

Indicator 6.3a Area of forest available for public recreation/tourism (2026)



This indicator measures the area of forest available for use by the community for recreation and tourism purposes. This provides an indication of the emphasis placed by society on the management of forests for recreation and tourism.

Context

Most publicly owned forested lands in Australia are available for recreation and tourism activities. Public access to forests on private land for recreation and tourism is generally not permitted, except for privately managed land in the National Reserve System.

Key points

- Most of the 32.8 million hectares of publicly owned forested lands in Australia is available for public recreation and tourism activities. This area comprises 22.1 million hectares of nature conservation reserves and 10.7 million hectares of multiple-use public forests. Some public land in other tenure categories may also be available.
- Some private forest areas are available for recreation and tourism, usually under commercial arrangements. Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory is an example of reserved forest on private land tenure that is available for recreation and tourism.
- Forests available for public recreation and tourism may be closed temporarily to ensure public safety during adverse weather conditions, bushfires, or during times when certain forest management activities are occurring, such as wood harvesting or prescribed fire.
- Public forest areas may be closed permanently to recreation and tourism if these activities are likely to compromise or are not compatible with the objectives of management for these forest areas, especially preservation and scientific reference areas.

Forests on public land

Most publicly owned forested lands designated for multiple uses or reserved for nature conservation are available for public recreation and tourism activities. Other tenure categories of public land may also be available.

Nationally, 32.8 million hectares of public forest (or 24.5% of Australia's total forest area) are available for public recreation and tourism across the nature conservation reserve and multiple-use public forest estates. This area comprises 22.1 million hectares in nature conservation reserve and 10.7 million hectares in multiple-use public forest (Table 6.3a-1).

Recreation and tourism activities include bushwalking, camping, mountain biking, cycling, canoeing, eco-tourism ventures, hunting, bird watching, picnicking and horse-riding (see [Indicator 6.3b](#)).

Most outdoor recreation and tourism activities may be undertaken freely in most public forests. Access for some activities, such as hunting, is restricted for safety reasons. Access to some areas of forest may also be restricted to protect specific scientific, natural, cultural or water supply value.

Forests that are usually available for public recreation and tourism may also be closed temporarily during extreme fire weather and other climatic events, for fuel reduction burning, control of feral animals or weeds, wood harvesting, and special controlled events (for example, car rallies). These temporary closures may be more likely in commercial plantation forests than in public native forests.

Some publicly owned forest areas may be closed permanently to the public, and therefore not available for general recreation and tourism. These include areas designated for scientific reference, study or research, nature conservation areas where preservation is a core objective, some water catchment areas, significant Indigenous cultural heritage sites, and defence training areas.

Forest management plans typically specify the types of visitors and community activities that are permissible and outline the general conditions of use that apply. In forests not subject to forest management plans, the policies of the responsible forest management agency usually indicate the types of recreation and tourism that may take place, and the conditions of use.

Forest areas on public land available for recreation and tourism in the states and territories

State and territory forest areas on public land are generally available for public recreation and tourism, particularly those areas in multiple-use public forests and nature conservation reserves (Table 6.3a-1).

Table 6.3a-1: Area of multiple-use public forest and forest in nature conservation reserves generally available for recreation and tourism

Tenure class	Area ('000 hectares)								Australia
	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas.	Vic.	WA	
Multiple-use public forest	16	2,122	0	3,140	29	762	3,292	1,352	10,715
Nature conservation reserve	117	5,638	11	4,236	1,758	1,533	3,458	5,301	22,052
Total	133	7,760	11	7,376	1,787	2,295	6,750	6,653	32,767

Source: [Table 1.1a.ii-1a](#), *Australia's State of the Forests Report*.

Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory has 117 thousand hectares of forest in nature conservation reserves, all of which is generally available for recreation and tourism. The Australian Capital Territory also has nearly 16 thousand hectares of multiple-use public forest, with 98% of this area available for recreation and tourism. The 2% not available for recreation and tourism consists of an area of exotic pine plantation leased and managed by the Department of Defence.

