

Continental United States

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The continental United States refers (except sometimes in U.S. federal law and regulations) to the largest part of the U.S. that is delimited by a continuous border. Specifically, this includes 48 states and the federal capital of the U.S., the District of Columbia; it excludes Alaska and Hawaii.

The **continental United States** is also used to refer to those 48 states plus Alaska.

The continental United States is also sometimes referred to as:

- the **conterminous states**, the **coterminous states**, or the **contiguous states** (abbreviated in various specialized contexts as "**CONUS**"),
- the "lower 48",
- in Hawaii, as "**the mainland**" or "**the continent**", and
- in Alaska, as "**outside**".

Each of these terms has some shortcoming of illogic, ambiguity, or excessive or deficient formality. In particular:

- no collection of states includes the District of Columbia;
- both "conterminous" and "coterminous" are rare, somewhat technical words;
- "contiguous" has a more usual sense, narrower than "conterminous", that applies to areas that touch each other but not to areas that can be reached from each other only via an intervening chain of touching areas;
- while Hawaii is not part of any continent, Alaska is clearly, like the contiguous states, part of North America, and excluding it from the "continental U.S." must be described as a misnomer.

Use in federal law

As the language of the Alaska Omnibus Act of 1959 makes apparent, the term was in use in U.S. federal law prior to then. It presumably dates from after the acquisition of Alaska in 1867, and probably from after the Spanish-American War brought the U.S. its first off-continent possessions in 1897. Whatever else these terms may be, "continental United States" is a term defined in various federal laws, in different ways in different time periods; it is also defined in different ways at the same time, depending on whether the context was the IRS or not, during at least a period that began with Alaska statehood.

Total area and population

(Note: area includes surface water.)

Rank	State	km ²	miles ²	Population (2000 census)
2	Texas	695,621	268,581	20,851,820
3	California	423,970	163,696	33,871,648
4	Montana	380,838	147,042	902,194
5	New Mexico	314,915	121,589	1,819,046
6	Arizona	295,254	113,998	5,130,632
7	Nevada	286,351	110,561	1,998,257
8	Colorado	269,601	104,094	4,301,261

9	Oregon	254,805	98,381	3,421,399
10	Wyoming	253,336	97,814	493,782
11	Michigan	250,494	96,716	9,938,444
12	Minnesota	225,171	86,939	4,919,479
13	Utah	219,887	84,899	2,233,169
14	Idaho	216,446	83,570	1,293,953
15	Kansas	213,096	82,277	2,688,418
16	Nebraska	200,345	77,354	1,711,263
17	South Dakota	199,731	77,116	754,844
18	Washington	184,665	71,300	5,894,121
19	North Dakota	183,112	70,700	642,200
20	Oklahoma	181,035	69,898	3,450,654
21	Missouri	180,533	69,704	5,595,211
22	Florida	170,304	65,755	15,982,378
23	Wisconsin	169,639	65,498	5,453,896
24	Georgia	153,909	59,425	8,186,453
25	Illinois	149,998	57,914	12,419,293
26	Iowa	145,743	56,272	2,926,324
27	New York	141,299	54,556	18,976,457
28	North Carolina	139,389	53,819	8,049,313
29	Arkansas	137,732	53,179	2,673,400
30	Alabama	135,765	52,419	4,447,100
31	Louisiana	134,264	51,840	4,468,976
32	Mississippi	125,434	48,430	2,844,658
33	Pennsylvania	119,283	46,055	12,281,054
34	Ohio	116,096	44,825	11,353,140
35	Virginia	110,785	42,774	7,078,515
36	Tennessee	109,151	42,143	5,689,283
37	Kentucky	104,659	40,409	4,041,769
38	Indiana	94,321	36,418	6,080,485
39	Maine	91,646	35,385	1,274,923
40	South Carolina	82,932	32,020	4,012,012
41	West Virginia	62,755	24,230	1,808,344
42	Maryland	32,133	12,407	5,296,486
44	Massachusetts	27,336	10,555	6,349,097
45	Vermont	24,901	9,614	608,827
46	New Hampshire	24,216	9,350	1,235,786
47	New Jersey	22,588	8,721	8,414,350
48	Connecticut	14,357	5,543	3,405,565
49	Delaware	6,447	2,489	783,600
50	Rhode Island	4,002	1,545	1,048,319
	Total	8,080,290	3,119,819	279,101,598

See also

- Mainland

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