Statewide Forest Resource Assessment Priority Landscapes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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1. **Why were these maps generated and what do they mean?**

   These maps are the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry's initial attempt to illustrate priority landscape areas in regards to forestry activities. A landscape is a defined area of land that provides a basis for organizations, communities, sectors of government, and other groups of people to work together to achieve common goals.   For the complete list of priority landscapes identified in Pennsylvania, please see Chapter 5 of Pennsylvania's Statewide Forest Resource Assessment.

   This mapping analysis was conducted to help identify land containing significant resource value or land at risk across the Commonwealth. The analysis covers all ownerships in the state and spans all areas of the urban to rural continuum – it does not just cover forested lands. These maps were generated as part of Pennsylvania's Statewide Forest Resource Assessment project (see chapter 5, Appendices 5A & 5B) and required by each state for the 2008 Farm Bill.

   Establishment of priority landscape areas is intended to aid in the efficient, strategic, and focused use of limited U.S. Forest Service resources and funding provided to the Commonwealth.

2. **How can I use the information on the maps?**

   The maps can be shared with anyone interested or involved in landscape planning or forest conservation that would like to discuss or learn about the resource values and services that the forest provides in their locality or across the Commonwealth. Below is a short list of examples of how the map's results could be used…

   - County Planners. Share the results with county planning commissions and county planners so they understand the values of the forestland in their local area and take those values into consideration when determining land use, zoning, development, or other planning services for their jurisdiction.
   - Woodland Owner Groups. Share the analysis with woodland owner groups to help identify and promote discussion, conversation, and sharing of information among local groups of landowners about what the unique resource values and risks are in their locality.
   - Forest Landowners. Help educate forest landowners as to what some of the resource values or potential risks are on or surrounding their land, and incorporate those values and risks into a forest stewardship plan or tree farm management plan for the property.
   - Urban Tree Committees. Contact urban tree committees or other officials for the high priority urban places shown on the map and advocate the need for more urban trees in these places. Suggest formulating urban tree committees if they do not already exist.

- Fire Departments. Share the fire theme map with fire departments to help identify areas of their jurisdiction that are most susceptible to problematic wildland fire and target wildland fire prevention and educational seminars around those areas.
- Forestry Professionals. Share the analysis with other forestry professionals or conservationists to promote discussion and conversation as to where the most important forests are in the commonwealth.

3. **How do I get started and what should I look at?**

When you first access the website, the composite map with aerial imagery / places in the background is shown by default and the map extent is set to the state of Pennsylvania. The composite map combines the priority areas from the other six theme maps (forest pest, wildfire, ecological, water, urban, and working forest) into a single map. The site should look like this:
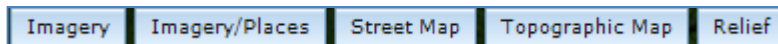
Think about an area of interest that you are familiar with and zoom to that location on the map. This may be a property you own, the county you live in, an area you frequently visit, or a region you have spent time at in the past.
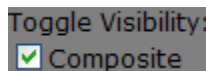
> **TIP**: The *County* and *Address* zoom tools below the map can assist you in navigating to an area quickly.

| Zoom to a County: | Pennsylvania ▾ |
| Zoom to Address: | 400 Market St, Harrisburg, PA, 17105 |

After navigating to an area of interest, switch the background layer from "Imagery/Places" to the other background layers by clicking street map, topographic map, and relief. This will help you to become oriented with the terrain, roads, streams, mountains, and towns within the map extent. The buttons for the other background layers looks like this:

| Imagery | Imagery/Places | Street Map | Topographic Map | Relief |

> **TIP**: You can toggle the visibility of the selected theme or composite map by clicking on the "Toggle Visibility" checkbox above the map legend. This will turn on/off the selected theme map or composite map and provide you a much clearer view of the background layer.
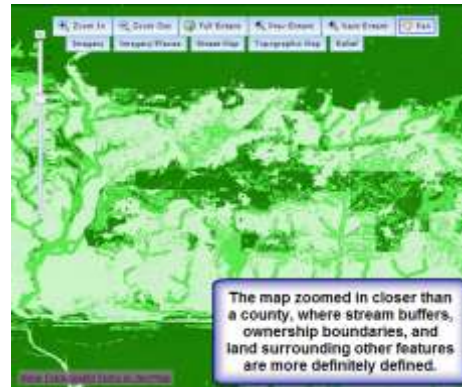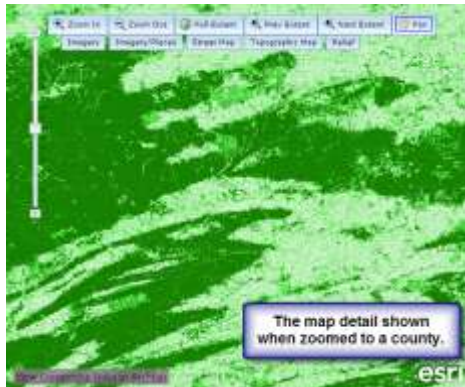
Toggle Visibility:
☑ Composite

Keeping at this same location, click each of the six theme maps one at a time and examine the high, medium, and low priority lands depicted by three shades of green. This will help you depict the values and risks identified in the analysis for your area of interest. When combined together, these six theme maps create the composite map.

