



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 New Hampshire

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

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EASTERN REGION

Table of Contents

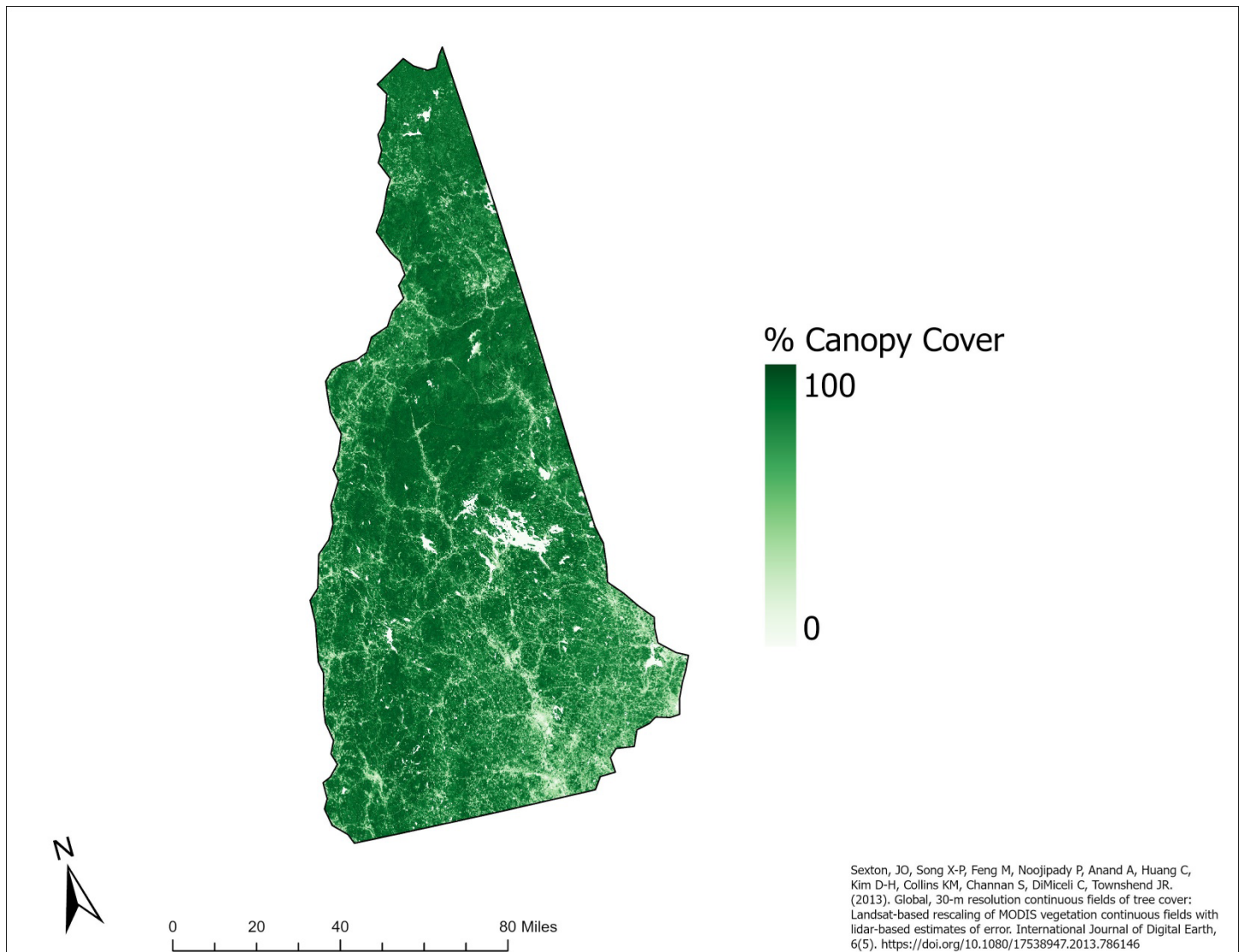
New Hampshire Forest Overview	2
Temperature and Precipitation	3
Projected Future Trends in Temperature / Precipitation.....	4
Forest Density	5
Forest Cover Types and Carbon.....	6
Forest Carbon Pools.....	7
Forest Carbon Density.....	8
Species-Specific Considerations for Climate Adaptation.....	9
Habitat Suitability and Migration Models	10
Adaptability Ratings.....	11
Climate Change Atlas Summary for Red Oak.....	11
Citations:	12

New Hampshire Forest Overview

New Hampshire is situated along the east coast of the United States and lies within the US Forest Service's Eastern Region (USFS Region 9). Bordering states include Vermont to the west, Maine to the east, Massachusetts to the south, the Canadian province of Québec to the north, with the Atlantic coast marking a small portion of New Hampshire's southeastern boundary.

