Forest Carbon and Climate Program
Department of Forestry
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

State and Tribal Capacity Building on Forest Carbon

Forest Carbon and Climate Change in Missouri

This technical briefing summarizes topics such as forest densities and cover types, carbon storage, and climate considerations for the state of Missouri.

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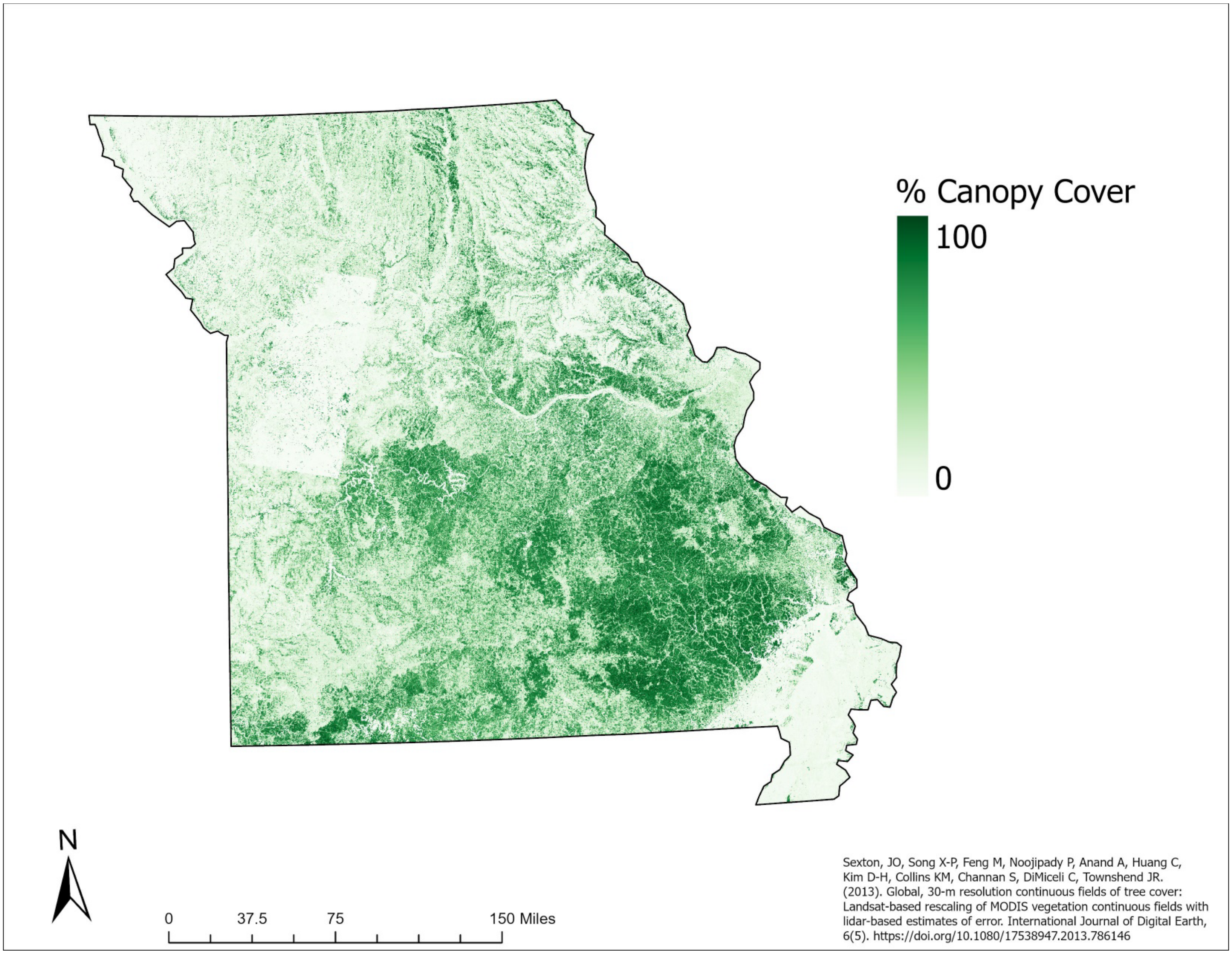
Missouri Forest Overview

Missouri is situated in the Midwest region of the United States and lies within the US Forest Service's Eastern Region (USFS Region 9). Bordering states include Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma to the west, Iowa to the north, Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee to the east, and the Arkansas state line marking Missouri's southern boundary.

A map of percent tree canopy cover in Missouri is shown in **Figure 1**. This state has variable forest coverage across its extent. The southern portion of the state, particularly the southeastern quadrant, contains the highest levels of canopy cover. This region, part of the Ozark Mountains, is characterized by a prevalence of protected lands, such as the Mark Twain National Forest, Montauk State Park, and several conservation areas. However, there is a significant reduction in canopy cover in the southeasternmost corner of the state, which sits at lower elevations and is characterized by a high prevalence of agriculture along the Mississippi river. Areas of reduced forest coverage in the northern portion of the state also coincide with higher levels of agricultural land use.

Figure 1. Percent tree canopy cover in Missouri.



Sexton, JO, Song X-P, Feng M, Noojipady P, Anand A, Huang C, Kim D-H, Collins KM, Channan S, DiMiceli C, Townshend JR. (2013). Global, 30-m resolution continuous fields of tree cover: Landsat-based rescaling of MODIS vegetation continuous fields with lidar-based estimates of error. International Journal of Digital Earth, 6(5). https://doi.org/10.1080/17538947.2013.786146

Temperature and Precipitation

Two major factors affecting forest carbon and productivity are temperature and precipitation. **Figure 2** shows normal mean temperatures throughout Missouri between 1991 and 2020. Over this 30-year period, mean annual temperatures varied by about 11 °F across this state. Temperature trends largely follow latitudinal gradients, with warmer mean temperatures occurring in the southernmost portions of the state and giving way to cooler temperatures to the north. The warmest mean annual temperature is around 61 °F and occurs in the southeastern corner of Missouri, while the coolest mean annual temperature is around 50 °F and occurs along Missouri's northern border.

