of the 242 million acres used for parks, recreation, and wildlife purposes in 2002, 28 percent were in the Mountain and Pacific regions, combined, and 58 percent were in Alaska. Much of this land is federally owned. An additional 7.5 percent spans rural parks, recreation, and fish and wildlife refuges

Table 9

Trends in special uses of land, 1959-2002

| Special-use areas | 1959 | 1964 | 1969 | 1974 | 1978 | 1982 | 1987 | 1992 | 1997 | 2002 |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | <i>Million acres</i> | | | | | | | | | |
| Nonagricultural | | | | | | | | | | |
| Intensive uses ¹ | 25.0 | 26.0 | 26.0 | 26.3 | 26.7 | 26.8 | 25.7 | 25.2 | 25.4 | 27.3 |
| Rural highways/roads | 20.2 | 21.2 | 21.0 | 21.2 | 21.5 | 21.5 | 21.2 | 21.0 | 21.0 | 21.8 |
| Railroads | 3.4 | 3.3 | 3.2 | 3.1 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 2.3 | 2.0 | 1.9 | 3.1 |
| Airports | 1.4 | 1.5 | 1.8 | 2.0 | 2.2 | 2.3 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.5 | 2.4 |
| Extensive uses | 87.7 | 107.4 | 107.0 | 112.5 | 122.8 | 234.9 | 245.8 | 249.3 | 253.6 | 258.8 |
| National/State parks ² | 29.7 | 31.9 | 35.0 | 36.8 | 38.5 | 89.7 | 96.0 | 94.3 | 98.1 | 99.2 |
| Wilderness areas ³ | 14.5 | 14.6 | 14.3 | 14.8 | 18.1 | 26.0 | 32.5 | 35.7 | 40.0 | 41.4 |
| Wildlife areas ⁴ | 17.2 | 29.0 | 32.1 | 35.9 | 41.3 | 95.2 | 96.4 | 98.8 | 99.0 | 101.6 |
| Defense/industrial ⁵ | 26.3 | 31.9 | 25.6 | 25.0 | 24.9 | 24.0 | 20.9 | 20.5 | 16.4 | 16.7 |
| Agricultural | | | | | | | | | | |
| Farmsteads/farm roads ⁶ | 10.1 | 9.2 | 8.4 | 8.1 | 8.4 | 8.0 | 7.1 | 6.2 | 6.6 | 10.8 |
| Total ⁷ | 122.8 | 142.6 | 141.4 | 146.9 | 157.9 | 269.7 | 278.6 | 280.8 | 285.5 | 296.8 |

¹ To derive rural highway and road estimates for 2002, average right-of-way widths were applied to mileage reported by FHWA (2002). 2002 railroad area is from FRA (2004) and airport area is from DOT/BTS (2004), DOT/FAA, (2002), and GDT (2000).

² For 2002, includes areas in national and State park systems plus about 2.5 million acres in New York classified as State forest preserves. Estimates exclude large water bodies and parks in urban places. Sources: DOI/NPS, 2002; WI, 2002; and HUD/BOC, 2003.

³ Estimates for 2002 include national forest wilderness and primitive areas administered by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Source: WI, 2002.

⁴ Areas administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (DOI/FWS 2001) and State wildlife agencies. Estimates exclude Federal areas under the jurisdiction of other agencies or areas leased for wildlife purposes. State estimates for 2002 are from State Fish and Wildlife websites, when available. Otherwise, they are mainly from a compilation by the Council on Environmental Quality updated through 2001.

⁵ Estimates for 2002 include areas administered by the U.S. Department of Defense (13 million acres) and U.S. Department of Energy (2 million acres), plus other defense-related public land (1.7 million acres), as of FY 2000 from the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). GSA has subsequently restricted access to these data.

⁶ Estimated on the basis of State-by-State number of farms and acreage of unclassified land in farms. For 2002, a new method was used to compute farmstead acreage. The average farmstead size in 1997 was derived from National Resources Inventory data (USDA/NRCS, 2000) and then multiplied by the number of farms in 2002 (USDA/NASS 2004a).