○ Composite
○ Forest Pest
◉ Wildfire
○ Ecological
○ Water
○ Urban
○ Working Forest

Click these controls to switch between theme maps and the composite map.

4. At what scales are the maps applicable?

The six theme maps and the composite map are actually grids made of 30 x 30 meter cells that cover the entire state of Pennsylvania. They are intended to be viewed at the statewide, regional, county, municipal, or individual property level. The closer you zoom in, the more detail you will see in regards to where priority lands have been identified.

The map detail shown when zoomed to a county.

The map zoomed in closer than a county, where stream buffers, ownership boundaries, and land surrounding other features are more definitely defined.

If you zoom in too far, you will notice the "blockiness" in the map as shown below:

The map is zoomed in too far for the accurracy of the results and the "blockiness" of the grid cells is shown.

The accuracy of the maps is not intended to cover this level of detail. The finest zoom level you should zoom to is shown with the red arrow on the adjustable map scale slider below:

The finest scale at which the maps should be viewed is indicated by the red arrow to the left.

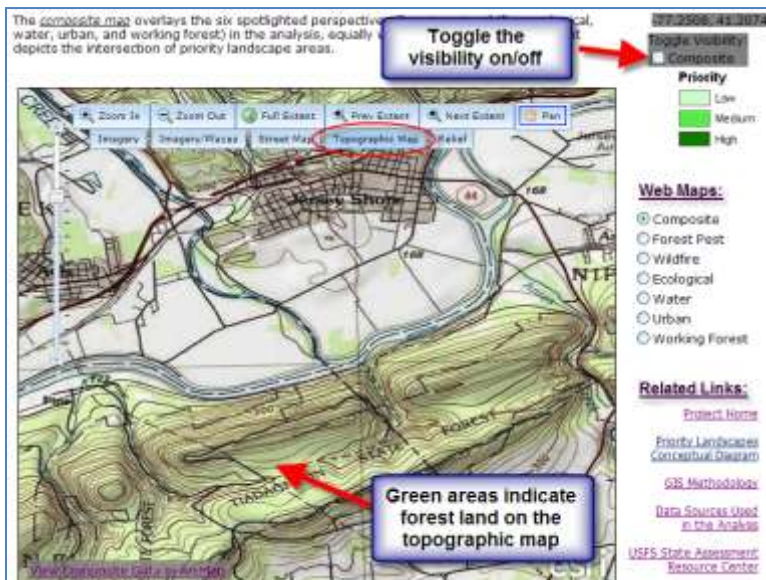5. **What does it mean if there is a lot of dark green on my property?**

Dark green on all the maps define land that has been ranked as high priority in regards to the corresponding forestry theme map that you are viewing (forest pest, wildfire, ecological, water, urban, and working forest). Dark green areas depict lands known to have significant resource richness or are at high risk in regards to the selected forestry theme. Light green areas rank as having less resource richness value or lower risk.

For example, a dark green area in the forest pest theme map is an area highly threatened by one or more forest insect and disease pest agents (such as the gypsy moth) in the foreseeable future. The dark green areas in the ecological map identify specially designated habitat for birds and mammals, large continuous forest patches, and habitat for species of special concern.

The *composite* map is unique in that it is not a theme. The green priority areas in the composite map combine the green areas from the other six theme maps (forest pest, wildfire, ecological, water, urban, and working forest). As such, the composite map is a single representation of areas that depicts the high, medium, and low rankings across all themes.
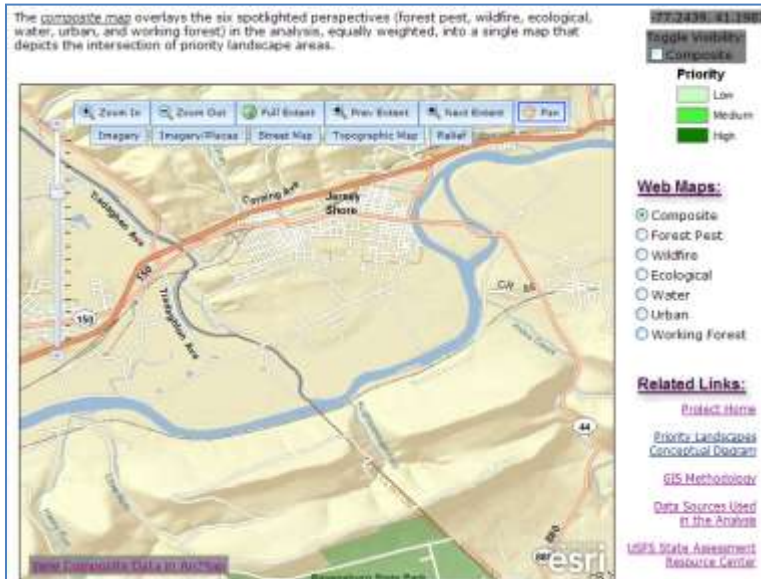
6. **How can I tell what areas of the map are forested and non-forested?**

