



People of Penn's Woods

The first people came to the land we call Pennsylvania at the end of the last ice age. Evidence of the ancient forests they explored can still be found. Pollen grains are preserved for centuries in the muck of bogs. They show us what plants were growing in the area long ago. Scientists study the bones of prehistoric animals found in caves and sinkholes. These clues and the stone tools left behind by the early inhabitants tell us their story.

About 12,000 years ago:

The first humans moved in from the west through forests of spruce, fir, birch, pine and alder. They hunted mammoth and mastodon, elk and moose with spears and stone tools. They had no planted crops or domesticated animals. The glaciers were still retreating and the climate was cool and wet.

10,000 - 8,000 years ago:

The climate slowly got warmer. Oak and chestnut, hickory and beech trees moved in from the south. Hunters pursued deer, elk, bear and turkey in deciduous forests with a rich understory of berries and other plant foods.



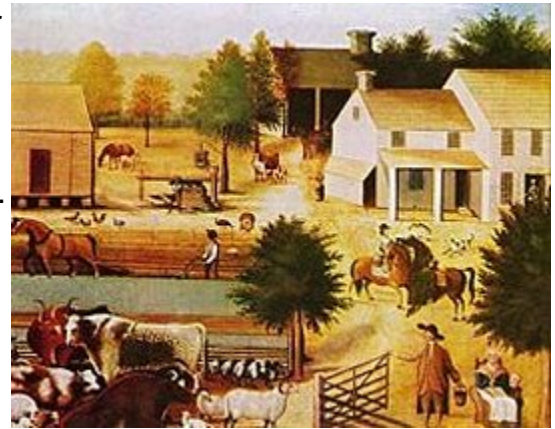
8,000 - 1,000 years ago:

People used fire to clear wooded areas for farming and villages. Crops of maize, beans and squash supplemented the diet of game and wild plants. Underbrush was cleared with fire to

improve hunting with a new tool-the bow and arrow. However, small populations and simple technology limited the impact of people on the forest.

400 - 200 years ago:

Europeans arrived. Steel plows and axes allowed easier clearing of land for agriculture, firewood and forest products. Charcoal makers cut and burned large areas of forest to supply fuel for the early iron industry. Farms and towns replaced the forest in valleys and on hillsides. The growing population pushed west. By the 1850's, Penn's Woods supported an estimated 128,000 self-sufficient farms.



Recent history:

In the late 1800's, Pennsylvania was the nation's greatest source of lumber. Millions of logs floated down the Susquehanna River to sawmills in Williamsport. This city reigned as the State's timber capital.



The Commonwealth was also a leading producer of leather. Tanners extracted tannic acid from the bark of hemlock trees to process hides.

Other trees provided a wealth of industrial products, such as wood alcohol and acetic acid. Wood fuel powered locomotives, steamboats and steam engines. By 1910, the number of farms in the Commonwealth peaked at 224,000.

After World War 1, much of state's population moved from rural areas to cities. Pennsylvania's forest area reached its historical minimum of about 13 million acres. Wildfires were very prevalent. But concerned people acted to control the fires and erosion while the natural process of plant succession began to convert abandoned farm fields to back into forests.

Today:



Areas in green shades are predominantly forest. Yellows and browns represent cultivated lands. Reds/purples are developed areas.
Based on USGS publications, 2000.

About 60% (17 million acres) of Pennsylvania is forested. The Commonwealth is the nation's largest producer of hardwood lumber (over 1 billion board feet per year). Individuals and families own about 75% of the forested land and provide 80% of Pennsylvania's timber products. Economic pressures to convert forest land to residential or commercial uses threaten the conservation of private forests.

The State Forest system contains 12% of the forested area, (about 2.1 million acres). This makes it one of the largest expanses of public forestland in the eastern United States. Other public forests include State Game Lands, State Parks and the Allegheny National Forest.

