

Forest Service: Timber Sales in Fiscal Years 2014–2023

GAO-25-107496

Q&A Report to Congressional Addressees

December 19, 2024

Why This Matters

The Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service sells timber each year as part of its mission to manage the National Forest System for multiple uses and to provide sustained yields of various resources. The agency sells timber for several reasons, including to help achieve land management objectives such as improving wildlife habitat. Timber from national forests is used for a variety of commercial purposes, such as to produce lumber to build houses or pulp to make paper products, and for other purposes, such as firewood (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: Timber Harvest Operations (left) and Processed Lumber (right)



Sources: Kletr/stock.adobe.com (left photo); Zhanna/stock.adobe.com (right photo). | GAO-25-107496

We received multiple congressional requests asking us to examine Forest Service timber sales. A House Report accompanying a bill for the Forest Service’s appropriations for fiscal year 2024 also includes a provision for us to study timber harvest levels. (H.R. Rep. No. 118-155, at 83 (2023); 170 Cong. Rec. S1095, S1675 (Mar. 5, 2024)). This report discusses how the Forest Service offers timber for sale, how the agency sets targets for the amount of timber it aims to sell each year, and how much timber the agency sold from fiscal years 2014 through 2023. This is part one of a two-part review. The second part will further examine Forest Service timber sales, including agency and stakeholder perspectives on the timber sale process.

Key Takeaways

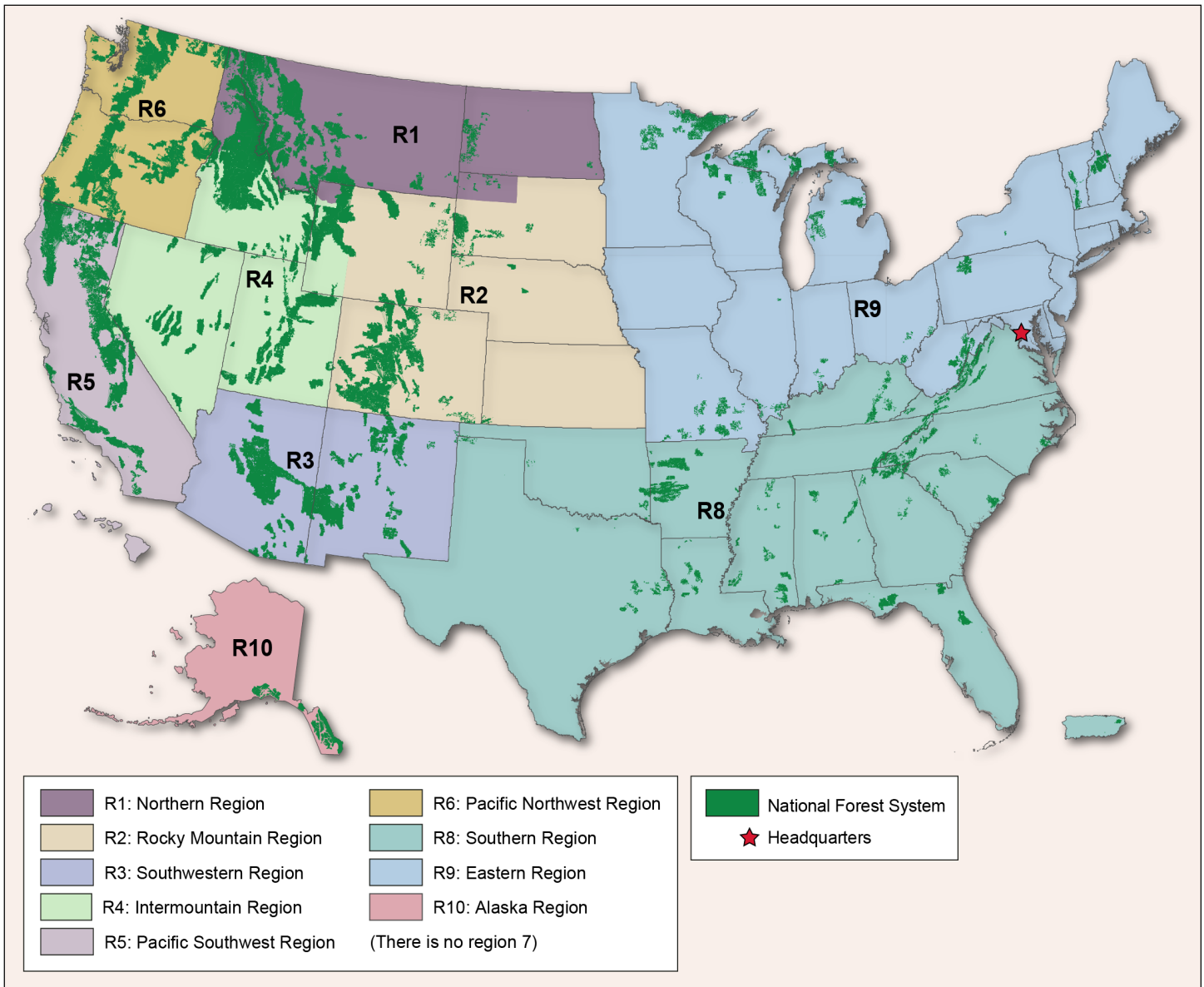
- The Forest Service sells timber from the national forests through different mechanisms, such as through timber sale or stewardship contracts.¹ For example, through stewardship contracts and agreements, the agency exchanges timber for services (e.g., habitat restoration work) to help achieve its land management objectives. The Forest Service can also enter into agreements with states to implement timber sales, called Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) agreements. The agency considers a variety of factors when determining which mechanism to use.

- Forest Service headquarters officials use an iterative process, working with the regions, to set targets for the total amount of timber the agency aims to sell each year through all mechanisms.
- The Forest Service’s average timber target was about 6,281,000 hundred cubic feet (CCF) per year—or about 3,314,000 thousand board feet (MBF) per year—and its average amount of timber sold was about 5,590,000 CCF per year—or about 2,979,000 MBF per year—from fiscal years 2014 through 2023.
- The majority of timber that the Forest Service sold from fiscal years 2014 through 2023 was through timber sale contracts, followed by stewardship contracts and agreements. The agency’s use of GNA agreements to sell timber generally increased during this time frame. The amount of timber sold through permits was variable during this time frame.

Background

The Forest Service manages the 193 million-acre National Forest System through its headquarters in Washington, D.C., nine regional offices, and 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands (see fig. 2). The individual forests and grasslands are referred to as units. A regional forester heads each regional office, and a forest supervisor heads each unit. Forest Service headquarters is responsible for developing policies and procedures for planning and implementing timber sales—primarily through its Natural Resources Office.

Figure 2: Map of the National Forest System and Forest Service Regions



Source: GAO analysis of Forest Service Geodata Clearinghouse data. | GAO-25-107496

Why does the Forest Service sell timber?

Providing a supply of timber to the American people was one of the original purposes for which the establishment of national forests was authorized.² In addition, the Forest Service may conduct a timber sale to achieve land management objectives and to promote other national forest uses. For example, a timber sale may be used to reduce the number of trees in an area to create openings to improve habitat for some types of wildlife or to reduce the risk of insects, diseases, or wildfires. The agency may also use a timber sale to reduce hazards from or to capture some of the economic value of trees damaged by wildfires or other events.

