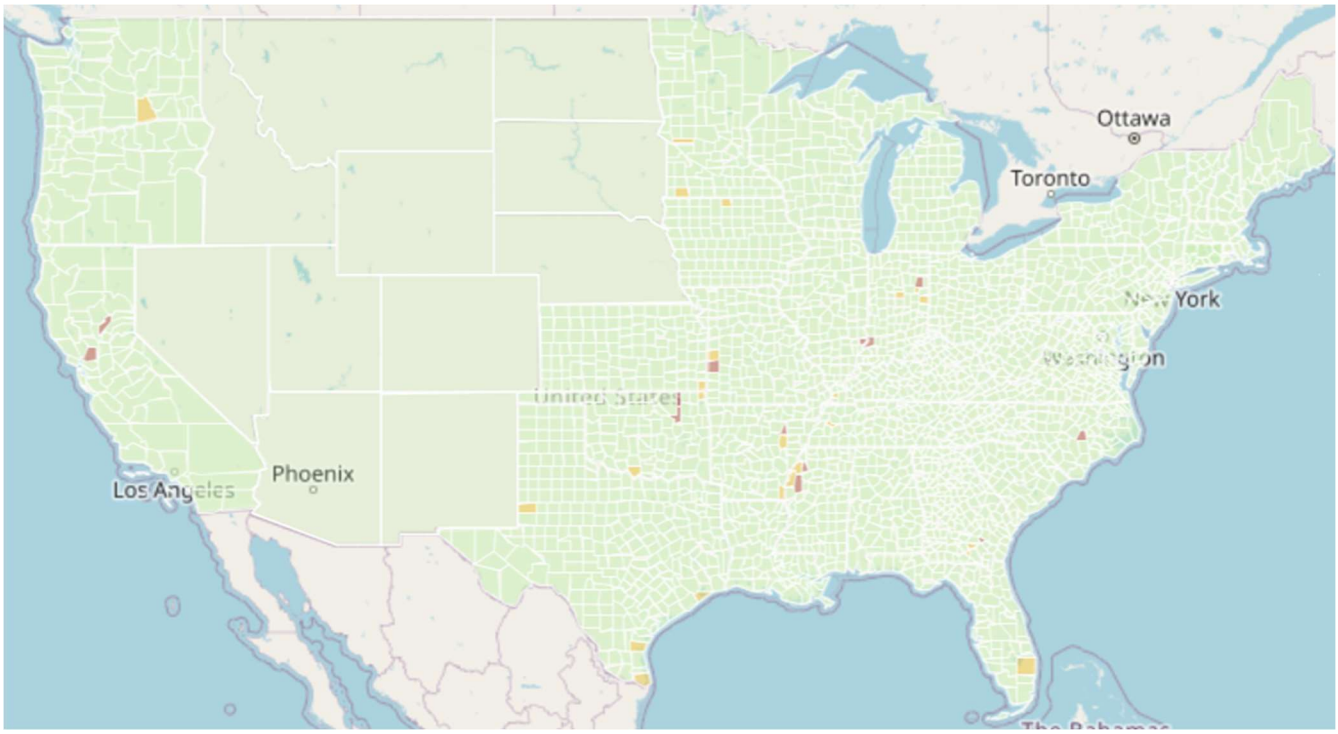


AHA 2025 deforestation risk assessment

Executive Summary

September 2026

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Author's note
This report has been produced independently by George White and commissioned for the American Hardwood Assured (AHA) Platform by the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC).

The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the AHA Platform or American Hardwood Export Council.

The AHA 2025 assessment finds a low level of potential conversion of U.S. hardwood forest to agricultural land across the area studied. It examined 2,615 counties in 37 states, using a revised 2020 forest baseline and land-use data through 2025. Of approximately 154.5 million hectares of hardwood forest in the baseline, an estimated 94,914 hectares may have been converted to agriculture over five years. This is an average of 18,983 hectares, or 0.012% of the baseline forest area, per year.

Most counties fell below AHA's risk threshold. The assessment classified 2,578 counties (98.6%) as Negligible Risk and 37 (1.4%) as Unspecified or Specified Risk. Further examination confirmed 13 of the 37 as Specified Risk. Only 12 of the higher-risk counties had reported hardwood sawlog production; together, they accounted for approximately 0.34% of the hardwood sawlog volume reported for the assessed states.

The estimated exposure of hardwood production to agricultural conversion was also small. For the 1,491 counties with reported hardwood sawlog production, potential conversion averaged 0.011% of their 2020 hardwood forest area annually. Applying those county-level rates to production gives an estimated 11,636 cubic metres of sawlogs exposed to risk each year, approximately 0.0135% of the 85.9 million cubic metres reported. This is a landscape-level estimate of exposure, not a determination of the origin or status of individual logs.

The analysis finds little relationship between hardwood sawlog production and potential forest loss. Across all 2,615 counties, sawlog production explained less than 1% of the variation in either the area or rate of forest loss. High-producing counties often had low potential conversion rates, while many of the 37 higher-risk counties reported no hardwood sawlog production. The findings do not support hardwood harvest volume as a useful predictor of agricultural deforestation at county level.

Agricultural conversion is concentrated in a small number of counties and is associated with several land uses. In the 37 higher-risk counties, estimated potential forest loss averaged about 2,100 hectares per year. Pecans were the largest single land-use category identified, but this attribution is uncertain: naturally occurring pecan trees and commercial orchards can be difficult to distinguish in satellite data. The report identifies similar classification challenges for blueberries. Soybeans accounted for approximately 6% of potential conversion in these counties. Development and other non-agricultural pressures also affect hardwood forests, although the assessment's principal measure is conversion to agriculture.

The results should be read as a risk assessment rather than proof of land-use change at every flagged site. In its review of 308 selected sites for the 2025 assessment, AHA's Expert Eye process found that 40% of suspected deforestation was not deforestation, while land use could not be determined at 32% of sites. The increase in detected potential conversion since the 2024 assessment largely reflects changes in the forest baseline, imagery resolution and assessment methods, so the two annual estimates should not be treated as a direct measure of change on the ground. AHA uses expert review to refine its classifications and requires platform users sourcing from Unspecified or Specified Risk counties to declare their risk-mitigation actions.