⁷ Distributions may not add to totals due to rounding.

Sources: Estimates prior to 2002 are from Daugherty, 1991, 1995; Frey, 1973, 1979, 1982; Frey and Hexem, 1985; Frey et al., 1968; Vesterby and Krupa, 2001; Wooten et al., 1962; Wooten and Anderson, 1957; and Wooten, 1953.

east of the Rocky Mountains, including areas in New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Tennessee, Florida, and Texas—all with a million or more acres. Alaska alone accounted for over three-fourths of the Federal and State fish and wildlife areas in the United States. Many areas, particularly the national parks and wilderness systems, were selected because of specific or unique site characteristics.

National defense areas are concentrated in the Western States and Alaska, where large areas are federally owned, and in less agriculturally productive areas of the East. Nearly 65 percent of the national defense lands are in the Mountain and Pacific regions.

Trends in Special Uses

Land used for rural transportation, recreation, wildlife, defense, and other special uses in the 48 contiguous States has more than doubled from 100 million acres in 1945 to 212 million acres in 2002. Over all 50 States, special use areas have increased about 2.5 times over a 43-year period, increasing from 142 million acres in 1959 to 356 million acres in 2002.¹³ This was largely due to a nearly fourfold increase in rural parks and fish and wildlife areas. Of the 181-million-acre increase in parks and wildlife areas from 1959 to 2002, 126 million acres (70 percent) occurred in Alaska.

The 71-percent increase in special uses between 1978 (158 million acres) and 1982 (270 million acres) came from establishing national parks, wilderness areas, and wildlife refuges in Alaska in what was once inventoried as forest or other unclassified land use. Alaska now has about 48 percent of the special-use acreage. Since 1978, acreage in special uses in Alaska has more than quadrupled from 35 million to over 143 million acres.

Special-use areas increased 11 million acres (almost 4 percent) over 1997-2002, continuing a steady upward trend since the 1940s. This apparent change, however, should be interpreted with caution, as it reflects in part an upward adjustment due to new data and methods. The rise in special-use areas from 1997 to 2002 may have been driven by a reclassification of miscellaneous and other land, which declined by 7 million acres from 1997 to 2002 (see “Miscellaneous and Other Land Uses,” p. 34).

About half of the estimated increase in special-use land over 1997-2002 resulted from a 5-million-acre (2 percent) increase in rural parks and wildlife areas, plus a 0.3-million-acre (2 percent) increase in defense areas. The remaining change was the result of a 4-million-acre (64 percent) increase in farmsteads/farm roads and a 2-million-acre (7 percent) increase in rural transportation areas. The dramatic change in farmsteads and farm roads reflects, perhaps in large part, newer data used to compute farmstead acreage rather than actual changes in land use. The average farmstead size in 1997 was derived from National Resources Inventory data (USDA/NRCS, 2000), then multiplied by the number of farms in 2002 (USDA/NASS, 2004a). The 1997 NRI data replaced older estimates of farmstead acreage used for previous reports.

The change in estimated areas under roads, airports, and railroads also reflects the use of improved data and coverage of uses previously omitted.

¹³ Data on special-use areas in Alaska and Hawaii only became available in 1959, when they represented about 12 percent of the Nation's total area in special uses.

Estimated land in rural transportation uses increased by nearly 2 million acres from 1997 to 2002. Slightly less than half of the increase in rural transportation was due to increases in the estimated area of rural roads based on 2002 mileage data from the Federal Highway Administration, with the remainder due to an increase in the estimated acreage of rural railroads. In past reports, railroads other than class 1 were excluded due to insufficient data. For this report, the availability of data and use of Geographic Information Systems techniques made it possible to include other classes of rural railroads.

National defense and industrial acres—including energy and research areas—differ from other special uses mainly in that location is paramount and higher values and intensive uses characterize much of the land. This land category consisted of 16.7 million acres in 2002, an increase of 300,000 acres from 1997, but a decrease of nearly 4 million acres since 1992. The modest increase may be attributed to more complete reporting of statistics. The decrease over the past 10 years is largely attributable to consolidation and closing of military installations.