A map of percent tree canopy cover in New Hampshire is shown in **Figure 1**. This state has significant forest coverage across much of its extent, showing only slight reductions in forest density near the state's most populated urban centers, largely concentrated in the southeastern portion of the state. The northern portion of the state, which includes the White Mountain National Forest and is characterized by higher elevations, shows consistently high levels of forest canopy cover.

Figure 1. Percent tree canopy cover in New Hampshire.



Temperature and Precipitation

Two major factors affecting forest carbon and productivity are temperature and precipitation. **Figure 2** shows normal mean temperatures throughout New Hampshire between 1991 and 2020. Over this 30-year period, mean annual temperatures varied by about 16 °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 49 °F and occurs in the southeast corner of New Hampshire, while the coolest mean annual temperature is around 33 °F in the northern portion of the state and coincides with higher elevations.

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

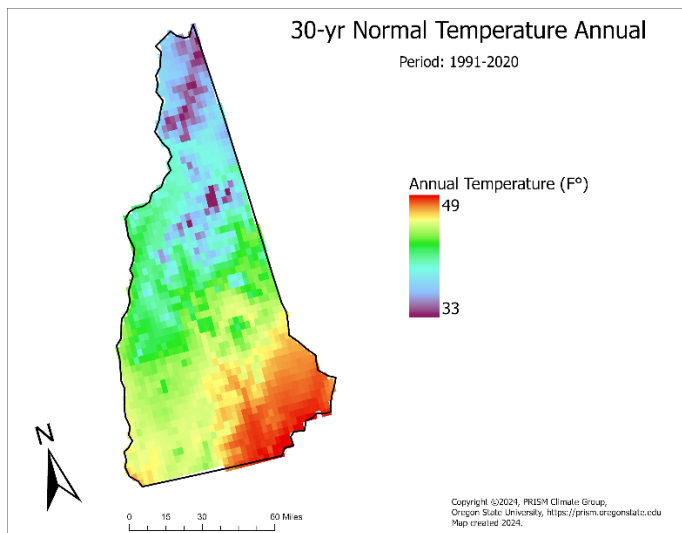


Figure 3. Normal mean precipitation (in.) from 1991-2020 in New Hampshire.