Figure 2. Normal mean temperature (°F) from 1991–2020 in Missouri.

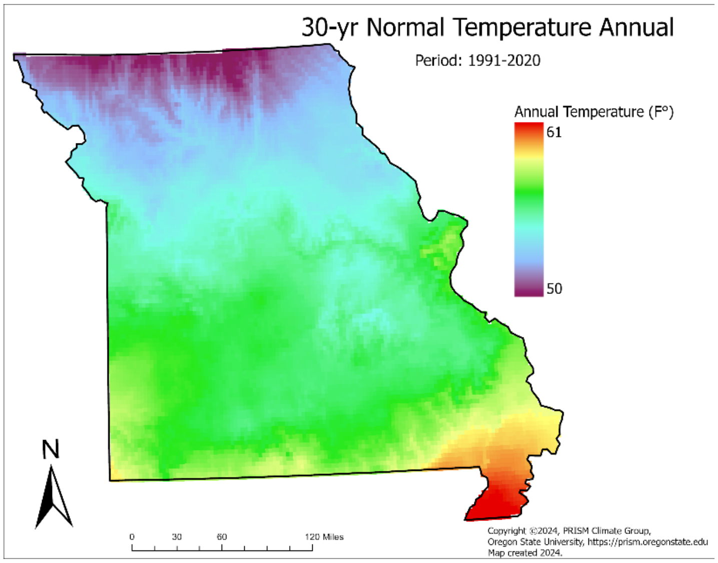


Figure 3. Normal mean precipitation (in.) from 1991-2020 in Missouri.

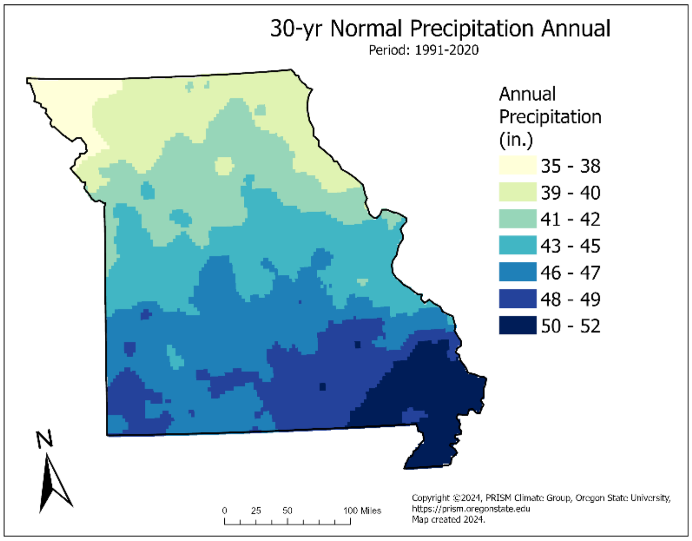
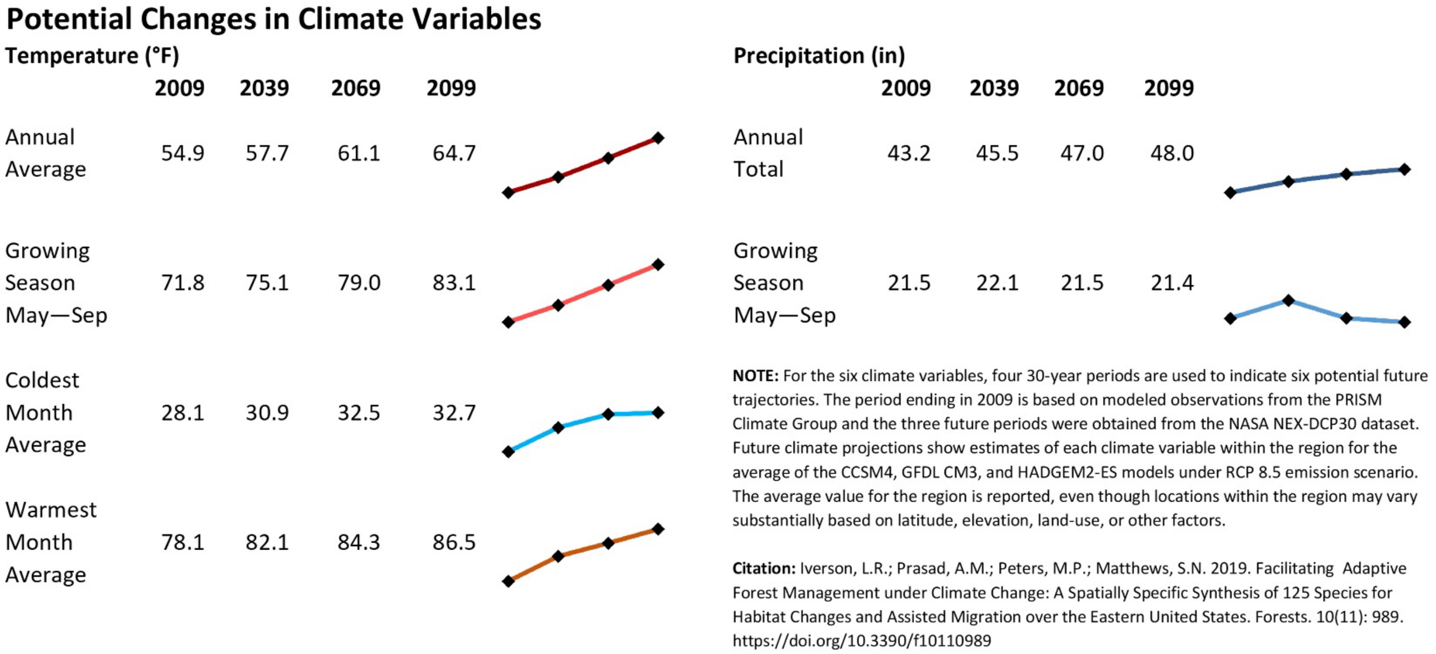