What is the Forest Service's multiple-use mission?

The Forest Service is authorized and directed by statute to, among other things, manage the National Forest System for multiple uses: outdoor recreation, range (i.e., livestock grazing), timber, watershed, and fish and wildlife purposes.³ The statute does not specify that the Forest Service should prioritize one use over any other use. Rather, it defines multiple use as, among other things, the

combination of uses that will best meet the needs of the American people, and not necessarily the combination that will give the greatest dollar return or output.⁴

The Forest Service is also authorized and directed by statute to manage the National Forest System for sustained yield of renewable resources.⁵ The statute defines sustained yield as the achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of a high-level annual or regular periodic output of the national forests' renewable resources—such as timber—without impairment of the productivity of the land.⁶

How does the Forest Service balance timber production within its multiple-use mission?

The Forest Service engages in different levels of planning to determine how to balance its mission of managing the National Forest System for multiple uses. At the unit level, land and resource management plans (often referred to as forest plans) establish long-term land management objectives based on each unit's resources.⁷ They also specify where activities such as timber harvests may or may not occur.⁸ Based on the objectives outlined in these plans, as well as budgetary and other factors, agency officials identify individual projects—such as timber sales—needed to meet the desired forest conditions—such as reducing overall density to create openings for wildlife habitat or to mitigate wildfire risk.

Once a need for a timber harvest has been identified, the unit engages in project-level planning to further inform its decision-making. As part of that process, the unit analyzes a proposed project's likely effects pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA), and takes actions to comply with other laws.⁹ This includes analyzing the project's impacts on other national forest resources, such as on threatened and endangered species.

How does the Forest Service offer timber for sale?

The Forest Service offers timber for sale through four mechanisms: timber sale contracts, stewardship contracts and agreements, GNA agreements, and permits.¹⁰ According to agency guidance, the Forest Service's policy is to use a mix of these mechanisms at the unit level, considering factors such as capacity, cost effectiveness, and the needs of the local forest industry.¹¹ Agency officials base decisions about which mechanism to use on the site-specific objectives and requirements of each individual timber sale, including financial feasibility.¹²

Timber sale contracts

The Forest Service uses timber sale contracts to sell the right to harvest timber to a purchaser.¹³ It generally offers these contracts through an open, competitive bidding process, with a starting bid based on the timber's estimated or appraised value. The contract specifies what trees may be harvested, when and how they may be harvested, and road building and other requirements for the purchaser.¹⁴ Timber purchasers have several years to complete the harvest, generally up to a maximum of 10 years,¹⁵ and are generally required to make periodic payments toward the value of contracts.¹⁶

Stewardship contracts and agreements

The Forest Service uses stewardship contracts and agreements to exchange timber for restoration services that work toward specified land management goals, such as improving water quality or wildlife habitat.¹⁷ The Forest Service uses different types of stewardship contracts, including sales contracts, when the value of the removed timber equals or exceeds the cost of the services, and procurement contracts, when the cost of the services exceeds the value of the timber.¹⁸ In contrast, stewardship agreements are cooperative agreements between the Forest Service and partners in which both parties contribute resources and benefit from the accomplishment of the specified land management goals.

Through stewardship contracts and agreements, the agency can use the value of the timber being sold to offset the costs of the service work being purchased. By combining timber sales and restoration services, the Forest Service has the ability to conduct forest management activities across larger areas in one contract or agreement, according to agency guidance.¹⁹ Stewardship contracts and agreements generally may not exceed 10 years, though the agency can offer some stewardship contracts and agreements for up to 20 years.²⁰

The Forest Service has had permanent authority to enter into stewardship contracts and agreements throughout the National Forest System since 2014.²¹ Before that time, the Forest Service's authority to use this mechanism was temporary and limited.²²

Good Neighbor Authority agreements

The Forest Service uses GNA agreements to plan or implement timber sales through a state partner.²³ According to agency guidance, the Forest Service uses GNA agreements to increase the pace, scale, capacity, and efficiency of activities to restore or improve forest health on National Forest System lands.²⁴ GNA agreements may not exceed 10 years.

The Forest Service's authority to enter into GNA agreements with states was enacted in the 2014 farm bill.²⁵ The 2018 farm bill authorized states with GNA agreements to retain and use revenue from sales of timber under GNA agreements.²⁶

Permits

The Forest Service issues permits for the removal of timber for a nominal fee or free of charge.²⁷ The removal of timber under permits is expected to have limited resource impacts and is often in designated areas. For example, the Forest Service may provide permits to an individual for the collection and personal use of firewood.

What is the overall process for timber sales?

The Forest Service's process for selling timber depends on whether the timber is being sold through a timber sale contract, stewardship contract or agreement, or GNA agreement.²⁸ The process for all mechanisms begins with the Forest Service developing, analyzing, and designing a proposed timber sale project that complies with the underlying forest plan, including conducting the required level of environmental analysis.²⁹ Once the analysis for the project has been approved, the agency begins considering whether a sale should be implemented through a timber sale contract, stewardship contract or agreement, or GNA agreement.³⁰

For sales implemented through a timber sale contract, the agency marks the sale boundary, designates the trees to be cut or left, appraises the timber, and solicits bids from interested buyers.³¹ Contracts are generally awarded to the purchaser with the highest bid.³² The purchaser is responsible for cutting and removing the timber, with the Forest Service monitoring the harvest operations. Figure 3 shows the general process for selling timber through a sale contract.

Figure 3: The Forest Service's Process for Selling Timber through a Sale Contract



Sources: GAO analysis of information from the Forest Service; Yulia, Carlstock, LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS, Kawee, Gustavo, Stock Photos & Video, stock.adobe.com (images from left to right). | GAO-25-107496

This process is generally similar for timber sales conducted through a stewardship contract or agreement or GNA agreement, though there are some differences. For example, for stewardship contracts and agreements, the appraisal also includes estimating the cost of the desired service work. In addition, the contractor is responsible for harvesting the timber and performing the specified services, with the Forest Service monitoring the operations. Unlike timber sale contracts, which generally go to the highest bidder, the Forest Service awards stewardship contracts and agreements based on which offer presents the best value, as determined by factors such as past performance, experience, and technical approach.

For GNA agreements, the state may handle some of the steps described above for timber sale contracts. For example, the state may be responsible for advertising the timber sale, awarding the contract, and monitoring the harvest operations.³³ The Forest Service, however, retains oversight responsibility to ensure all work meets applicable federal laws, regulations, and forest plans.³⁴

How does the Forest Service set targets for the amount of timber it aims to sell each year?

The Forest Service uses an iterative process, with headquarters officials in the agency's Natural Resources Office working with the regions to set agencywide and regional targets for the amount of timber the agency aims to sell each year through all four mechanisms. These targets are program and budgetary performance measures rather than statutory mandates.³⁵ Headquarters officials outlined the following process, which they began using in fiscal year 2023:

1. Headquarters asks the regions for the amount of timber they aim to sell each year for the next 5 years and how much funding they would need to plan and implement timber sales at that level.³⁶ Regions develop this information based on information provided by the individual units in their region.
2. Headquarters reviews the regional information on planned timber sales volume, as well as trends on volume of timber sold in each region in past years.
3. Headquarters discusses potential timber target levels with the Forest Service's executive leadership team and the regional foresters. Factors considered in establishing timber targets include the level of harvest needed to meet land management objectives, staff capacity, and anticipated budget levels. They also consider other agency targets, such as goals for reducing the density of trees and other vegetation to mitigate wildfire risk, called hazardous fuel reduction. Officials from the Department of Agriculture may also be involved in these discussions.
4. Based on these discussions, headquarters sets initial agencywide and regional timber targets for the upcoming fiscal year.