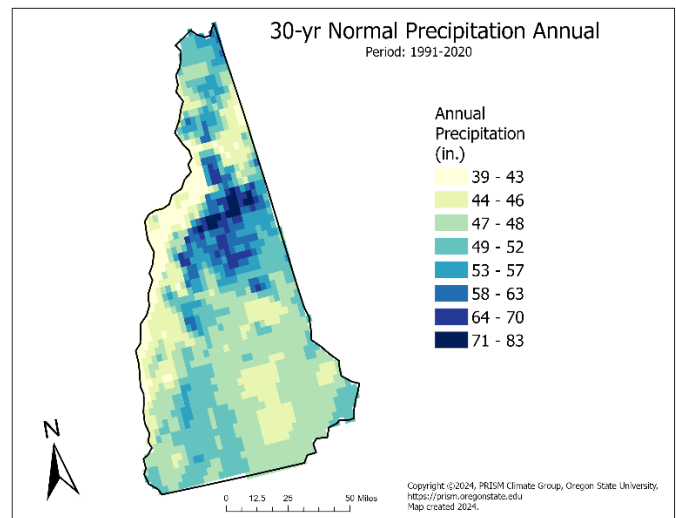
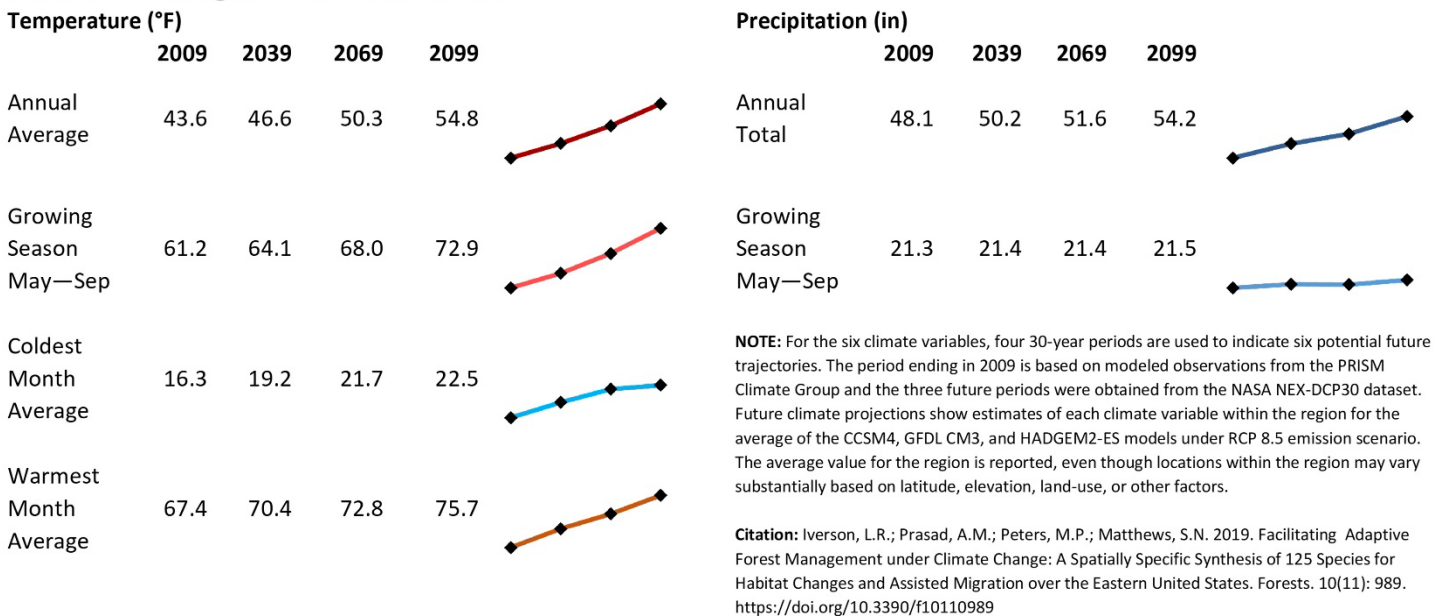


Figure 3 shows normal mean precipitation throughout New Hampshire between 1991 and 2020 and demonstrates the geographic variation in these trends. Over this 30-year period, mean annual precipitation levels varied by about 44 in. Areas that receive the lowest levels of precipitation (39-43 in.) occur along New Hampshire's western border with Vermont. Areas receiving the highest amounts of precipitation (71-83 in.) occur in the inland northern region of the state, coinciding with the location of the White Mountains.

Projected Future Trends in Temperature / Precipitation

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

Potential Changes in Climate Variables



Projected future trends in temperature and precipitation for New Hampshire 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 11.2 °F, with the most drastic increases expected to occur during the growing season (+11.7 °F).

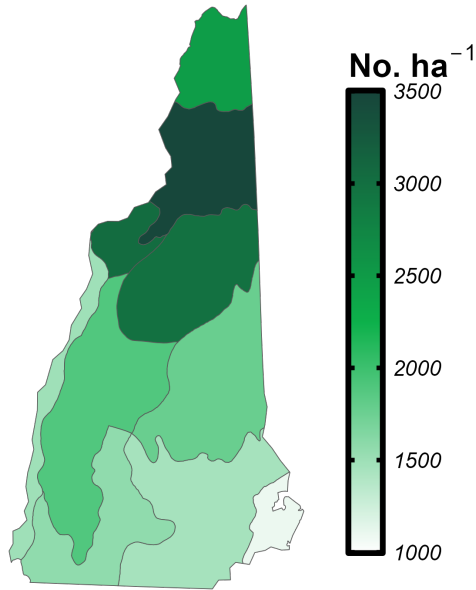
Model results of future precipitation in New Hampshire follow similar trends, with totals projected to steadily increase through 2099 (**Figure 4**). Over a 90-year period, annual precipitation is expected to increase by an estimated 6.1 in., which is a higher rate of change than projections for the growing season (+0.2 in.). This suggests that the most significant changes to precipitation in New Hampshire may occur during the winter months (Oct. – Apr.).