Figure 3 shows normal mean precipitation throughout Missouri between 1991 and 2020 and demonstrates the geographic variation in these trends. Over this 30-year period, mean annual precipitation levels varied by about 17 in. The northwest corner of the state receives the lowest levels of precipitation (35-38 in.) and grades into areas of higher precipitation to the southeast. The southeastern corner of the state receives the highest amounts of precipitation (50-52 in.).

Projected Future Trends in Temperature / Precipitation

Figure 4. Model results for potential changes in temperature and precipitation trends in Missouri through 2099 under a high emission scenario (RCP 8.5).



Potential Changes in Climate Variables

Temperature (°F)

	2009	**2039**	**2069**	**2099**
Annual Average	54.9	57.7	61.1	64.7
Growing Season May—Sep	71.8	75.1	79.0	83.1
Coldest Month Average	28.1	30.9	32.5	32.7
Warmest Month Average	78.1	82.1	84.3	86.5

Precipitation (in)

	2009	**2039**	**2069**	**2099**
Annual Total	43.2	45.5	47.0	48.0
Growing Season May—Sep	21.5	22.1	21.5	21.4

NOTE: For the six climate variables, four 30-year periods are used to indicate six potential future trajectories. The period ending in 2009 is based on modeled observations from the PRISM Climate Group and the three future periods were obtained from the NASA NEX-DCP30 dataset. Future climate projections show estimates of each climate variable within the region for the average of the CCSM4, GFDL CM3, and HADGEM2-ES models under RCP 8.5 emission scenario. The average value for the region is reported, even though locations within the region may vary substantially based on latitude, elevation, land-use, or other factors.

Citation: Iverson, L.R.; Prasad, A.M.; Peters, M.P.; Matthews, S.N. 2019. Facilitating Adaptive Forest Management under Climate Change: A Spatially Specific Synthesis of 125 Species for Habitat Changes and Assisted Migration over the Eastern United States. Forests. 10(11): 989. https://doi.org/10.3390/f10110989

Projected future trends in temperature and precipitation for Missouri between 2009 and 2099 are shown in **Figure 4.** Model results suggest average temperatures will continue to increase through the end of the century, a trend which is also projected for the coldest and warmest month averages, as well as throughout the growing season (May – Sep.). Over this 90-year period, average annual temperatures are expected to increase by an estimated 9.8 °F, with the most drastic increases expected to occur during the growing season (+11.3 °F).

Model results of future precipitation in Missouri follow variable trends, with totals projected to steadily increase through 2099 (**Figure 4**). Over a 90-year period, annual precipitation is expected to increase by an estimated 4.8 in., however, precipitation levels are projected to remain relatively stable during the growing season, with an estimated change of only -0.1 in. between 2009 and 2099. This suggests Missouri is likely to see increased precipitation levels during the winter months (Oct. – Apr.).

Forest Density

Figure 5. Forest density as live tree density (No. ha^{-1}) in Missouri.

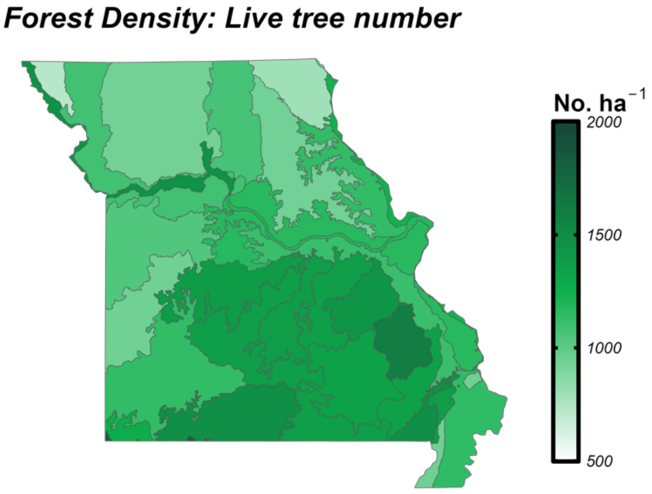
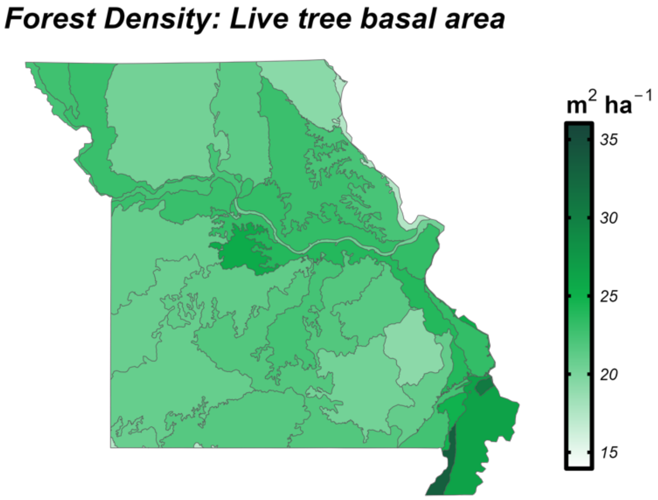


Figure 6. Forest density as live tree basal area (m^2 ha^{-1}) in Missouri.



