



Before You Buy Forested Land Checklist: *A guide for prospective buyers*

Use this checklist to explore key questions and gather information about the property you're considering. Not every item will apply to your situation, but identifying what you know—and what you don't—will help you advocate for yourself and make informed decisions.

This checklist guides you in evaluating forest conditions, as well as structural, financial, lifestyle, and safety considerations. Note that each property is unique and not all categories will apply. However, use this guide to spark questions for your realtor or the current landowner and expand your understanding before purchasing.

Date and location of property in review _____

Seller of property name & phone number _____

General notes/description of property (immediate likes/dislikes) _____

Financial Considerations				
Question	Yes	No	N/A	Notes
Have you estimated property taxes (residential, timberland, and how land use affects tax rates)?				
Have you evaluated insurance needs (wildfire coverage, liability, structures)?				
Have you asked about defensible space ?				
Have you considered ongoing management costs (e.g., thinning, road upkeep, weed control, fire hazard reduction)?				
Is the property zoned as a Timber Production Zone (TPZ)? (This affects tax rates, check your local assessors office)				
Is the property covered by the Williamson Act ? (CA Land Conservation Act of 1965- preserves agriculture and open space)				
If there are land easements , have you reviewed the legal obligations? (may impact your forest management goals)				
Land Characteristics				
Question	Yes	No	N/A	Notes
Is the acreage size and shape clearly defined? Is it usable versus steep/rugged?				
Are there existing maps of the property?				

Do you know the last time the land was surveyed? Can you confirm property boundaries ?				
Have you assessed available water sources (e.g., streams, wells, water rights, seasonal creeks)?				
Do you understand the property's topography (slopes, flood risk, overall accessibility)?				
Have you reviewed access rights , including utility easements, rights of way, public or private roads, or whether the property is landlocked?				
Have you reviewed the local climate and microclimates (e.g., snowpack, fire history, drought risk)?				
Forest Health & Ecology				
Question	Yes	No	N/A	Notes
Have you hired or consulted with a forester or local resource agencies for land management assistance?				
Have you inspected the trees for health , including signs of disease, pests, or overcrowding?				
Have you assessed biodiversity and wildlife presence , considering both potential benefits and conflicts?				
Have you checked for invasive plants (e.g., blackberry, broom, or other problematic species)?				

Have you asked about past land use on the property (e.g., logging, grazing, or prescribed burns)?				
Is there a forest management plan in place , or is a registered forester currently working on the property?				
Wildfire & Safety				
Question	Yes	No	N/A	Notes
Have you reviewed wildfire history and risk for the property (e.g., local fire maps, CAL FIRE ratings)?				
Are roads and driveways wide and safe enough for emergency vehicle access (including bridges, if present)?				
Do you have a plan to create or maintain defensible space around structures?				
Are nearby fire protection resources identified e.g., fire station distance, hydrants, water storage? Distance to these may affect insurance.				
Infrastructure & Utilities				
Question	Yes	No	N/A	Notes
Is road access reliable? Do you know who is responsible for road maintenance (private owner, neighbors, county, potential for locked gates)?				

Is there access to utilities such as power, water, and septic, or will off-grid solutions be required?				
Is reliable communications like internet and cell service available on the property?				
Are there existing structures on the property (e.g., cabins, barns, fences), and do you know their condition? What are their maintenance needs?				
Lifestyle & Long-Term Plans				
Question	Yes	No	N/A	Notes
Have you thought about the surrounding neighbors and community culture ?				
Have you clarified your primary purpose for the property (recreation, residence, timber production, or investment)?				
Have you considered the property's proximity to towns, services, hospitals, and markets?				
Does the community actively prioritize risk reduction (e.g., participation in Firewise or similar fire safety programs)?				
Have you planned how ongoing management will be handled (DIY, hiring a forester, or other community programs)?				