Forest Density

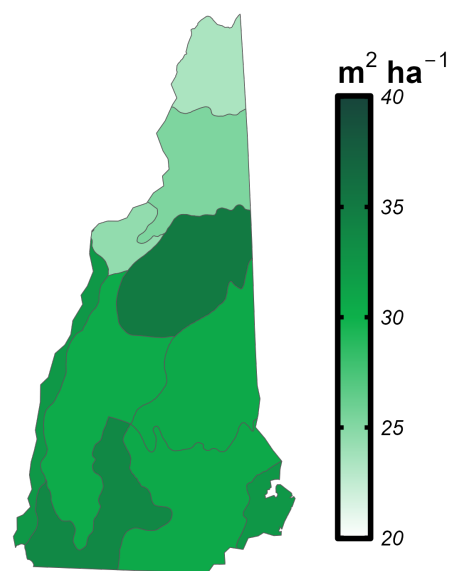
Figure 5. Forest density as live tree density (No. ha⁻¹) in New Hampshire.

Figure 6. Forest density as live tree basal area (m² ha⁻¹) in New Hampshire.

Forest Density: Live tree number



Forest Density: Live tree basal area



Forest density¹ 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 ecosection² across the state of New Hampshire, while **Figure 6** represents forest density by ecosection in terms of basal area (m² ha⁻¹).

By comparing these figures we can see that a small ecosection in the southeast corner of New Hampshire has the state’s lowest forest density in terms of number of trees per hectare (**Figure 5**), but an average forest density in terms of basal area (**Figure 6**). This suggests that there may be fewer total trees per unit area in this zone, but on average, these trees tend to be relatively large. By contrast, the ecosection just south of the northernmost ecosection of New Hampshire has the highest forest density in terms of number of trees but has one of the lowest forest densities in terms of basal area, suggesting the prevalence of many, smaller-stemmed trees in this zone.

¹All 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).

²Ecosection 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 type³ in New Hampshire.

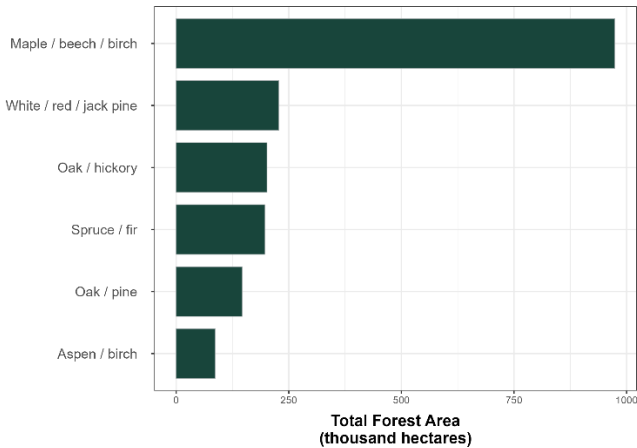
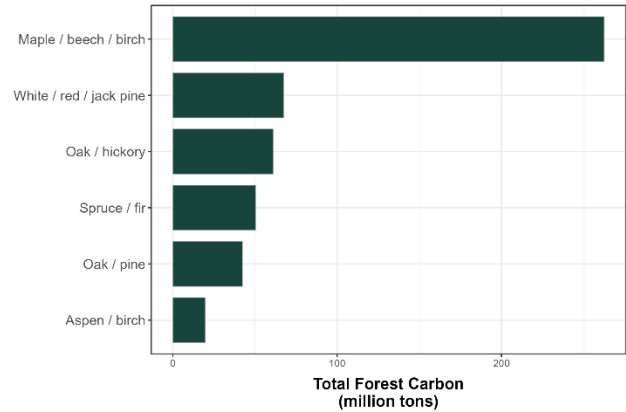


Figure 8. Total forest carbon (million tons) by forest type in New Hampshire. Total forest carbon is the sum of carbon stored across all aboveground and belowground pools (includes Soil Organic carbon + Live Belowground carbon + Live Aboveground carbon + Litter carbon + Dead wood carbon).