Forest density[1] is both a structural characteristic of forests and a reflection of forest dynamics. It can be measured as the number of trees per unit area, or it can be measured in terms of live tree area per unit area, known as "basal area". Live tree basal area represents the amount of ground covered by living trees in two-dimensional space. **Figure 5** shows average forest density in terms of live trees per hectare by ecosection[2] across the state of Missouri, while **Figure 6** represents forest density by ecosection in terms of basal area (m^2 ha^{-1}).

By comparing these figures we can see that the ecosection on the western side of Missouri's southeast corner (which covers roughly the extent of Dunklin county) has a relatively low forest density in terms of number of trees per hectare (**Figure 5**), but has the state's highest forest density in terms of basal area (**Figure 6**). This suggests that in this ecosection, there may be fewer total trees per unit area, but on average, these trees tend to be relatively large. By contrast, an ecosection in the southeastern portion of Missouri has the state's highest forest density in terms of number of trees but is among the state's lowest forest densities in terms of basal area. This suggests that forests in this zone are characterized by many, smaller-stemmed trees.

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[1] All forest inventory and carbon data were estimated using data from the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program which can be accessed through the FIA DataMart (USDA Forest Service, 2024. *Forest inventory and analysis program.* Available at: https://www.fia.fs.usda.gov/) using the rFIA package (Stanke et al, 2020. rFIA: an R package for estimation of forest attributes with the US Forest Inventory and analysis database. *Environ Model Softw.* **127**:104664. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsoft.2020.104664) in the R programming environment (R Core Team, 2020. *R: A language and environment for statistical computing*, Vienna, Austria: R Foundation for Statistical Computing.

[2] Ecosection definition can be found at Cleland et al, 2007. Ecological Subregions: Sections and Subsections for the conterminous United States. *General Technical Report WO-76D*, Washington Office, USDA Forest Service. https://doi.org/10.2737/WO-GTR-76D

Forest Cover Types and Carbon

Figure 7. Total forest area (thousand ha) by forest type[3] in Missouri.

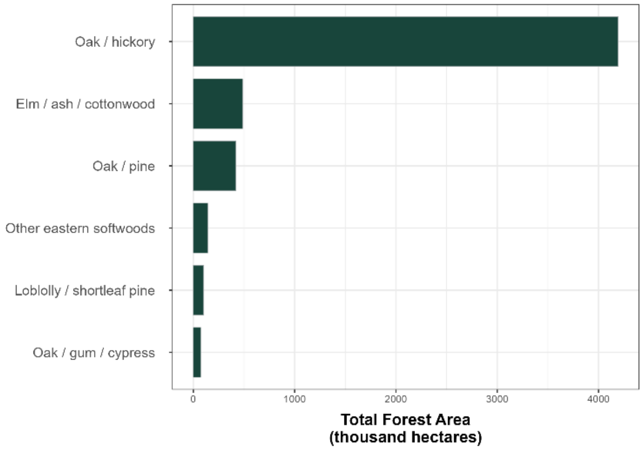
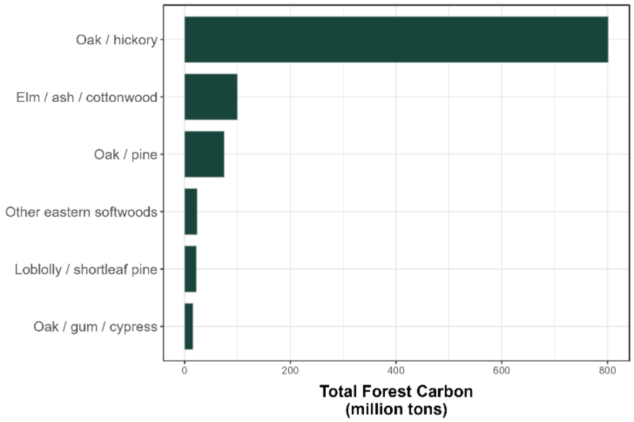


Figure 8. Total forest carbon (million tons) by forest type in Missouri. Total forest carbon is the sum of carbon stored across all aboveground and belowground pools (includes Soil Organic carbon + Live Belowground carbon + Live Aboveground carbon + Litter carbon + Dead wood carbon).