- Once the Forest Service receives its annual appropriations, headquarters makes any adjustments needed and finalizes the agencywide and regional timber targets. For example, if enacted appropriations are lower than anticipated, then headquarters could lower the targets.

What were the Forest Service's timber targets and amount of timber sold from fiscal years 2014–2023?

The Forest Service's average timber target was about 6,281,000 CCF per year, and its average amount of timber sold was about 5,590,000 CCF per year, from fiscal years 2014 through 2023.³⁷ The agency also reports its targets and sales in board feet (see table 1).³⁸

Table 1: Forest Service's Timber Target and Volume of Timber Sold, Fiscal Years (FY) 2014–2023

FY	Hundred cubic feet (CCF)		Thousand board feet (MBF)	
	Target	Sold ^a	Target	Sold ^a
2014	5,600,000	5,361,643	2,936,700	2,831,587
2015	5,752,103	5,354,126	3,019,862	2,819,181
2016	6,039,700	5,594,698	3,175,959	2,962,767
2017	5,696,000	5,592,819	3,001,150	2,933,132
2018	6,457,000	5,936,894	3,407,590	3,155,548
2019	6,194,122	6,054,699	3,277,247	3,230,089
2020	6,980,250	5,989,082	3,686,722	3,223,145
2021	7,344,740	5,192,986	3,880,880	2,824,163
2022	6,247,698 ^b	5,178,533	3,304,850 ^b	2,801,400
2023	6,494,330	5,642,095 ^c	3,448,849	3,008,885 ^c
Annual average	6,280,594	5,589,757	3,313,981	2,978,990

Source: GAO analysis of Forest Service data. | GAO-25-107496

Note: These data are from the Forest Service's Timber Information Manager database and may differ from data the Forest Service reported in the past for various reasons. For example, this table includes timber volume added during contract execution in the fiscal year that the timber was sold, whereas past reports may not have included the added volume in that fiscal year.

^aThe Forest Service sets timber targets for the amount of timber the agency aims to sell each year. Thus, this table reports volume of timber sold; the final harvested volume may differ. The volume sold amounts include volume that is added to timber sales during contract execution.

^bThe target for FY 2022 was preliminary. According to headquarters officials, the Forest Service did not set a final target in FY 2022 for various reasons, including because the agency received its final appropriations late in the fiscal year.

^cBeginning in FY 2023, the Forest Service began counting the volume of timber provided free of charge via firewood permits toward its sold volume, which it had not done previously. The Forest Service may offer firewood to the public free of charge in designated areas if it is compatible with land management plans. From FY 2014–2023, the Forest Service counted firewood permits provided for a fee toward its target.

The Forest Service did not meet its targets for the amount of timber sold for any of the years from fiscal years 2014 through 2023. The agency sold between 71 percent and 98 percent of its annual targets during this time frame, averaging nearly 90 percent. There are several reasons why the agency might not meet its target, according to agency documents and officials. For example:

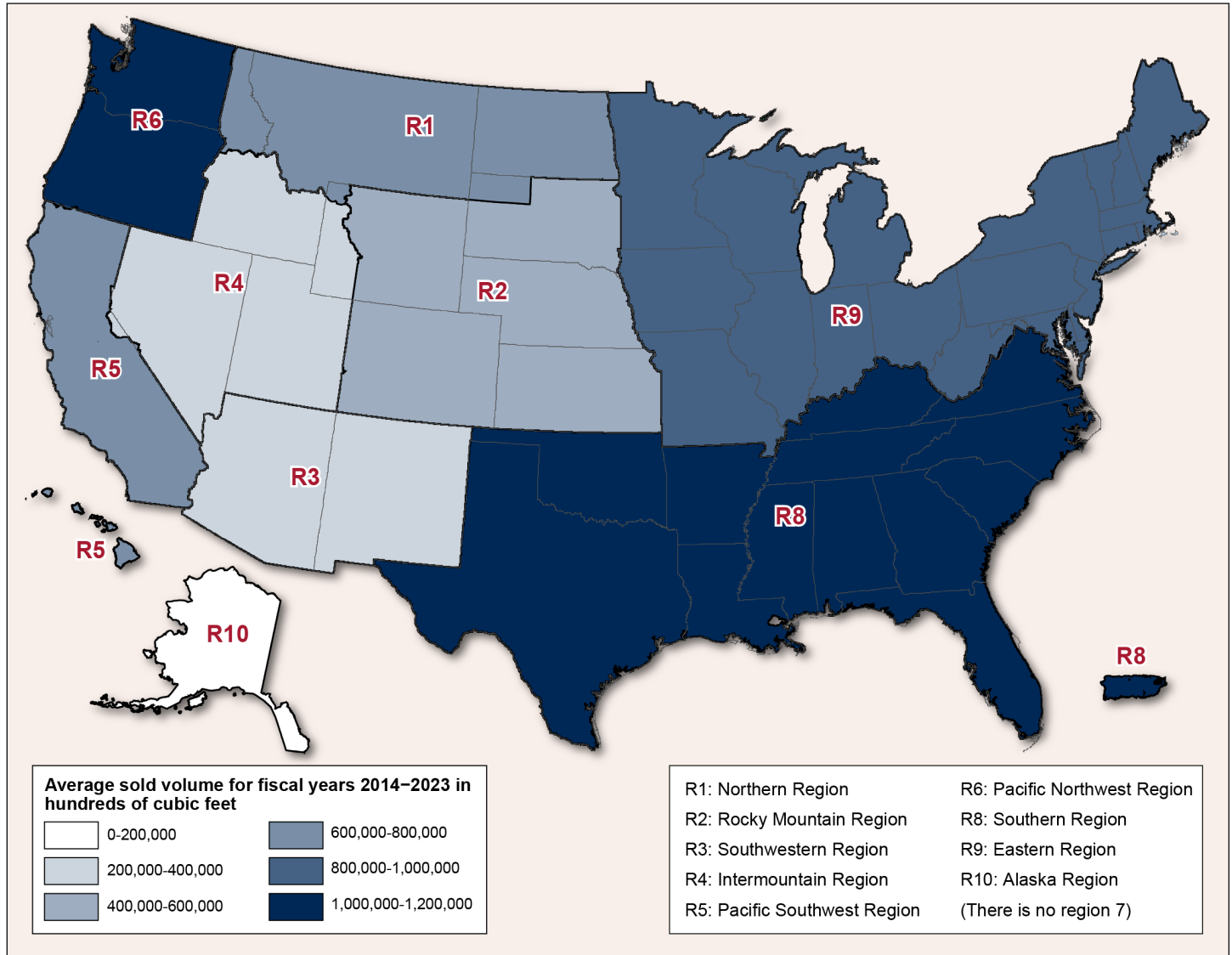
- The Forest Service offered timber for sale that was not purchased (referred to as “no-bid sales”).
- Limited staff capacity to plan and implement timber sales.
- Wildfires and other natural disasters that shifted priorities or affected areas where the agency had planned timber sales.

- Factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as travel restrictions and social distancing requirements, affected staff’s ability to plan and implement timber sales, most notably in fiscal year 2021.

How much timber was sold by region?

Regions six, eight, and nine sold the most timber through all four mechanisms (see fig. 4). See appendix I for regional-level data on timber sales.

Figure 4: Average Annual Amount of Timber Sold, by Forest Service Region, Fiscal Years 2014–2023



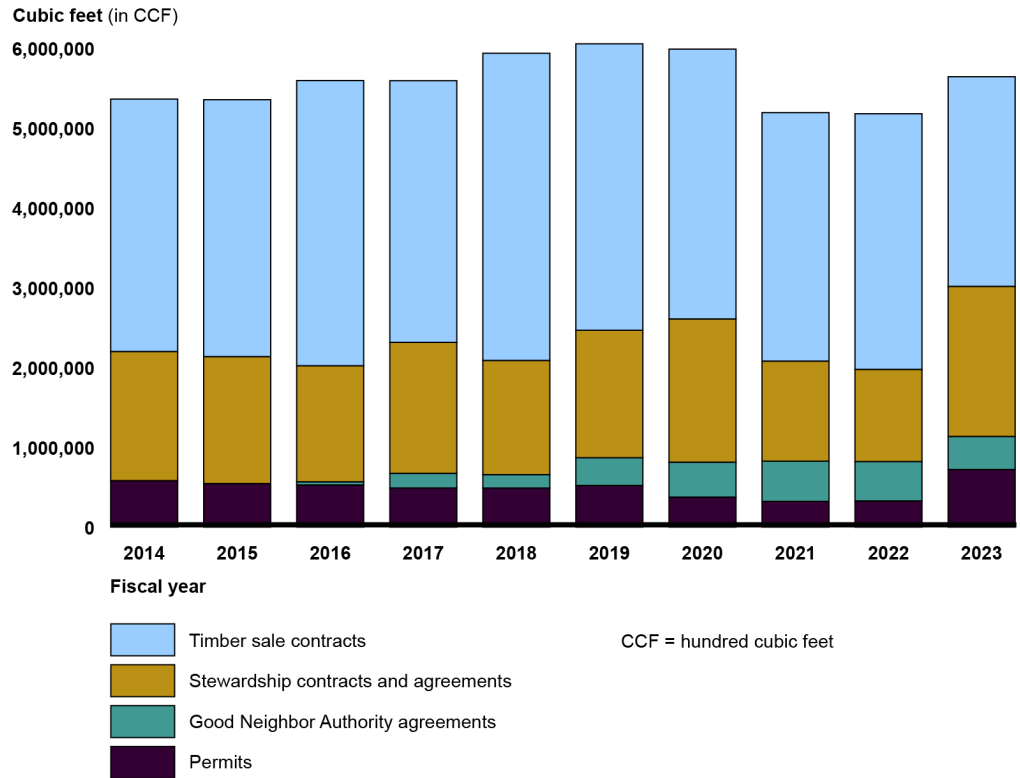
Source: GAO analysis of Forest Service data. | GAO-25-107496

Note: The amount of timber sold in each region varied for several reasons, such as the amount and biological productivity of National Forest System land in the region and timber industry capacity and needs.

What were the Forest Service’s timber sales by mechanism?

The majority of timber that the Forest Service sold from fiscal years 2014 through 2023 was through timber sale contracts, followed by stewardship contracts and agreements (see fig. 5). The Forest Service’s use of GNA agreements to sell timber generally increased during this time frame. The amount of timber sold through permits was variable during this time frame. See appendix I for regional-level data on timber sales by mechanism.

Figure 5: Annual Amount of Timber Sold by Type of Sale Mechanism, Fiscal Years 2014–2023



Source: GAO analysis of Forest Service data. | GAO-25-107496

Notes: The Forest Service offers timber for sale through four mechanisms: timber sale contracts, stewardship contracts and agreements, Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) agreements, and permits. Through timber sale contracts, the Forest Service sells the right to harvest timber to a purchaser, generally through an open and competitive bidding process. Through stewardship contracts and agreements, the Forest Service exchanges goods (e.g., timber) for services (e.g., wildlife habitat improvements). 16 U.S.C. § 6591c.

The Forest Service may enter into GNA agreements with states to plan or implement a timber sale. 16 U.S.C. § 2113a. The Forest Service’s authority to enter into GNA agreements with states was enacted in the 2014 farm bill. The 2018 farm bill authorized states to retain and use revenue from the sale of timber under GNA agreements.

Beginning in FY 2023, the Forest Service began counting the volume of timber provided free of charge via firewood permits toward its sold volume, which it had not done previously. The Forest Service may offer firewood to the public free of charge in designated areas if it is compatible with land management plans. From FY 2014–2023, the Forest Service counted firewood permits provided for a fee toward its target.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Agriculture for review and comment. The department provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

How GAO Did This Study

We analyzed laws, regulations, policies, and guidance governing the Forest Service’s timber sales, the various mechanisms the agency uses to sell timber, and the agency’s target-setting practices. We also analyzed data from a Forest Service system—Timber Information Manager—for tracking data on timber sales. To assess the reliability of these data, we performed electronic testing for obvious errors in accuracy and completeness, reviewed related documentation, and interviewed agency officials. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of reporting the agency’s agencywide and regional timber targets and sold volumes.

We also interviewed Forest Service officials, including headquarters officials that oversee timber sales and officials involved in various steps of the timber sale

process. We selected and visited the Forest Service region that harvested the most timber, on average, over the past 10 years (region 6) to learn more about the agency’s mechanisms for selling timber and processes for making timber sale decisions. Within this region, we interviewed officials from four national forests, selected based on geography and variation in the amount of timber harvested, to learn more about approaches used by each forest. Information obtained during the site visits is not generalizable to all regions or units.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2024 to December 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

List of Addressees

The Honorable Joe Manchin III
Chair
The Honorable John Barrasso, M.D.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
House of Representatives

The Honorable Doug LaMalfa
Chairman
Subcommittee on Forestry
Committee on Agriculture
House of Representatives

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

The Honorable Jack Bergman
House of Representatives

The Honorable Lori Chavez-DeRemer
House of Representatives

The Honorable Derek Kilmer
House of Representatives

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Agriculture, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

GAO Contact Information

For more information, contact: Cardell Johnson, Director, Natural Resources and Environment, JohnsonCD1@gao.gov, (202) 512-3841.

Sarah Kaczmarek, Managing Director, Public Affairs, KaczmarekS@gao.gov, (202) 512-4800.

A. Nicole Clowers, Managing Director, Congressional Relations, ClowersA@gao.gov, (202) 512-4400.

Staff Acknowledgments: Jonathan Dent (Assistant Director), Lesley Rinner (Analyst in Charge), Cindy Gilbert, Katie Hoover, John Mingus, Dan Royer, Caitlin Scoville, and Jeanette Soares.

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Appendix I: Forest Service’s Timber Sales by Region

Tables 2, 3, and 4 present data on timber sold by Forest Service region. The extent each region met its targets for the amount of timber sold from fiscal year 2014 through 2023 varied by region and by year. Each region met or exceeded its target in at least 1 of the 10 years. The amount of timber sold in each region varied for several reasons, such as the amount and biological productivity of National Forest System land in the region and timber industry capacity and needs.