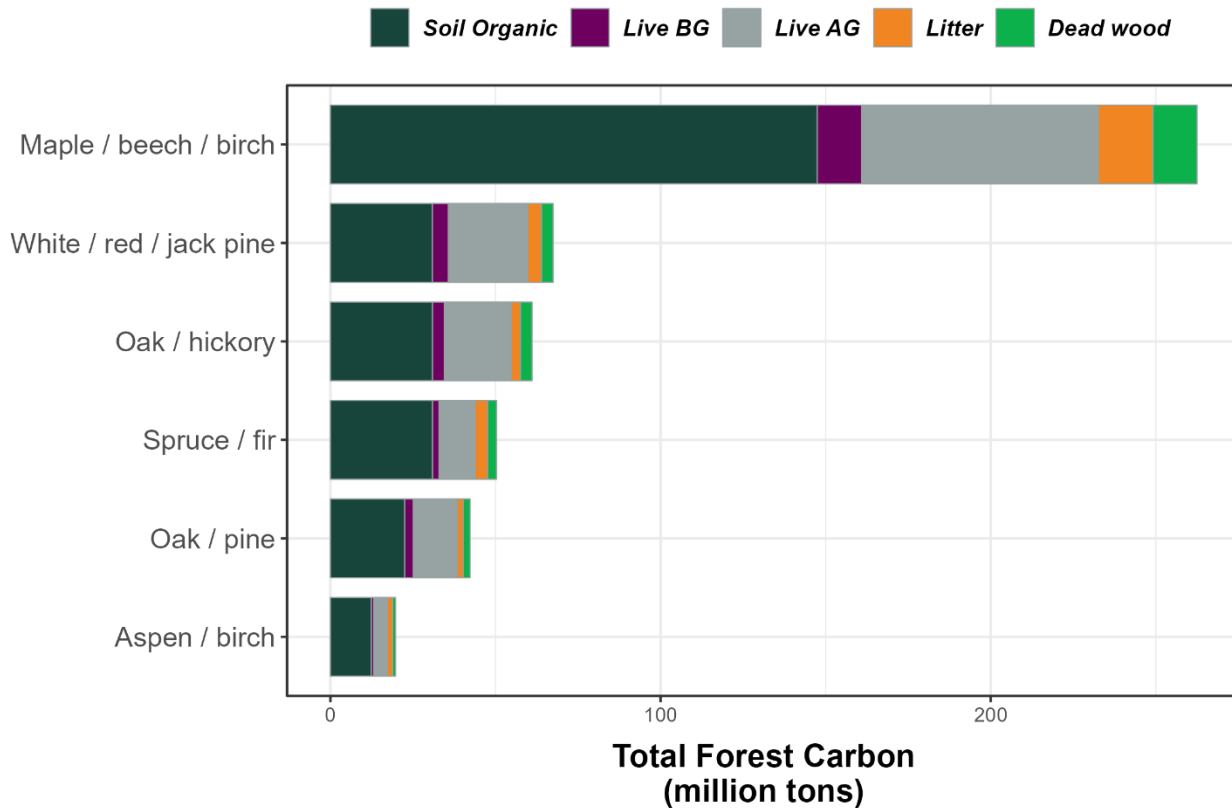


New Hampshire is dominated by 6 key forest cover types: Maple / beech / birch, White / red / jack pine, Oak / hickory, Spruce / fir, Oak / pine, and Aspen / birch. **Figure 7** and **Figure 8** show state-level data of total forested area and total forest carbon, respectively, for each of these cover type groups. As these figures show, Maple / beech / birch is the dominant forest type of New Hampshire, spanning an area upwards of 900,000 hectares and storing over 250 million tons of carbon statewide. With coverage levels ranging from <125,000 to ~200,000 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, Oak / hickory forests cover roughly the same land area as Spruce / fir stands in New Hampshire (**Figure 7**), yet store more statewide carbon than their Spruce / fir counterparts (**Figure 8**).

³Forest 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

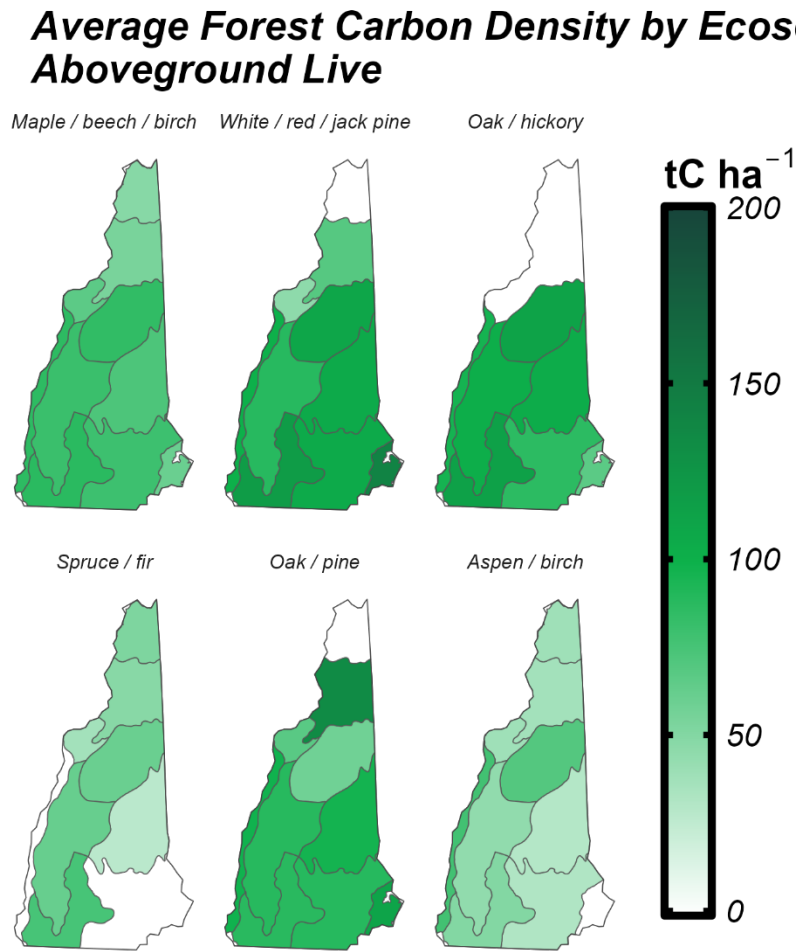
Figure 9. Total forest carbon (million tons) by pool and forest type in New Hampshire.