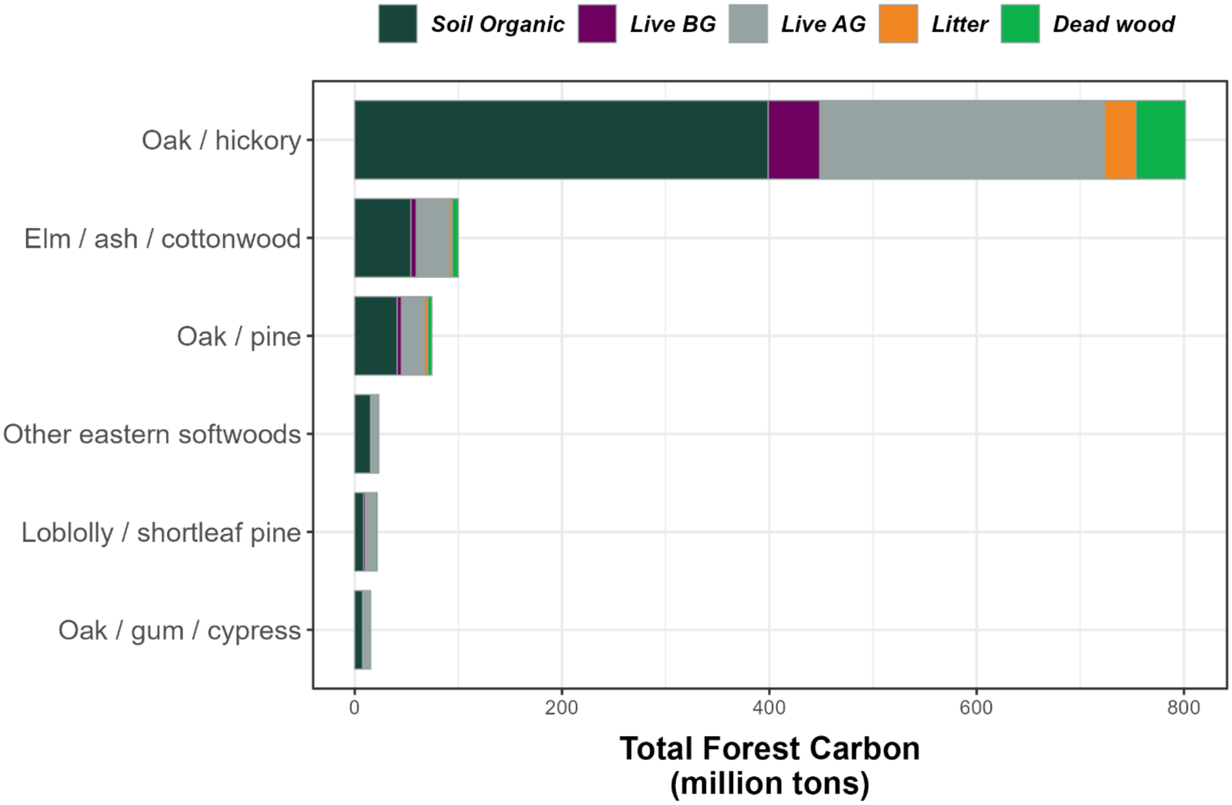


Missouri is dominated by 6 key forest cover types: Oak / hickory, Elm / ash / cottonwood, Oak / pine, Other eastern softwoods, Loblolly / shortleaf pine, and Oak / gum / cypress. **Figure 7** and **Figure 8** show state-level data of total forested area and total forest carbon, respectively, for each of these cover type groups. As these figures show, Oak / hickory is the dominant forest type of Missouri, spanning an area upwards of 4 million hectares and storing roughly 800 million tons of carbon statewide. With coverage levels ranging from ~100,000-500,000 hectares, other forest types in this state are less abundant, yet play an important role contributing to enhanced biodiversity and landscape heterogeneity. Comparing trends from **Figure 7** with those in **Figure 8** demonstrates how carbon storage levels vary by forest cover type. For example, Other eastern softwoods forests cover more land area than Loblolly / shortleaf pine stands in Missouri (**Figure 7**), yet store roughly the same amount of carbon statewide (**Figure 8**).

[3] Forest Types are a classification of forest land based upon and named for the tree species that forms the plurality of live-tree stocking. These forest types used in the briefing align with FIA's definition of Forest type group which are a combination of forest types that share closely associated species and site requirements. Longer definitions of both forest types and forest type groups are found in Appendix D of the Forest Inventory and Analysis Database: Database Description and User Guide for Phase 2 (version 9.1) which can be accessed here: https://research.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/wo-fiadb_user_guide_p2_9-1_final.pdf

Forest Carbon Pools

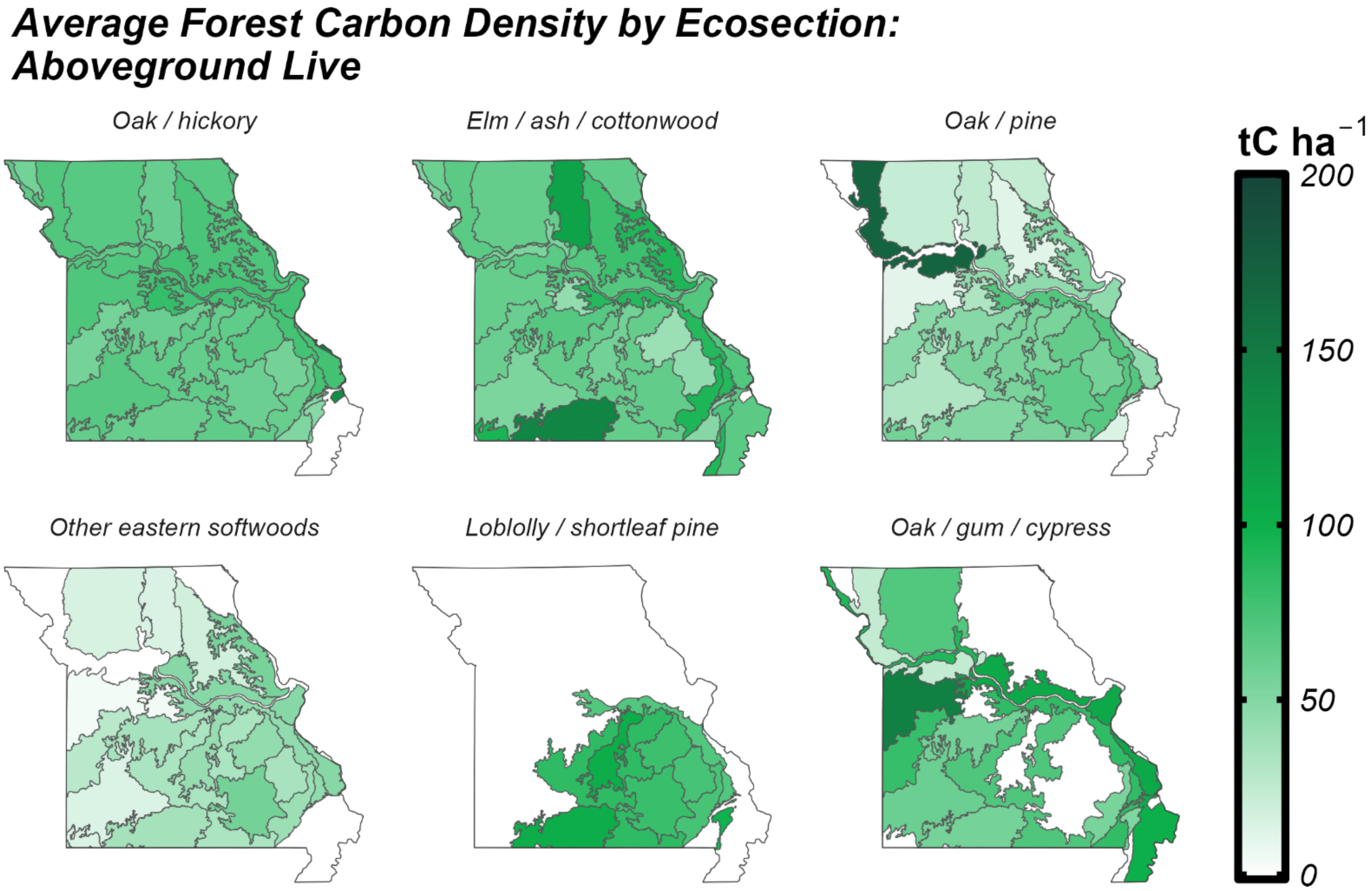
Figure 9. Total forest carbon (million tons) by pool and forest type in Missouri.



