

# Aspen Forest

**A**lso called quaking aspen for the way their leaves quiver in breezes, aspen trees and the forests they create are as scenic as they are important for wildlife. Each fall, aspen leaves turn bright yellow, attracting tourists to Utah's mountains, where the forests occur at elevations above 5,600 feet.

Although few other trees inhabit the aspen forest, these areas are home to a wide variety of shrubs and wildflowers that fill the forest floor. In turn, this diversity of plant life supports a busy array of wildlife.

Changes in natural fire cycles and other disturbances, however, are making aspen forests increasingly rare across Utah. Without disturbances to open up the forest and help the aspens spread, spruce and fir forests are quickly overtaking aspen forests.



## *Key Facts about Utah's Aspen Forests:*

### *Rare*

Covering just three percent of Utah's land area, aspen forests are not very abundant in Utah.

### *Under Stress*

Scientists believe that both the amount and condition of aspen forests are declining.

### *Plant Life*

Aspen trees are the dominant trees in the aspen forest, but shrubs such as snowberry and wildflowers such as mountain bluebells are often found on the forest floor.

### *Animal Life*

Several species of woodpeckers can be found in aspen forests, where they use the trees' soft wood to create homes. Northern goshawks and owls can also be found above the forest, while voles and weasels can be found burrowing beneath the forest.





## Species on the Edge

Aspen forests are rapidly declining across the state, putting wildlife under pressure to quickly adapt. Aspen forests are home to four species of conservation need:

**Tier One—Very High Concern**  
Northern goshawk

**Tier Two—High Concern**  
Yavapai mountainsnail  
Mexican vole

**Tier Three—Moderate Concern**  
Williamson's sapsucker



*Northern goshawk*

## What's Threatening Utah's Aspen Forests?

**Land Development**—Whether it's to create new housing or to accommodate other needs, many of our aspen forests are being lost to development.

**Fire Cycle Alteration**—Aspen forests are well adapted to regular fires. In fact, these forests rely on fires to remain healthy. But over the past 100 years, fires have been suppressed across the West. Without regular fires in aspen forests, many aspen stands are being replaced with other habitats.

**Improper Grazing Practices**—Certain grazing practices such as overgrazing or grazing at sensitive times of year have damaged some aspen forests.

## Taking Action

Protecting Utah's Aspen Forests will require coordinated action among a variety of partners across the state.

### Conservation Actions

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has identified the following key actions needed to conserve aspen forests:

1. Restore natural fire cycles where appropriate.
2. Ensure appropriate grazing practices are implemented.
3. Restore damaged habitats.
4. Research and monitor both aspen forest habitats and the sensitive species they contain.
5. Partner with federal and state agencies and private landowners.
6. Educate the public about how to help protect and sustain aspen forests.

### Conservation Partners

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is working closely with the grazing industry, private forest industries, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, and others to manage, restore and protect aspen forests.