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 New Hampshire. 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. New Hampshire forests generally allocate more ecosystem carbon to belowground pools (soil organic matter + live BG biomass) than aboveground pools (live AG biomass + litter + dead wood), yet the proportions in which they do so varies across forest cover types. For instance, Spruce / fir and Aspen / birch forests allocate roughly 2/3 of total stored carbon to belowground pools, whereas forest types like White / red / jack pine and Oak / hickory display a more even distribution of carbon 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. Maple / beech / birch'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 New Hampshire's Maple / beech / birch forests on their own contain more stored carbon than the total ecosystem carbon (sum of carbon stored across all pools) contained by the Aspen / birch group.

Forest Carbon Density

Figure 9. Aboveground live forest carbon density (tC ha^{-1}) by forest type in New Hampshire.



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 9**, the carbon density of aboveground living forest biomass is shown for 6 key cover types in New Hampshire. Of these, White / red / jack pine and Oak / pine stands hold the highest levels of aboveground live carbon per unit area, represented by the deep shade of green shown for a small southeastern ecoregion (White / red / jack pine) and the ecoregion just south of the northernmost ecoregion (Oak / pine). Across much of their extent, Maple / beech / birch and Oak / hickory stands exhibit relatively even carbon densities, while cover types like White / red / jack pine and Oak / pine show higher levels of variability across ecoregions. In these instances, variable carbon densities can be driven by the relative prevalence or absence of each forest type from a given ecoregion.

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 Tree 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 National Climate Assessment Region which include the Midwest, Northeast, Northern Plains, Southeast, and Southern Plains
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.

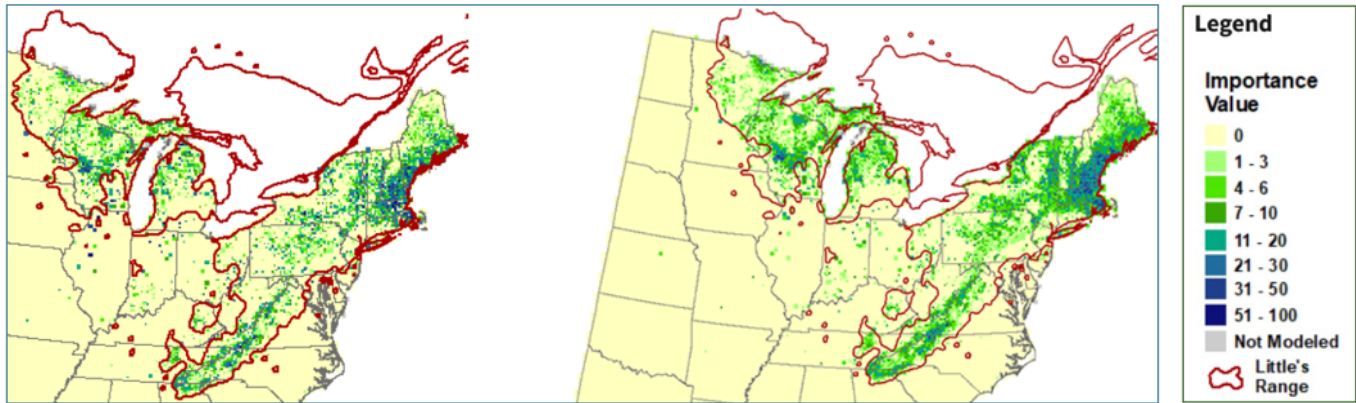
Habitat Suitability and Migration Models

