



SYSTEM DIMENSIONS	CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL	BIOLOGICAL COMPONENTS	HUMAN USES
Extent	Nutrients, Carbon, Oxygen	Plants and Animals	Food, Fiber, and Water
Pattern	Contaminants Physical	Communities Ecological Productivity	Recreation and Other Services

## ② Suburban/Rural Land Use Change

**Suburban/Rural Land Use Change**

Indicator Development Needed

### What Is This Indicator, and Why Is It Important?

This indicator will describe the pattern and intensity, or density, of development, both at the outer edge of suburban development around cities, and in rural areas that, despite the lack of a large town center, are growing rapidly toward suburban densities.

Citizens and policymakers alike have expressed strong interest in the nature and pace of suburban development. Patterns of development can directly affect wildlife and the people living in and around newly developed areas. Concerns often focus on the conversion of natural or agricultural land to low-density housing or commercial development, often accompanied by loss of

open space; demands for more roads and sewers; increased crowding in public schools; and longer travel times to jobs and stores. Landowners, however, often resist efforts to control or channel development, and some jurisdictions favor continued growth as a means of ensuring steady or increasing tax revenues.

**Why Can't This Indicator Be Reported at this Time?** Reporting on this indicator will require agreement among land use professionals on the most appropriate measure of changes in suburban and rural land use, and on monitoring of these changes using consistent methods.

Public debate often focuses on “sprawl” or “smart growth,” but there is no consensus on how best to measure—and thus to track—these phenomena. Issues include change in overall density, the appropriate mix of commercial and low- and high-density housing, and the degree to which new development is located near existing development or in more remote undeveloped areas.

One type of candidate indicator focuses on the degree to which patches of forests, grasslands, and wetlands are reduced in size and isolated from each other, affecting the amount of wildlife habitat and open space values they provide (see the “natural area” patches indicator, p. 183, the open space indicator, p. 194, and the ecosystem services indicator, p. 195). Another approach focuses on such issues as the amount of time residents spend traveling to stores, jobs, and schools, perhaps measured in vehicle-hours.

**There is no technical note for this indicator.**