New South Wales

New South Wales has about 2.1 million hectares of multiple-use public forest and about 5.6 million hectares of forest in nature conservation reserves, all of which is generally available for recreation and tourism except during temporary closures of areas for operational or safety reasons.

Northern Territory

Most of the 11 thousand hectares of forest in nature conservation reserves in the Northern Territory are available for recreation and tourism. There are no multiple-use forests in the Northern Territory. See the *Forest on private and leasehold land* section below for information on recreation areas that exist under private (and Indigenous) land ownership and are managed as national parks.

Queensland

Queensland has about 3.1 million hectares of multiple-use public forest in State forests and timber reserves, which is generally available for recreation and tourism. Most of the 4.2 million hectares of forest in nature conservation reserves in Queensland are also available for recreation and tourism, including national parks, conservation reserves, resource reserves and forest reserves.

South Australia

Most areas in the 1.8 million hectares of forest in nature conservation reserves in South Australia are available for recreation and tourism. ForestrySA manages about 32 thousand hectares of multiple-use plantation forest and native forest reserves in South Australia, which are also available for recreation and tourism.

Tasmania

Tasmania has 2.7 million hectares of public forest available for general recreation, consisting of about 1.5 million hectares of formal nature conservation reserves, 0.8 million hectares of multiple-use public forest and 0.4 million hectares of forest on other Crown land.

Recreation and tourism are specified management objectives on land reserved and managed in Tasmania under the *Nature Conservation Act 2002* and the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*. This means almost all forested public land in Tasmania is available for recreation and tourism, including forests on 'Permanent Timber Production Zone land. Public access to these forests may be restricted at times for various reasons, usually only on a short-term basis.

Victoria

Victoria's public forests are generally open to visitors and promoted for tourism and recreational use. Victoria has 3.3 million hectares of multiple-use public forest, which is generally available for recreation and tourism. Victoria also has nearly 3.5 million hectares of forest in nature conservation reserves, which is also available for recreation and tourism.

Western Australia

Western Australia has 1.4 million hectares of multiple-use public forest and 5.3 million hectares of forest in nature conservation reserves, which are generally available for recreation and tourism.

Forests on private and leasehold land

Public access for recreation and tourism to forests on private land is generally restricted or not permitted, and little information is available on permitted uses. If access is required, it would be on application to the private landowner or manager for permission to undertake certain activities, unless specific commercial arrangements are advertised (for example, a wildlife park). The same applies for forests on leasehold land, most of which is privately managed under long-term pastoral leases that grant the lessee rights of custody of the land — these leases impart a level of responsibility for the management of the land.

Of the 90.8 million hectares of forest on private and leasehold land ([Table 1.1a.ii-1a](#), [Indicator 1.1a.ii](#)), around 12.4 million hectares (14%) is in the National Reserve System ([Table 1.1c-2](#), [Indicator 1.1c](#)). Much of the 12.4 million hectares of private and leasehold land in the National Reserve System is available for recreation and tourism, most of which is in the Northern Territory (52%) and Queensland (35%).

The Northern Territory has more than 6.4 million hectares of forest reserved on private or leasehold land in the National Reserve System, including reserved Indigenous land. Much of this land is available for recreation and

tourism, including Kakadu National Park, as an example of private land leased to the Australian Government for management of its nature conservation values under national park tenure.

Queensland has about 4.4 million hectares of forest reserved on private or leasehold land in the National Reserve System, including reserved Indigenous land, much of which is available for recreation and tourism.

In Tasmania, 84 thousand hectares of forest occur across a network of reserves on private land. Public access is permitted to some private sanctuaries and private nature reserves, which together have a combined area of forest of about 14 thousand hectares.

In South Australia, public access is available to around 80,000 hectares of plantation forest on public land in the Green Triangle region, which is under leasehold to a private forest manager. Areas are open to the public during daylight hours for a broad range of activities, with some activities requiring permits. Access to these areas, including permits, is facilitated by the Government of South Australia.

More information

Learn more about [Criterion 6 of Australia's State of the Forests Report](#).

Web agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/sofr/

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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