

## *Ecological Site Description*

### **Claypan Basin Flatwoods**

**F116CY008MO**

- (*Quercus velutina* - *Quercus stellata*/*Rhus aromatic*/*Schizachyrium scoparium* - *Carex*)
- (black oak – post oak/aromatic sumac/little bluestem – sedge)

An Ecological Site Description (ESD) is a reference document of ecological knowledge regarding a particular land area (ecological site). An ESD describes ecological potential and ecosystem dynamics of land areas and their potential management. Ecological sites are linked to soil survey map unit components, which allows for mapping of ecological sites. (**NOTE:** *This is a “provisional” ESD, and is subject to change. It contains basic ecological information sufficient for conservation planning and land management in Missouri. After additional information is developed and reviewed, a “Correlated” ESD will be published and will be available via the Web Soil Survey <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov> .)*)

**Major Land Resource Area:** 116C – St. Francois Knobs and Basins

### **Introduction**

The St Francois Knobs and Basins (area outlined in red on the map) is the structural center of the Ozark Dome. Elevation ranges from about 450 feet along the rivers in the southern part of the area, to 1,772 feet on the summit of Taum Sauk Mountain, the highest point in Missouri. Prominent features of this MLRA are the Precambrian igneous knobs and hills that rise conspicuously to various elevations, interspersed with smooth-floored basins and valleys overlying dolomite and sandstone. Ecological Sites defined for this MLRA are associated with the igneous parent materials, either in knob or basin positions. Areas influenced primarily by dolomite and/or sandstone are included in ecological sites within MLRA 116A (Ozark Highlands).

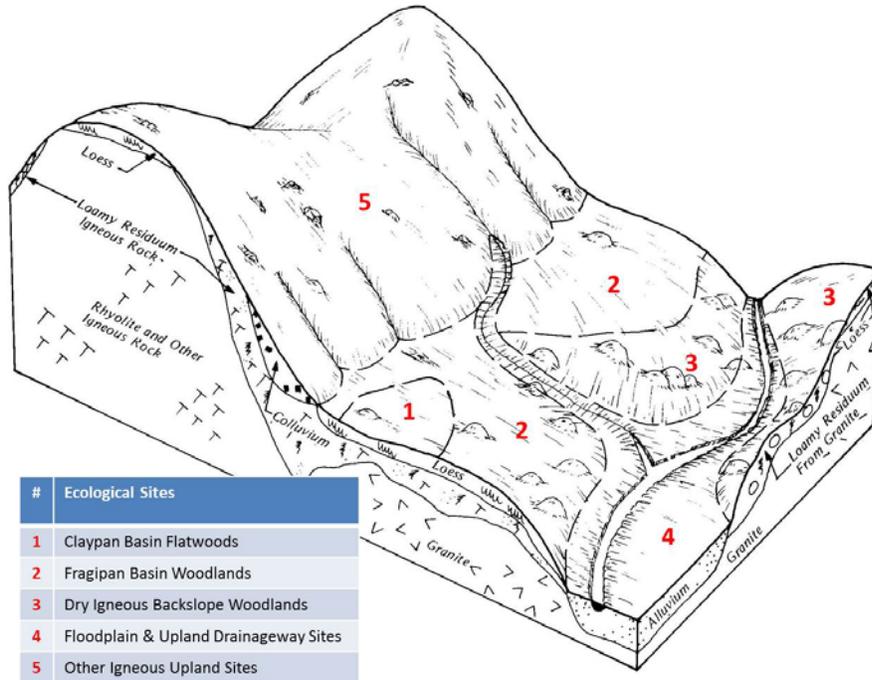


Claypan Basin Flatwoods (green areas on the map) occur mainly in the north part of the area, and in outlying igneous basins in adjacent counties. Soils have silty clay subsoil that perches water in the spring, and affects rooting depth. These sites are typically adjacent to Fragipan Basin Woodland ecological sites, which occur on slightly higher, more convex positions and are not as wet.

### **Physiographic Features**

This site is in both basin and mountain landscapes, on broad upland summit interfluves and divides, with slopes of 0 to 5 percent. The site generates runoff to adjacent, downslope ecological sites. This site does not flood.