Forested areas can be identified by switch the background layer to the "Topographic Map" (circled in red below). Light green areas on the topographic map represent forested land. Forests can also be identified from the "Imagery" background layer.
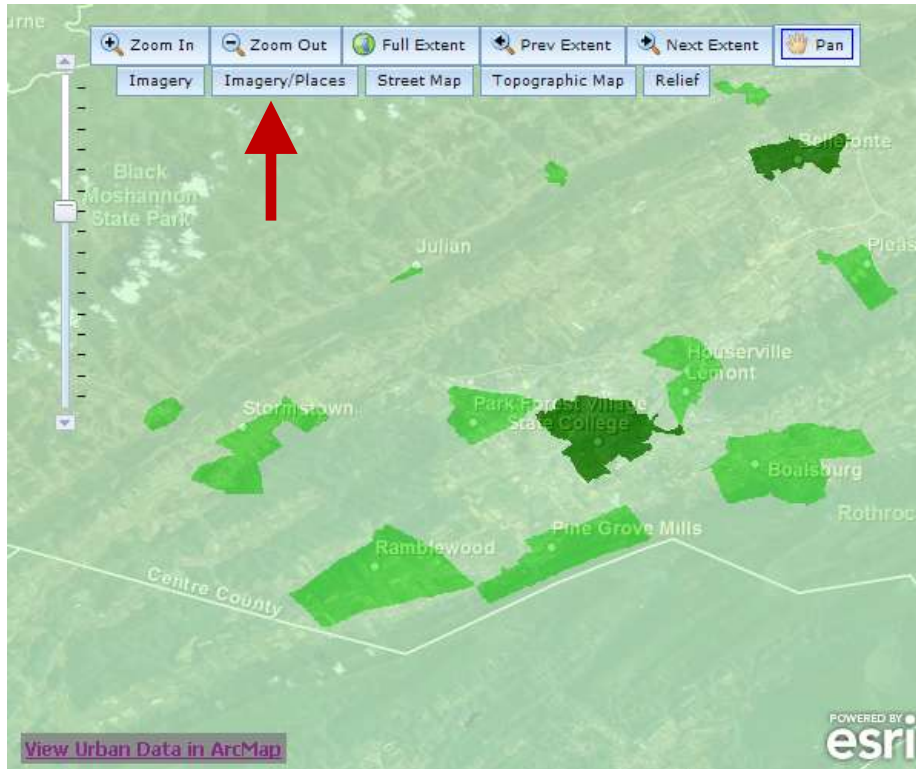
7. **How do I know I'm looking at the right place?**

The underlying background maps available are aerial imagery, imagery with common places, street map, topographic map, and relief.   These maps provide you a reference as to where you are looking. Each base map contains locations of common features such as aerial imagery, roads, streams, towns, state parks, contours, county boundaries, relief, and much more.   The checkbox above the map legend allows you to tun the theme or composite layer on/off so you can more clearly see the base map underneath. The street map below is an example:
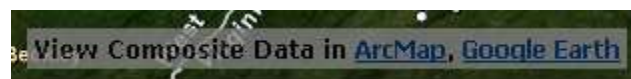
8. **In the Urban theme map, how do I know what urban place I am looking at?**

When zoomed in close enough, most of the urban places are labeled when using the "Imagery/Places" background layer. You can toggle the visibility of the theme or composite layer so the urban label can be read more easily. Shown below is an example of the urban areas labeled around the State College area.

9. **I'm an advanced GIS user – how do I overlay this data with other GIS data I have?**

Advanced Geographic Information System (GIS) users who have ArcMap version 9.2 or later version or Google Earth installed on their computer can add the currently viewed theme map or composite map to ArcMap / Google Earth by clicking the link in the lower left hand corner of the map. The priority areas can then be overlaid with other geospatial dataset you have available.

10. **Will the priority landscape areas ever change?**

The Farm Bill requires that State Assessments shall be reviewed and updated at least every five years or as deemed necessary by the Secretary of Agriculture. Updates to priority areas may be made when State Assessments are updated to reflect new / improved data or changing needs.

11. **I have examined an area familiar to me on the map and feel that its priority should rank differently (low, med, high)…what should I do?**

This analysis was created using geospatial data that was currently available to DCNR. In some cases, geospatial data is not available for some information, and we are always looking for ways to fill in gaps in the data. In addition, everyone values the forest in slightly different ways, and DCNR welcomes you to share with us your feedback and perspective of where you feel the most important forests are in the Commonwealth. If you would like to share your perspective with DCNR, feel free to the Rural and Community Forestry Section at 717-783-0385 or email rbillingha@state.pa.us. Your comments may be used to help us improve future refinements to the priority landscape mapping analysis.