Forest carbon storage can be further assessed by examining how it's distributed across different ecosystem carbon pools. **Figure 9** shows the amount of carbon stored in different carbon pools of key forest cover types in Missouri. These values show how different forest types allocate distinct proportions of forest carbon into soil organic matter, live belowground (BG) biomass, live aboveground (AG) biomass, litter, and dead wood pools. For instance, forests composed of Oak / hickory, Elm / ash / cottonwood, Oak / pine and Other eastern softwoods allocate more ecosystem carbon to belowground pools (soil organic matter + live BG biomass), whereas forest types like Loblolly / shortleaf pine and Oak / gum / cypress tend to distribute stored carbon more evenly between aboveground and belowground pools. Another noteworthy trait shown in **Figure 9** is the magnitude of carbon storage levels across different pools and cover types. Oak / hickory's dominating presence on this landscape means its statewide carbon pools are outsized compared to other groups. For example, leaf litter and dead wood pools of Missouri's Oak / hickory forests on their own contain more stored carbon than the total ecosystem carbon (sum of carbon stored across all pools) contained by the Oak /pine, Other eastern softwoods, Loblolly / shortleaf pine or Oak / gum / cypress groups.

Forest Carbon Density

Figure 10. Aboveground live forest carbon density (tC ha-1) by forest type in Missouri.



Forest carbon density can be influenced by many ecosystem traits, such as tree density, stand age, species mix/ cover type, soil fertility, elevation, and a site's management and disturbance history. In **Figure 10**, the carbon density of aboveground living forest biomass is shown for 6 key cover types in Missouri. Of these, Oak / pine stands hold the highest levels of aboveground live carbon per unit area, represented by the deep shades of green shown for a few ecosections in the northwestern portion of the state. By contrast, Oak / gum / cypress stands have a much lower carbon density per unit area in these ecosections. Across much of their extent, Oak / hickory and Loblolly / shortleaf pine stands exhibit relatively even carbon densities, while cover types like Oak / pine and Oak / gum / cypress show higher levels of variability across ecosections. In these instances, variable carbon densities can be driven by the relative prevalence or absence of each forest type from a given ecosection.

Species-Specific Considerations for Climate Adaptation

Climate change is expected impact the distribution of species into the future. Predictive modeling of potential future changes that incorporate species interactions, dispersal mechanisms, demography, physiology, and evolution is needed to assist in adaptive forest planning. The USDA Forest Service **Climate Change Tree Atlas, Version 4**, provides modeled potential suitable habitat for 125 species in the eastern US, with an additional 23 species. https://www.fs.usda.gov/nrs/atlas/tree/

Core Climate Change Atlas Components:

- DISTRIB-II: Species habitat suitability model
- SHIFT: Migration model (when combined with DISTRIB-II, estimates colonization potential (HQCL) of future suitable habitats
- Adaptability Ratings: Species adaptability ratings (species traits not included in DISTRIB-II and SHIFT models)

In addition to the modeled potential suitable habitat for individual tree species, the Climate Change Atlas includes Current and potential future habitat, capability and migration for individual tree species and potential changes in climate variables summarized by the following spatial extents:

Geographic Area	Description
National Forest Summaries	Results summarized for 55 national forests
National Park Summaries	Results summarized for 78 national parks
HUC6 Watershed	Results summarized by hydrologic unit codes level 3 (HUC 6) which are hierarchical classifications based on surface hydrologic features in which level 3 maps watershed basins (Seaber et al, 1987) https://pubs.usgs.gov/wsp/wsp2294/
Ecoregional Vulnerability Assessments (EVAS)	Results summarized by ecoregions used in the USDA Climate Hub Regional Vulnerability Assessments https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/assessments
USDA Forest Service EcoMap 2007 Sections	Results summarized by ecological sections that delineate ecosystems with distinctive vegetation and other unique ecological characteristics (Cleland et al, 2007, McNab et al, 2007)
National Climate Assessment (NCA) 2015 Regional Summaries	Results summarized by 1x1° latitude and longitude
1 x 1° Grid Summaries	Results summarized by 1x1° latitude and longitude
State Summaries	Results summarized for 38 states
Urban areas	Results summarized for 185 urban areas across the eastern US