Table 2: Forest Service’s Average Timber Targets and Volume of Timber Sold, by Region, Fiscal Years 2014–2023

Region	Hundred cubic feet (CCF)		Thousand board feet (MBF)	
	Target	Sold ^a	Target	Sold ^a
Region 1	754,140	665,781	377,070	334,566
Region 2	554,054	508,557	277,027	250,618
Region 3	386,910	336,102	193,455	178,710
Region 4	271,220	256,950	146,459	135,294
Region 5	802,600	645,756	401,300	337,377
Region 6	1,256,225	1,114,811	653,237	585,096
Region 8	1,203,153	1,081,792	637,671	566,426
Region 9	928,996	937,343	575,978	571,519
Region 10	123,296	42,665	51,784	19,383
Total	6,280,594	5,589,757	3,313,981	2,978,990

Source: GAO analysis of Forest Service data. | GAO-25-107496

Notes: Numbers may not sum to the totals due to rounding. These data are from the Forest Service’s Timber Information Manager database and may differ from data the Forest Service reported in the past for various reasons. For example, this table includes timber volume added during contract execution in the fiscal year that the timber was sold, whereas past reports may not have included the added volume in that fiscal year. There is no region 7.

*The Forest Service sets timber targets for the amount of timber the agency aims to sell each year. Thus, this table reports volume of timber sold; the final harvested volume may differ. The volume sold amounts include volume that is added to timber sales during contract execution.

Table 3: Forest Service’s Timber Targets and Volume of Timber Sold, by Region, Fiscal Years (FY) 2014–2023

FY	Hundred cubic feet (CCF)		Thousand board feet (MBF)	
	Target	Sold ^a	Target	Sold ^a
Region 1: Northern				
2014	570,000	574,073	285,000	281,107
2015	615,000	641,966	307,500	321,813
2016	720,000	534,887	360,000	265,168
2017	642,000	687,268	321,000	343,021
2018	780,000	709,736	390,000	356,718
2019	764,400	810,879	382,200	403,827
2020	840,000	746,221	420,000	377,178
2021	920,000	623,108	460,000	321,963
2022	840,000 ^b	659,511	420,000 ^b	342,118
2023	850,000	670,164 ^c	425,000	332,752 ^c
Region 2: Rocky Mountain				
2014	500,000	467,949	250,000	231,525
2015	519,640	526,544	259,820	265,049
2016	580,700	597,362	290,350	295,738
2017	562,000	569,314	281,000	279,130
2018	661,000	610,980	330,500	299,789
2019	607,200	625,832	303,600	310,971
2020	630,000	449,305	315,000	222,281
2021	600,000	494,456	300,000	240,352
2022	460,000 ^b	385,790	230,000 ^b	188,605
2023	420,000	358,033 ^c	210,000	172,740 ^c
Region 3: Southwestern				
2014	250,000	324,579	125,000	170,967
2015	337,100	410,089	168,550	210,736
2016	412,300	338,159	206,150	179,991
2017	384,000	399,836	192,000	207,793
2018	446,000	302,071	223,000	159,637
2019	342,000	372,597	171,000	193,917
2020	456,000	288,830	228,000	157,608
2021	488,000	215,911	244,000	121,810
2022	303,700 ^b	350,934	151,850 ^b	189,126
2023	450,000	358,014 ^c	225,000	195,516 ^c
Region 4: Intermountain				
2014	230,000	227,525	124,200	123,425
2015	252,747	178,388	136,483	93,509
2016	277,000	331,932	149,580	158,734
2017	277,000	275,403	149,580	151,399
2018	286,000	177,557	154,440	94,146
2019	243,738	295,901	131,618	152,120
2020	286,750	280,827	154,845	153,364
2021	296,296	261,800	160,000	140,899

FY	Hundred cubic feet (CCF)		Thousand board feet (MBF)	
	Target	Sold ^a	Target	Sold ^a
2022	268,519 ^b	181,667	145,000 ^b	98,479
2023	294,150	358,501 ^c	158,841	186,866 ^c
Region 5: Pacific Southwest				
2014	1,000,000	577,001	500,000	312,447
2015	780,000	619,938	390,000	324,123
2016	770,000	675,155	385,000	378,423
2017	630,000	486,449	315,000	243,524
2018	740,000	679,864	370,000	340,721
2019	728,000	702,074	364,000	367,507
2020	800,000	830,269	400,000	420,408
2021	860,000	333,413	430,000	184,402
2022	748,000 ^b	790,898	374,000 ^b	415,012
2023	970,000	762,501 ^c	485,000	387,204 ^c
Region 6: Pacific Northwest				
2014	1,160,000	1,164,714	603,200	608,319
2015	1,257,603	1,124,064	653,954	587,237
2016	1,173,100	1,176,028	610,012	619,229
2017	1,173,000	1,099,077	609,960	573,803
2018	1,271,000	1,194,596	660,920	629,311
2019	1,299,456	1,107,299	675,717	577,183
2020	1,382,400	1,356,145	718,848	718,058
2021	1,434,000	1,103,740	745,680	582,485
2022	1,307,692 ^b	735,944	680,000 ^b	389,939
2023	1,104,000	1,086,502 ^c	574,080	565,390 ^c
Region 8: Southern				
2014	1,050,000	1,080,538	556,500	552,236
2015	1,125,000	1,075,584	596,250	545,255
2016	1,164,500	1,078,749	617,185	543,735
2017	1,055,000	1,137,166	559,150	575,293
2018	1,237,000	1,277,468	655,610	677,629
2019	1,131,354	1,105,898	599,618	600,767
2020	1,379,700	969,528	731,241	518,842
2021	1,471,698	1,075,247	780,000	574,067
2022	1,132,075 ^b	975,932	600,000 ^b	514,684
2023	1,285,200	1,041,811 ^c	681,156	561,754 ^c
Region 9: Eastern				
2014	700,000	727,836	434,000	447,188
2015	720,000	741,286	446,400	454,485
2016	810,000	833,276	502,200	508,734
2017	824,000	862,755	510,880	528,157
2018	940,000	963,024	582,800	588,056
2019	983,726	1,016,582	609,910	618,158
2020	1,062,600	1,060,746	658,812	652,141
2021	1,129,032	1,081,313	700,000	656,360
2022	1,025,806 ^b	1,088,737	636,000 ^b	659,220
2023	1,094,800	997,875 ^c	678,776	602,690 ^c

FY	Hundred cubic feet (CCF)		Thousand board feet (MBF)	
	Target	Sold ^a	Target	Sold ^a
Region 10: Alaska				
2014	140,000	217,428	58,800	104,371
2015	145,013	36,267	60,905	16,974
2016	132,100	29,149	55,482	13,015
2017	149,000	75,551	62,580	31,012
2018	96,000	21,598	40,320	9,540
2019	94,248	17,636	39,584	5,639
2020	142,800	7,210	59,976	3,266
2021	145,714	3,998	61,200	1,826
2022	161,905 ^b	9,119	68,000 ^b	4,219
2023	26,180	8,694 ^c	10,996	3,971 ^c

Source: GAO analysis of Forest Service data. | GAO-25-107496

Notes: Numbers may not sum to totals reported in other tables due to rounding. These data are from the Forest Service's Timber Information Manager database and may differ from data the Forest Service reported in the past for various reasons. For example, this table includes timber volume added during contract execution in the fiscal year that the timber was sold, whereas past reports may not have included the added volume in that fiscal year. There is no region 7.