Model Reliability: **High**

Key Species Example: Modeled potential suitable habitat for Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) through 2100

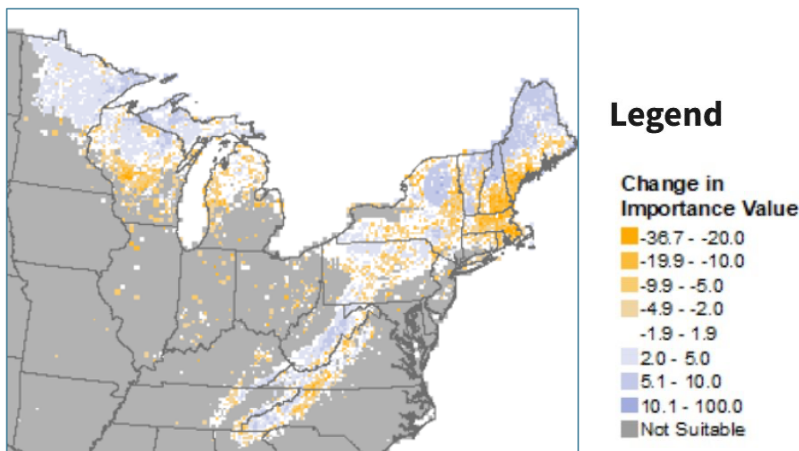
Current habitat quality and distribution (DISTRIB-II)

Potential migration (SHIFT) and colonization likelihood (CL)



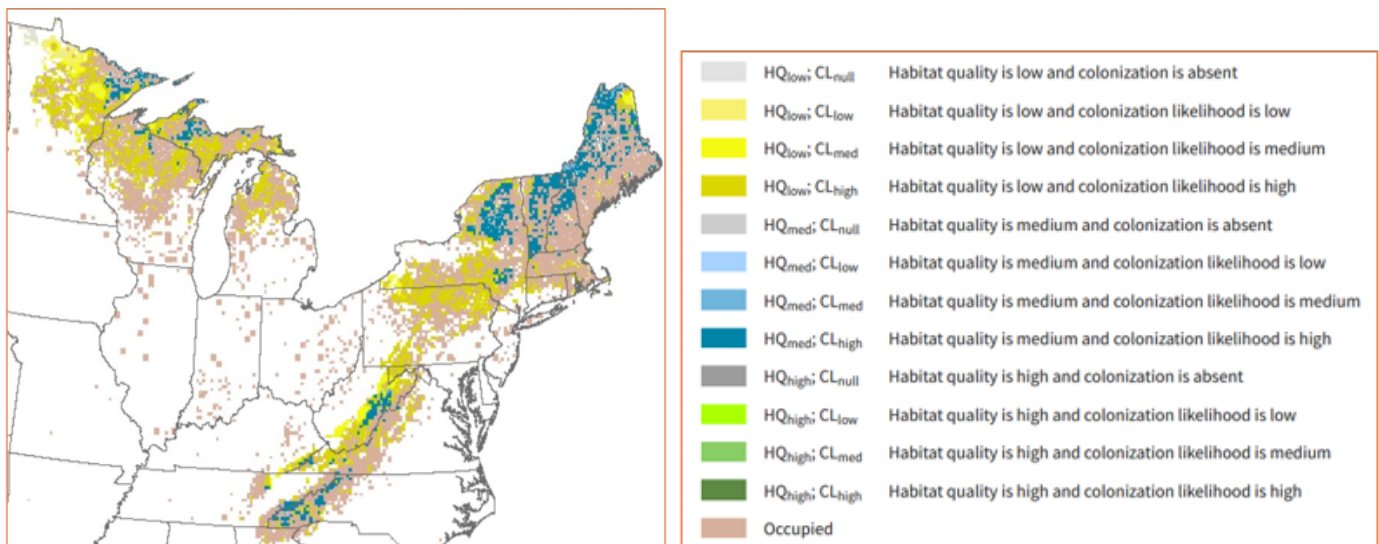
Importance value is a measure of abundance that accounts for both tree basal area and number of stems, ranging from 0-100.