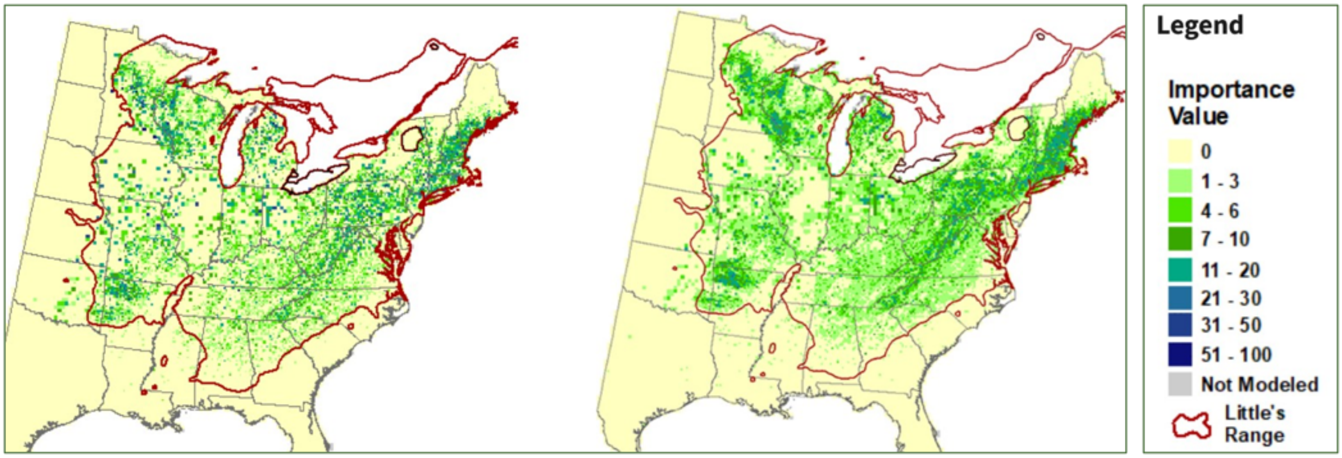
Additional background on this tool can be found at: https://research.fs.usda.gov/centers/ccrc along with short video tutorials on the Climate Change Atlas website.

Habitat Suitability and Migration Models

Model Reliability: Medium

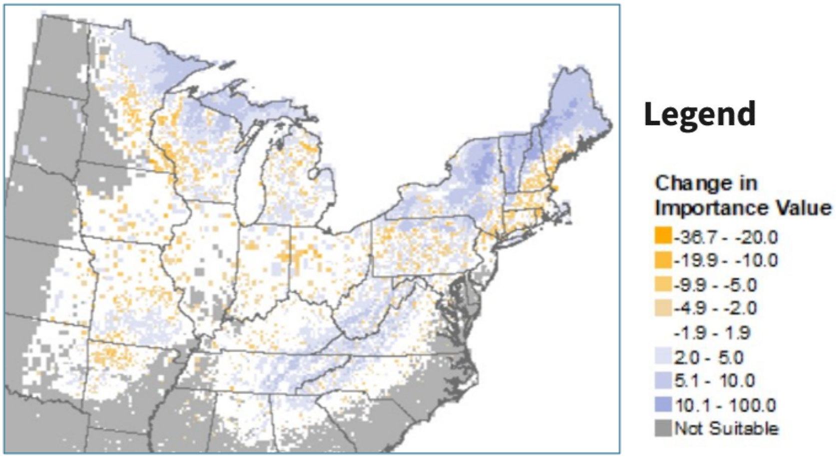
Key Species Example: Modeled potential suitable habitat for Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*) through 2100

Current habitat quality and distribution (DISTRIB) Potential migration (SHIFT) and colonization likelihood (CL)

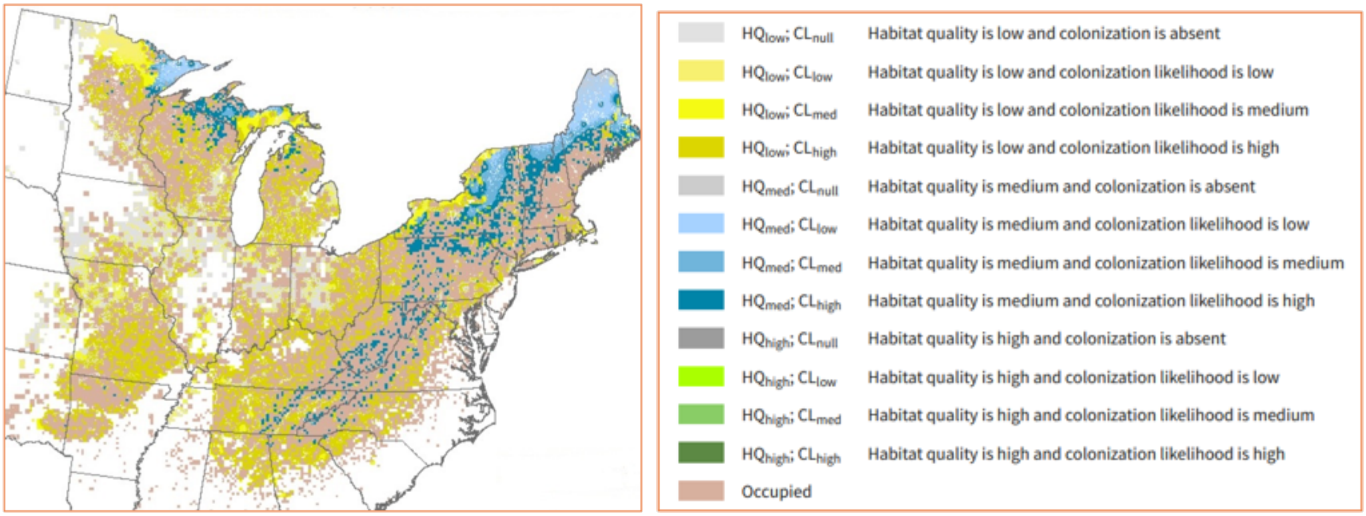


Importance value is a measure of abundance that accounts for both tree basal area and number of stems, ranging from 0-100