^aThe Forest Service sets timber targets for the amount of timber the agency aims to sell each year. Thus, this table reports volume of timber sold; the final harvested volume may differ. The volume sold amounts include volume that is added to timber sales during contract execution.

^bThe target for FY 2022 was preliminary. According to headquarters officials, the Forest Service did not set a final target in FY 2022 for various reasons, including because the agency received its final appropriations late in the fiscal year.

^cBeginning in FY 2023, the Forest Service began counting the volume of timber provided free of charge via firewood permits toward its sold volume, which it had not done previously. The Forest Service may offer firewood to the public free of charge in designated areas if it is compatible with land management plans. From FY 2014–2023, the Forest Service counted firewood permits provided for a fee toward its target.

Table 4: Forest Service's Volume of Timber Sold, by Mechanism and Region, Fiscal Years (FY) 2014–2023

FY	Timber sale contracts ^a		Stewardship contracts and agreements ^b		Good Neighbor Authority agreements ^c		Permits ^d		Total	
	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF
Region 1: Northern										
2014	366,758	189,027	92,526	46,308	0	0	114,789	45,773	574,073	281,107
2015	354,169	182,997	183,467	97,490	0	0	104,330	41,326	641,966	321,813
2016	415,757	214,960	9,862	5,085	7,525	4,624	101,742	40,498	534,887	265,168
2017	416,182	211,140	169,174	89,142	11,833	7,087	90,079	35,651	687,268	343,021
2018	419,737	214,627	161,137	86,010	28,542	15,679	100,320	40,401	709,736	356,718
2019	550,526	279,807	100,243	54,310	60,275	30,277	99,835	39,433	810,879	403,827
2020	580,509	298,295	53,652	26,722	90,845	43,903	21,215	8,257	746,221	377,178
2021	464,857	242,881	31,560	16,985	123,663	61,000	3,027	1,097	623,108	321,963
2022	563,266	294,953	0	0	93,698	46,426	2,547	739	659,511	342,118
2023	333,886	176,660	81,056	43,670	80,995	44,552	174,228	67,870	670,164	332,752
Region 2: Rocky Mountain										
2014	329,093	162,974	90,205	44,919	0	0	48,650	23,633	467,949	231,525
2015	354,332	179,655	125,000	62,276	0	0	47,211	23,118	526,544	265,049
2016	451,148	224,146	99,893	49,195	0	0	46,321	22,397	597,362	295,738
2017	418,081	203,883	103,166	52,172	2,560	1,274	45,506	21,801	569,314	279,130
2018	467,012	229,828	84,908	41,940	11,560	5,373	47,500	22,648	610,980	299,789
2019	421,625	211,287	79,783	38,227	75,617	38,223	48,807	23,234	625,832	310,971
2020	292,673	145,341	94,813	47,593	26,927	12,891	34,892	16,456	449,305	222,281

FY	Timber sale contracts ^a		Stewardship contracts and agreements ^b		Good Neighbor Authority agreements ^c		Permits ^d		Total	
	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF
2021	266,376	132,412	156,758	73,494	31,038	15,265	40,284	19,181	494,456	240,352
2022	215,683	105,301	100,632	50,097	28,954	13,864	40,521	19,343	385,790	188,605
2023	123,843	59,581	170,775	82,292	15,568	7,888	47,848	22,979	358,033	172,740
Region 3: Southwestern										
2014	63,444	32,268	167,435	79,622	0	0	93,700	59,077	324,579	170,967
2015	38,215	18,820	275,258	131,124	0	0	96,615	60,792	410,089	210,736
2016	90,322	45,959	148,731	71,865	0	0	99,106	62,167	338,159	179,991
2017	104,557	53,030	200,039	95,016	0	0	95,239	59,747	399,836	207,793
2018	98,538	49,037	118,202	56,921	0	0	85,330	53,679	302,071	159,637
2019	82,040	40,276	183,578	86,001	0	0	106,979	67,640	372,597	193,917
2020	110,329	53,616	44,316	20,020	0	0	134,185	83,972	288,830	157,608
2021	61,869	29,676	30,873	14,545	0	0	123,169	77,589	215,911	121,810
2022	37,046	17,170	103,022	49,282	72,452	36,360	138,415	86,314	350,934	189,126
2023	109,944	51,541	79,132	37,498	0	0	168,938	106,478	358,014	195,516
Region 4: Intermountain										
2014	54,317	28,280	91,955	47,575	0	0	81,252	47,570	227,525	123,425
2015	87,174	41,142	17,956	9,476	0	0	73,257	42,891	178,388	93,509
2016	177,218	80,924	79,318	33,669	0	0	75,396	44,141	331,932	158,734
2017	156,646	84,932	47,142	24,549	0	0	71,614	41,917	275,403	151,399
2018	101,745	50,052	1,393	505	0	0	74,419	43,590	177,557	94,146
2019	207,075	100,879	0	0	11,304	5,806	77,523	45,435	295,901	152,120
2020	195,604	104,508	12,663	6,802	9,984	5,418	62,577	36,637	280,827	153,364
2021	173,552	91,475	789	316	26,654	13,549	60,805	35,560	261,800	140,899
2022	100,619	52,597	16,434	8,775	1,163	638	63,450	36,468	181,667	98,479
2023	215,093	110,955	27,843	14,896	39,603	16,906	75,962	44,108	358,501	186,866
Region 5: Pacific Southwest										
2014	434,318	247,716	58,468	22,573	0	0	84,215	42,158	577,001	312,447
2015	485,968	256,574	61,655	31,386	0	0	72,316	36,164	619,938	324,123
2016	259,075	142,763	346,634	200,934	0	0	69,446	34,726	675,155	378,423
2017	254,014	127,525	166,099	82,828	0	0	66,336	33,172	486,449	243,524
2018	413,356	206,588	193,677	99,169	12,313	4,699	60,519	30,265	679,864	340,721
2019	335,799	182,530	303,352	153,512	0	0	62,923	31,465	702,074	367,507
2020	360,072	181,547	431,351	218,643	0	0	38,846	20,218	830,269	420,408
2021	150,391	88,134	158,940	83,080	0	0	24,083	13,189	333,413	184,402
2022	393,698	208,098	366,530	189,805	0	0	30,670	17,108	790,898	415,012
2023	107,062	56,094	574,432	290,050	0	0	81,007	41,061	762,501	387,204
Region 6: Pacific Northwest										
2014	550,988	292,105	516,853	265,815	0	0	96,873	50,400	1,164,714	608,319
2015	509,755	270,219	526,294	271,221	0	0	88,015	45,798	1,124,064	587,237
2016	702,342	379,647	387,363	194,672	0	0	86,323	44,911	1,176,028	619,229
2017	490,455	259,982	526,047	270,868	3,569	1,856	79,006	41,097	1,099,077	573,803
2018	645,023	344,262	468,769	243,021	0	0	80,804	42,029	1,194,596	629,311
2019	604,217	318,081	365,770	189,143	58,256	28,839	79,057	41,121	1,107,299	577,183
2020	493,653	265,674	700,911	368,805	114,197	58,935	47,385	24,644	1,356,145	718,058

