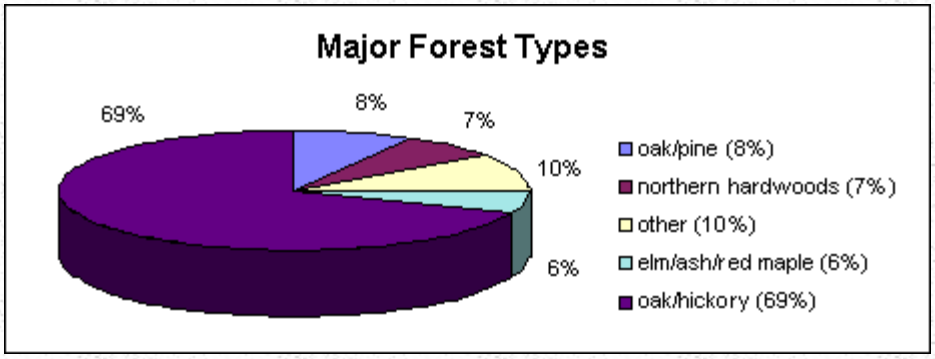
1996 Forest Health Highlights

Rhode Island

The Resource

Forest land in Rhode Island is owned primarily by individuals who view their land as a source of enjoyment and a resource to be protected. The existence of intense public debate related to any impact on undeveloped lands is indicative of citizen concerns for the amenities provided by these lands, whether privately or publicly held. Rhode Island's forests are valued as a source of cleaner air, protected ground and surface water, wildlife habitat, wood fiber, and recreational opportunities.



- 60% of the state is forested (371,800 acres)

Out of the forested area:

- 91.8% timberland
- 8.2% non commercial or reserved forestland

Special Issues

A two day **Arborist Workshop** was held in January 1997 to reach out to tree care workers and present information related to sound aboriculture practices and the urban forestry resource in Rhode Island. Recognizing that the health of this valuable resource may often depend on the skills of technicians on site, the Division of Forest Environment plans to offer training workshops every year. This is done with support from the University of Rhode Island, The Rhode Island Urban and Community Forest Council, and several utility line clearing companies.

The most significant recent damage to the state forest resource was caused by the December 1996 **winter storm**. Approximately 100,000 acres of northwestern Rhode Island woodlands were severely damaged. The heavy wet snow caused downed limbs, broken crowns, and damaged powerlines. Utility line clearance personnel characterized the damage as worse than recent hurricanes. State recreation areas, particularly cross country ski trails and snowmobile trails required weeks of cleanup before reopening.

Gypsy moths continue to maintain populations in north central and eastern Rhode Island. Approximately 4,000 acres were defoliated 50 to 80 percent. These were not contiguous acres and were not apparent during aerial surveys, but rather were recorded during ground surveys in late June. In all the areas visited, caterpillar mortality caused by the gypsy moth virus and the fungus *Entomaphaga maimaiga* was observed.

During a late season aerial assessment, **hardwood stands** (primarily oak) in coastal and east Bay areas showed browning foliage. This may be a result of combined stress from repeated defoliations, marginal sites, past droughts, and salt damage. In addition to the hardwood damage, the coastal areas of Rhode Island, including Block Island, are experiencing a steady mortality of Japanese black pine. There are high populations of the black turpentine beetle, a known secondary pest, in the stems of the Japanese black pine. However, the primary cause of the decline has not yet been determined.

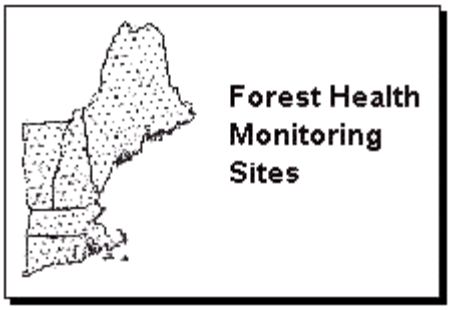
The **hemlock resource** continues to be affected by the hemlock woolly adelgid, an introduced pest. The damage is apparent through the western corridor of Rhode Island woodlands. The graying foliage is easily seen during aerial surveys. Trees are affected from Westerly to Burrillville.

Regional Surveys

Interest in regional forest condition prompted the implementation of the National Forest Health Monitoring Program and the North American Maple Project.

FOREST HEALTH MONITORING PROGRAM

The objective is to assess trend in tree condition and forest stressors. All of the New England States have been involved since the program was initiated in 1990. Results indicate that there has been minimal change in crown condition in the last 7 years. In 1996, 98.5 percent of trees greater than 5 inches diameter had normal crown fullness. About 97 percent of the trees had little or no crown dieback, and 78 percent showed no measurable signs of damage. The most common damage was decay indicators, which were more evident on hardwoods than softwoods. Additional surveys indicate there are concerns for individual species such as ash, butternut and hemlock due to various damage agents.



NORTH AMERICAN MAPLE PROJECT

This cooperative project with Canada was initiated in 1988 to look at change in sugar maple tree condition. There are several states in the Northeast involved including New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, and Massachusetts. Overall, sugar maple located within the sample sites are in good condition. Periodically, insect defoliation has affected crown condition in some areas. There was little difference found betweensugarbush and non sugarbush stands.

For More Information

Dept. of Environmental Management
Div. of Forest Environment
1037 Hartford Pike
North Scituate, RI 02857

(401) 647-3367

Forest Health Protection
USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 640
Durham, NH 03824

(603) 868-7709