Colonization potential of future habitats under a high emission scenario (RCP 8.5)

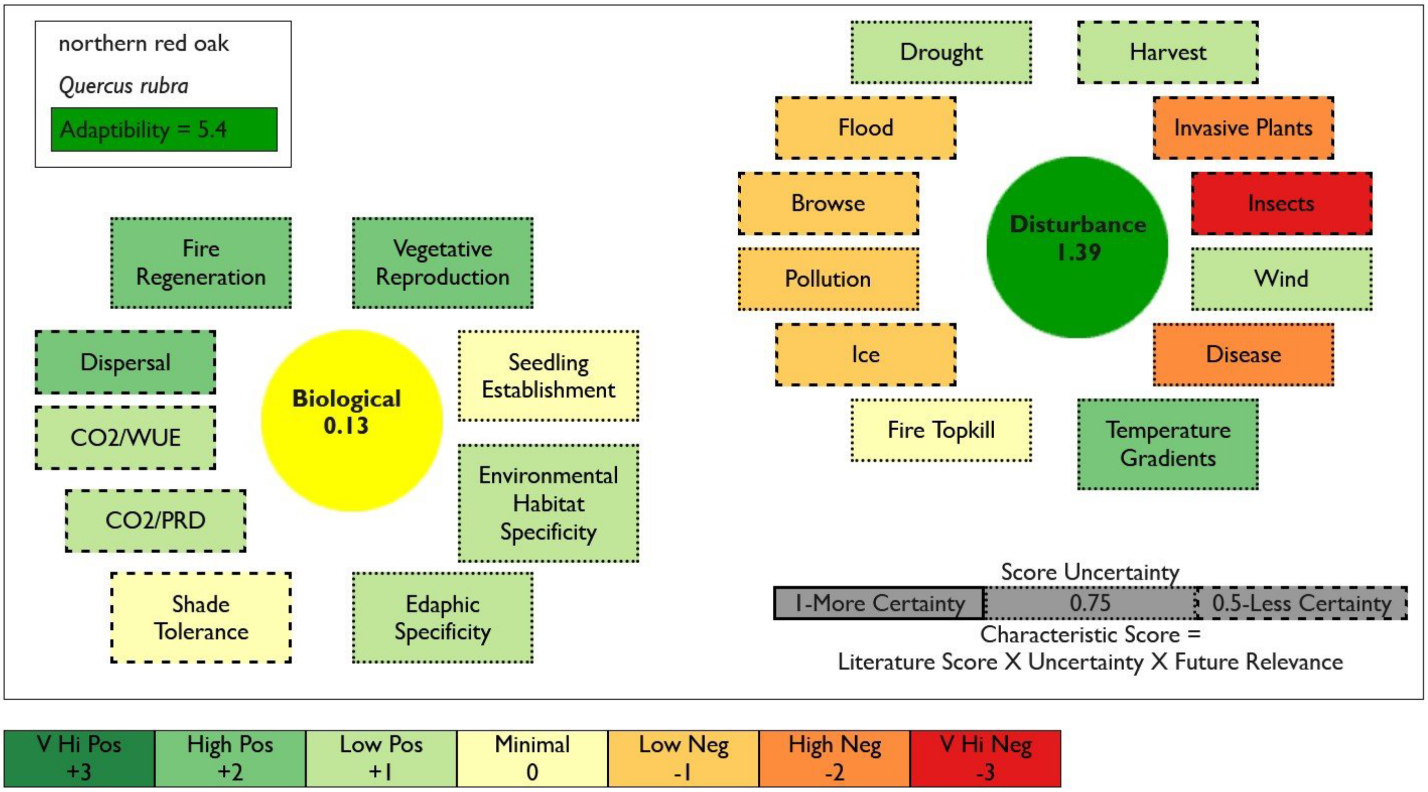


DISTRIB-II + SHIFT: Habitat quality and colonization likelihood (RCP 8.5)



Adaptability Ratings

Key Species Example: Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)



The Adaptability score, which assesses 21 variables to assign adaptability ratings to tree species in the eastern US, reflects a species' potential adaptability to climate change-driven stressors and disturbances at range wide scale. Adaptability ratings provide broad insights into factors that cannot be directly included in the Climate Change Tree Atlas species migration models. Two types of species traits are evaluated: 1) biological and 2) disturbance, each with their own set of factors to help characterize species' traits and responses to disturbance. Uncertainty is also included for each trait or factor assessed. When coupled with other modeled projections, adaptability ratings can support future planning under a changing climate.

The Adaptability variable is single score derived from the Modification Factors which encompass scores for the 12 disturbance and 9 biological factors. The Adaptability results can be considered relative to other tree species. For example, a species with a low Adaptability variable likely does not have life history characteristics to allow it to thrive under most conditions whereas a high Adaptability variable will likely do better under the climate change outputs from the DISTRIB-II and SHIFT Models.

Climate Change Atlas Summary for Red Oak

Northern red oak is a widely distributed species (24.4% of area, more than any other oak except white oak and sixth overall), dense, high IV, and abundant throughout most of the northern 2/3 of the eastern US. Its medium reliable model predicts a small increase in habitat all the way to the northern border of the country. The SHIFT model allows some potential for natural migration into those new habitats within 100 years. It is rated as highly adaptable to a changing climate and thus its overall capability is very good.

Citations:

Habitat suitability models on trees:

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