FY	Timber sale contracts ^a		Stewardship contracts and agreements ^b		Good Neighbor Authority agreements ^c		Permits ^d		Total	
	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF	CCF	MBF
2021	541,713	293,181	423,345	217,291	93,189	48,352	45,493	23,662	1,103,740	582,485
2022	452,714	241,154	192,786	101,002	70,262	37,285	20,181	10,498	735,944	389,939
2023	386,221	203,013	460,946	237,912	120,929	62,889	118,406	61,575	1,086,502	565,390
Region 8: Southern										
2014	800,658	410,597	260,299	131,603	0	0	19,580	10,036	1,080,538	552,236
2015	837,972	424,609	216,466	109,815	0	0	21,146	10,831	1,075,584	545,255
2016	865,477	435,982	197,283	99,578	0	0	15,989	8,174	1,078,749	543,735
2017	882,601	447,710	236,140	118,227	5,472	2,736	12,953	6,620	1,137,166	575,293
2018	1,058,368	560,785	191,395	102,154	14,097	7,723	13,607	6,967	1,277,468	677,629
2019	746,194	404,175	334,907	183,334	10,183	5,555	14,614	7,703	1,105,898	600,767
2020	609,822	328,984	314,028	165,083	32,520	17,764	13,158	7,011	969,528	518,842
2021	756,199	403,610	251,956	134,484	56,294	30,183	10,799	5,790	1,075,247	574,067
2022	789,571	415,361	158,492	84,351	17,724	9,561	10,146	5,411	975,932	514,684
2023	732,048	394,737	259,678	139,960	38,328	20,758	11,756	6,299	1,041,811	561,754
Region 9: Eastern										
2014	561,862	344,920	125,026	76,361	0	0	40,948	25,907	727,836	447,188
2015	517,981	316,538	181,944	111,781	0	0	41,360	26,166	741,286	454,485
2016	583,413	356,442	186,445	112,581	32,224	19,973	31,194	19,737	833,276	508,734
2017	553,599	338,623	194,749	118,453	84,756	52,336	29,650	18,745	862,755	528,157
2018	625,892	380,493	210,723	128,925	101,822	63,094	24,586	15,544	963,024	588,056
2019	635,263	386,517	229,061	137,540	122,518	75,325	29,740	18,776	1,016,582	618,158
2020	732,370	449,927	143,457	86,598	163,705	102,244	21,213	13,371	1,060,746	652,141
2021	695,960	422,175	197,868	117,969	173,368	107,313	14,117	8,903	1,081,313	656,360
2022	642,797	388,259	216,005	128,666	209,616	129,515	20,319	12,780	1,088,737	659,220
2023	611,831	367,794	227,099	136,477	119,271	73,398	39,675	25,021	997,875	602,690
Region 10: Alaska										
2014	2,396	1,133	214,977	103,208	0	0	55	30	217,428	104,371
2015	34,873	16,272	1,300	650	0	0	95	52	36,267	16,974
2016	29,110	12,995	0	0	0	0	39	20	29,149	13,015
2017	2,186	925	0	0	73,220	30,008	145	79	75,551	31,012
2018	21,173	9,328	117	44	0	0	308	168	21,598	9,540
2019	6,427	2,811	0	0	11,024	2,730	186	99	17,636	5,639
2020	7,024	3,165	0	0	0	0	187	101	7,210	3,266
2021	3,786	1,713	0	0	0	0	212	113	3,998	1,826
2022	8,868	4,080	0	0	0	0	251	139	9,119	4,219
2023	7,261	3,176	0	0	0	0	1,432	796	8,694	3,971

CCF = hundred cubic feet; MBF = thousand board feet.

Source: GAO analysis of Forest Service data. | GAO-25-107496

Notes: Numbers may not sum to the totals due to rounding. These data are from the Forest Service's Timber Information Manager database and may differ from data the Forest Service reported in the past for various reasons. For example, this table includes timber volume added during contract execution in the fiscal year that the timber was sold, whereas past reports may not have included the added volume in that fiscal year. The Forest Service offers timber for sale through four mechanisms: timber sale contracts, stewardship contracts and agreements, Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) agreements, and permits. There is no region 7.

^aThrough timber sale contracts, the Forest Service sells the right to harvest timber to a purchaser, generally through an open and competitive bidding process.

^bThrough stewardship contracts and agreements, the Forest Service exchanges goods (e.g., timber) for services (e.g., wildlife habitat improvements). 16 U.S.C. § 6591c.

^cThe Forest Service may enter into GNA agreements with states to plan or implement a timber sale. 16 U.S.C. § 2113a. The Forest Service's authority to enter into GNA agreements with states was enacted in the 2014 farm bill. The 2018 farm bill authorized states to retain and use revenue from the sale of timber under GNA agreements.

^dThe Forest Service issues permits for the removal of timber for a nominal fee or free of charge, often in designated areas. Beginning in FY 2023, the Forest Service began counting the volume of timber provided free of charge via firewood permits toward its sold volume, which it had not done previously. From FY 2014–2023, the Forest Service counted firewood permits provided for a fee toward its target.

Endnotes

¹For purposes of this report, timber includes trees, portions of trees, and other forest products that can be measured by volume, including sawtimber, pulpwood, and firewood. The term “sell” includes the sale, disposal, or removal of timber from National Forest System lands.

²Specifically, one of the purposes for which national forests were to be established was to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States. 30 Stat. 34 (1897) (codified at 16 U.S.C. § 475).

³Pub. L. No. 86-517, §§ 1-2, 74 Stat. 215 (1960) (codified at 16 U.S.C. §§ 528-529).

⁴Pub. L. No. 86-517, § 4, 74 Stat. 215 (1960) (codified at 16 U.S.C. § 531(a)).

⁵Pub. L. No. 86-517, § 2, 74 Stat. 215 (1960) (codified at 16 U.S.C. § 529).

⁶Pub. L. No. 86-517, § 4, 74 Stat. 215 (1960) (codified at 16 U.S.C. § 531(b)).

⁷The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended, requires the Forest Service to develop forest plans for each National Forest System unit. Pub. L. No. 93-378, § 5, 88 Stat. 476, 477 (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. § 1604). The Forest Service's regulations governing forest plans are at 36 C.F.R. Part 219.

⁸As part of the land management planning process, the Forest Service identifies lands as suitable or not suitable for timber production. 16 U.S.C. § 1604(k); 36 C.F.R. § 219.11. For example, forest plans must identify lands within the plan area as not suitable for timber production if law, executive order, or regulation prohibits timber production on the land, such as in designated wilderness areas. 36 C.F.R. § 219.11(a)(1)(i). Timber harvest for purposes other than timber production, such as improving wildlife habitat, may occur in some areas designated as not suitable for timber production to protect other multiple-use values. 36 C.F.R. § 219.11(c).

⁹When planning timber sales, the Forest Service must comply with several laws and their implementing regulations, including NEPA; the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended; and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. NEPA requires federal agencies to evaluate the likely environmental effects of proposed projects using an environmental assessment or, if the project likely would significantly affect the environment, a more detailed environmental impact statement evaluating the proposed project and alternatives unless the proposed project is within a category of activities the agency has already determined has no significant environmental effect. Pub. L. No. 91-190, 83 Stat. 852 (1970) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-47).