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



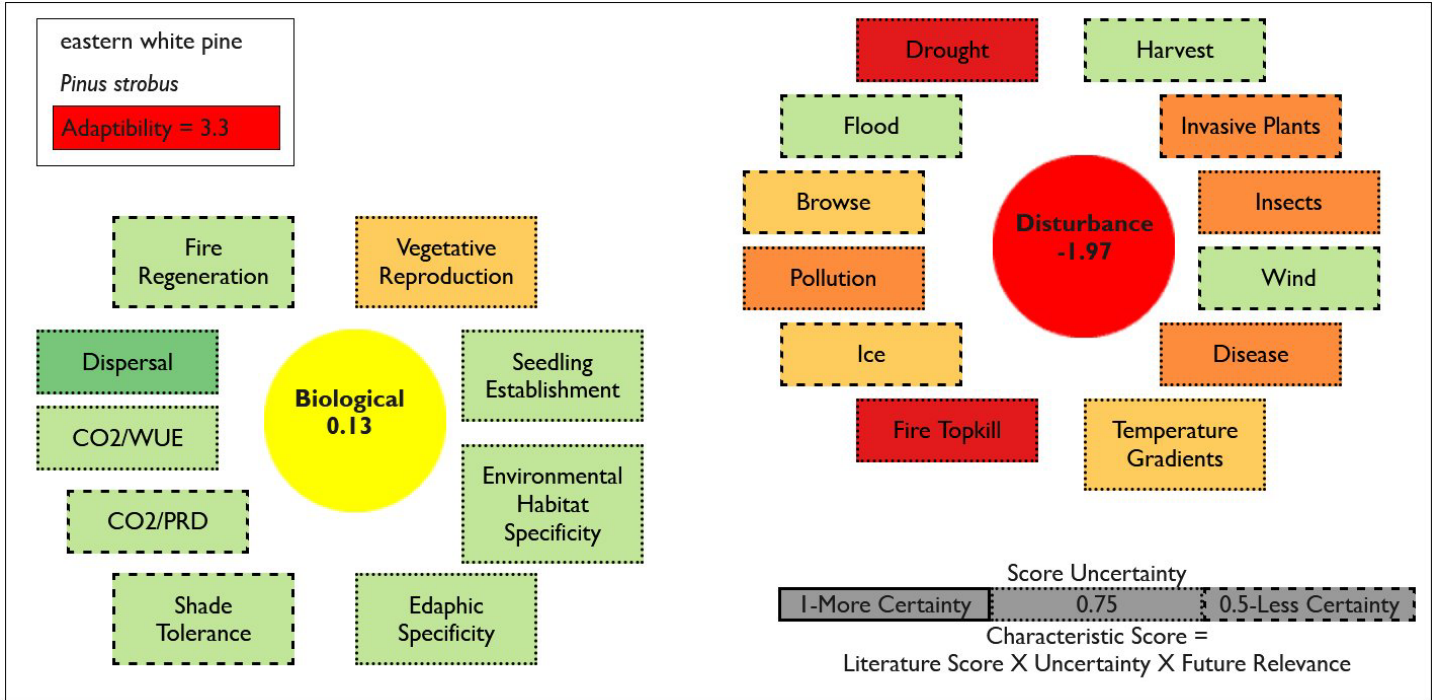
Colonization is limited to range margins and infill (Blue) which is derived from habitat quality (DISTRIB) and migration model (SHIFT) utilizing the colonization likelihood model (CL). Orange shading represents current species' distributions where abundance is predicted to decrease due to loss of habitat suitability.

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



Adaptability Ratings

Key Species Example: Eastern White Pine (*Pinus Strobus*)



V Hi Pos +3	High Pos +2	Low Pos +1	Minimal 0	Low Neg -1	High Neg -2	V Hi Neg -3
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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

Eastern white pine is a widely distributed (10.6% of area), dense, and high importance northern pine with little modeled change in suitable habitat by 2100. It does, however, suffer from some negative traits (e.g., susceptibility to drought, fire, and insects) which drops it to low adaptability. Because of its high current abundance, we upgrade its capacity to cope to fair. SHIFT shows good infill.

Citations:

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Cleland, D.T.; Freeouf, J.A.; Keys, J.E.; Nowacki, G.J.; Carpenter, C.A.; and McNab, W.H. 2007. Ecological Subregions: Sections and Subsections for the conterminous United States. Gen. Tech. Report WO-76D [Map on CD-ROM] (A.M. Sloan, cartographer). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, presentation scale 1:3,500,000; colored. <https://research.fs.usda.gov/treearch/48672>

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