

Major Uses of Land, by Class of Ownership

Over 60 percent of the land in the United States is privately owned (table 10). The Federal Government is the next largest landowner with more than 28 percent, mostly in the West. State and local governments own nearly 9 percent and Indian trust land accounts for over 2 percent. These proportions change only gradually over time, except in Alaska, where large areas of Federal land have been transferred to State and native (private) ownership.

Federal land, at 635 million acres in 2002, includes the original public domain and land acquired by purchase and other means. Total federally owned land decreased by about 12 million acres between 1997 and 2002. About 37 percent of all Federal land is in Alaska, 41 percent in the Mountain region, and 14 percent in the Pacific region. The remaining 9 percent is distributed among the other eight farm production regions and Hawaii, with the largest portion—nearly 2 percent of all Federal land—in the Lake States.

About 152 million acres of Federal grassland and a portion of Federal forestland are used for grazing. Livestock can also graze some of the special-use and miscellaneous land. Federal land also includes **forest land in special uses** and **miscellaneous other land**, such as marshes, open swamps, bare rock areas, desert, and other uses not inventoried (see Appendix for detailed descriptions of terms in **bold**).

State and local governments have accumulated landholdings of various sizes through grants from the Federal Government, tax reversions, purchases, gifts, and escheats. These publicly administered areas are distributed throughout the Nation more evenly than Federal land, but are still highly concentrated in the Western States. State and local governments hold land

Table 10

Ownership and use of land, by major categories, 2002

Ownership	Cropland	Grassland pasture and range	Forest land ¹	Special uses, urban uses, and miscellaneous land ²	Total land area ⁴
<i>Million acres</i>					
Federal	--	152	246	237	635
State and other public	3	40	70	82	195
American Indian ³	2	36	11	7	56
Private	436	358	422	162	1,378
Total ⁴	442	587	749	487	2,264

-- = Less than 500,000 acres.

¹ Includes reserved forest land in parks and other special uses.

² Excludes an estimated 98 million acres in special uses that have forest cover and, therefore, are included with forest land in this table.

³ Managed in trust by the Bureau of Indian Affairs for American Indian and Alaskan Native tribes and individuals.

⁴ Distributions may not add to totals due to rounding.

Sources: Federal, State, and local government and Indian land acreage are approximations based on public records and reports (DOI; FS; GSA). Private land is the remainder of the land in each use category. Land use data are from DOI/BLM, 2003; DOT/BTS, 2004; DOT/FAA, 2002; DOT/FHWA, 2002; DOT/FRA, 2004; DOI/FWS, 2001; GSA, 2001; GDT, 2000; HUD/BOC, 1992, 2002, 2003; USDA/FS 1989, 1998; USDA/NASS, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; DOI/NPS, 2002; USDA/NRCS, 2000, 2004a; and WI, 2002.

for forests, parks, wildlife refuges, highways and roads, institutional uses, and other specific purposes. Most Western States also own relatively large acreages to earn income, provide financial support to schools, and meet other objectives. About 40 million acres in this category are used for grazing.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) manages 56 million acres in trust for American Indian and Alaskan Native tribes and individuals. Like Federal and State land, most land managed by BIA is concentrated in the Western States. About 36 million acres is grazing land, and a small acreage is used for crop production.

Private land, except that under American Indian and Alaska Native ownership, totaled nearly 1.4 billion acres in 2002. Between 1997 and 2002, private ownership increased in **forest-use** land by 2 million acres and in **special uses, urban,** and miscellaneous by a total of 17 million acres. Privately owned land includes 99 percent of the Nation's **cropland**, 61 percent of the **grassland pasture and range**, 56 percent of the forest-use land, and 30 percent of the special-use, urban, and miscellaneous land.

Land use is closely interlinked with land ownership, and these proportions reflect historic land management priorities. During the 19th century, Federal agencies actively encouraged westward settlement and economic development through the selective transfer of the more productive agricultural lands from Federal ownership to private companies and individuals (Wiebe et al., 1997). At the beginning of the 20th century, the emphasis of land-use policies has evolved to balance private economic interests with the provision of recreation, wilderness and wildlife, and environmental and resource conservation.