¹⁰These mechanisms specify the terms for harvesting timber, the value or price of the timber harvested, and other conditions, such as the time frame for harvesting timber. The Forest Service generally must obtain appraised fair market value for timber, but may permit the use of timber for domestic purposes free of charge. 16 U.S.C. §§ 472a(a), 477; 36 C.F.R. §§ 223.60-223.65, 223.303(c)(11).

¹¹Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2400 – Timber Management, Chapter Zero Code (2021).

¹²FSM 2430 – Commercial Timber Sales (2021).

¹³Timber sale contracts are authorized by 16 U.S.C. § 472a.

¹⁴The Forest Service may require timber purchasers to perform or pay for construction of roads for the timber harvest. 16 U.S.C. § 535(2); 36 C.F.R. § 223.41. Timber contracts may also specify other requirements, such as deposits to cover the cost of post-harvest brush disposal. 16 U.S.C. § 490.

¹⁵36 C.F.R. § 223.31.

¹⁶The Secretary of Agriculture may extend a timber sale contract beyond 10 years in certain circumstances. 16 U.S.C. § 472a(c), 36 C.F.R. § 223.31. A downpayment toward the value of the

contract is required at the time the contract is awarded, and some contracts may require periodic payments throughout the duration of the contract. 16 U.S.C. § 618(d), 36 C.F.R. §§ 223.49-223.50.

¹⁷The land management goals of stewardship contracts and agreements may be (1) road and trail maintenance or obliteration to restore or maintain water quality; (2) soil productivity, habitat for wildlife and fisheries, or other resource values; (3) setting of prescribed fires to improve the composition, structure, condition, and health of stands or to improve wildlife habitat; (4) removing vegetation or other activities to promote healthy forest stands, reduce fire hazards, or achieve other land management objectives; (5) watershed restoration and maintenance; (6) restoration and maintenance of wildlife and fish; and (7) control of noxious and exotic weeds and reestablishing native plant species. 16 U.S.C. § 6591c(c).

¹⁸These procurement contracts are subject to the Federal Acquisition Regulations in title 48 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

¹⁹Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 2409.19 Ch. 60 Stewardship Contracts and Agreements (2022).

²⁰16 U.S.C. § 6591c(d)(3)(B). In 2018, the Forest Service was authorized to enter into stewardship contracts and agreements for not more than 20 years on areas where the majority of the lands are in Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III. Pub. L. No. 115-141, div. O, tit. II, § 207, 132 Stat. 348, 1065. Fire Regime Groups describe the relative frequency and severity of wildfires occurring in a landscape. Some stewardship contracts may require periodic payments toward the value of the contract.

²¹Pub. L. No. 113-79, tit. VIII, subtit. C, § 8205(a), 128 Stat. 649, 918 (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. § 6591c).

²²In 1998, the Forest Service was first authorized to enter into a limited number of stewardship contracts until the end of fiscal year 2002. Pub. L. No. 105-277, div. A, tit. III, § 347, 112 Stat. 2681, 2681-298 (1998). In 2003, this authority was amended to, among other things, authorize stewardship agreements, remove the limit on the number of the stewardship contracts, and extend it through fiscal year 2013. Pub. L. No. 108-7, div. F, tit. III, § 323, 117 Stat. 11, 275.

²³16 U.S.C. § 2113a. The Forest Service may enter into GNA agreements with states, counties, or Tribes to carry out activities to restore or improve forest health on National Forest System lands. These activities include conducting prescribed fires or planting trees. However, counties and Tribes are not authorized to generate or collect revenue from sales of federal timber through GNA agreements so the Forest Service is responsible for conducting the sale.

²⁴FSH 2409.19 Ch. 80 Good Neighbor Authority (2022).

²⁵Pub. L. No. 113-79, tit. VIII, subtit. C, § 8206(b)(1)(A), 128 Stat. 649, 921 (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. § 2113a(b)(1)(A)).

²⁶Pub. L. No. 115-334, tit. VIII, subtit. F, § 8624(c), 132 Stat. 4490, 4858 (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. § 2113a(b)(2)(C)(i)). This authority is set to expire on December 21, 2024. Pub. L. No. 118-83, div. B, tit. I, § 107 (2024) (codified at 16 U.S.C. § 2113a(b)(2)(C)(ii)). States must use the revenue from a GNA timber sale to carry out the restoration services under that or another GNA agreement.

The 2018 farm bill also authorized the Forest Service to enter into GNA agreements with counties and Tribes, though those partners are not authorized to retain and use timber sale revenue. Pub. L. No. 115-334, tit. VIII, subtit. F, § 8624(a)(2), (b)(1)(A), 132 Stat. 4490, 4857 (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. § 2113a(a)(5), (6)). The applicable statutory definition of Tribe includes federally recognized Tribes and corporations established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. See 16 U.S.C. § 2113a(a)(7). According to Forest Service officials, GNA agreements implementing timber sales have all been with state partners, as of October 2024.

²⁷36 C.F.R. §§ 223.5-223.13.

²⁸For timber sold through a permit, the Forest Service receives permit applications rather than initiating the sale.

²⁹A proposed project may include multiple individual timber sales.

³⁰Project approval occurs when the appropriate Forest Service official has signed the NEPA decision document. The type of documentation required varies depending on the type of NEPA analysis conducted for the project.

³¹The Forest Service is generally required to advertise all timber sales by contract with an appraised value over \$10,000 for at least 30 days. 16 U.S.C. § 472a(d), 36 C.F.R. §§ 223.80-223.81, 223.85.

³²Prior to awarding the contract, the Forest Service must determine the purchaser's responsibility, including finding that the purchaser is able to perform the contract within the contract term and has adequate financial resources to perform the contract. 36 C.F.R. § 223.101.

³³Timber sales sold by states through GNA agreements are not subject to the requirement to advertise all timber sales with an appraised value over \$10,000. 16 U.S.C. § 2113a(b)(2)(A).

³⁴FSH 2409.19 Ch. 80, Good Neighbor Authority (2022). The agency must also ensure that the work performed by the state complies with the requirements specified in the NEPA decision document for the project.

³⁵The Department of Agriculture and Congress exchange views and information about budgetary needs and timber accomplishments through, respectively, the annual budget process and statutorily required agency performance reports, according to agency officials. In addition to annual targets, the Forest Service also sets outyear timber targets as part of its budget development process, according to agency officials.

³⁶The main factors that national forests base their 5-year plans for timber sales on are (1) their forest plans and land management goals, (2) local timber industry needs, (3) staff capabilities, and (4) anticipated budget, according to headquarters officials.

³⁷The Forest Service's calculation of the amount of timber sold as it applies toward the target changed in fiscal year 2023. Beginning in fiscal year 2023, the Forest Service began counting the volume of timber provided free of charge via firewood permits toward its sold volume, which it had not done previously. The Forest Service may offer firewood to the public free of charge in designated areas if such offering is compatible with land management plans. From fiscal years 2014–2023, the Forest Service counted firewood permits provided for a fee toward its target.

³⁸The board foot is a unit of measurement to estimate the amount of lumber that can be produced from a tree. Relationships between cubic and board foot scales vary depending on tree size and species and on how the timber is used (e.g., to produce lumber or pulp), among other factors. These relationships can be derived from values found in scaling handbooks. According to a Forest Service document, general conversion factors range across the nine regions, with 1 CCF equaling between 0.42 to 0.62 MBF.