The following figure (adapted from Brown & Gregg, 1991) shows the typical landscape position of this ecological site and landscape relationships among the major ecological sites in the igneous basins. It is within the area labeled “1”.



**Soil Features**

These soils have an abrupt textural change to silty clay or clay at about 18 inches, which impedes but does not exclude rooting. The soils were formed under woodland vegetation, and have thin, light-colored surface horizons. They have silt loam surface horizons, and silty clay to clay subsoils. Parent material is loess over pedisegment weathered from acidic volcanic rock such as granite. A seasonal high water table is perched above the

abrupt textural change during the spring months in most years. Soil series associated with this site include Ogborn and Loughboro.

**Ecological Dynamics**

*Information contained in this section was developed using historical data, professional experience, field reviews, and scientific studies. The information presented is representative of very complex vegetation communities. Key indicator plants, animals and ecological processes are described to help inform land management decisions. Plant communities will differ across the MLRA because of the naturally occurring variability in weather, soils, and aspect. The Reference Plant Community is not necessarily the management goal. The species lists are representative and are not botanical descriptions of all species occurring, or potentially occurring, on this site. They are not intended to cover every situation or the full range of conditions, species, and responses for the site.*

Claypan Basin Flatwoods are dominated by short (40 to 60 feet) open grown black oak, with scattered white, post and northern red oaks. Canopy closure is 50 to 80 percent. Historically this was the one of the most open of the Ozark woodland communities. The understory canopy is also open with a dense ground flora of native grasses and forbs.

The claypan soil subsoil perches water in the spring and affects rooting depth of this ecological site limiting the growth of trees and supporting an abundance of native grasses and forbs in the understory. Fire played an important role in the maintenance of these systems as well. It is likely that these ecological sites, along with adjacent glades and woodlands burned at least once every 5 to 10 years. These periodic fires would have kept woodlands open, removed the litter, and stimulated the growth and flowering of the grasses and forbs.

These sites were also subjected to occasional disturbances from wind and ice, as well as grazing by native large herbivores. Wind and ice would have periodically opened the canopy up by knocking

over trees or breaking substantial branches off canopy trees. Grazing by native large herbivores, such as bison, elk and deer, would have effectively kept understory conditions more open, creating conditions more favorable to oak reproduction and sun-loving ground flora species.

In the long term absence of fire, woody species have encroached into these woodlands. Once established, these woodies can quickly fill the woodland system. Most occurrences today are dense, and shady with a greatly diminished ground flora. Removal of the younger understory and the application of prescribed fire have proven to be effective management tools. Domestic grazing has also impacted these communities, further diminishing the diversity of native plants and introducing species that are tolerant of grazing, such as buckbrush, gooseberry, and Virginia creeper. It also promotes the invasion of eastern red cedar.

Today, domestic grazing is also impacting these communities, further diminishing the diversity of native plants and introducing species that are tolerant of grazing, such as buckbrush, gooseberry, and Virginia creeper along with eastern redcedar. These grazed sites also have a more open understory in addition to soil compaction, soil erosion and lower productivity problems.

Timber harvesting is very limited on these sites because of the poor tree quality and size. They are excellent wildlife sites.

### Reference State Plant Community

#### Canopy Trees

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
POST OAK	<i>Quercus stellata</i>	20-40	50
BLACK OAK	<i>Quercus velutina</i>	20-40	60
NORTHERN RED OAK	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	5-20	50
BLACK HICKORY	<i>Carya texana</i>	10-20	40
BLACKJACK OAK	<i>Quercus marilandica</i>	10-20	30
SHORTLEAF PINE	<i>Pinus echinata</i>	0-10	50
WHITE OAK	<i>Quercus alba</i>	0-10	40

#### Understory Trees

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
SASSAFRAS	<i>Sassafras albidum</i>	5-10	30
DOWNY SERVICEBERRY	<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>	5-10	20

#### Shrubs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
WINGED ELM	<i>Ulmus elata</i>	5-20	6
AROMATIC SUMAC	<i>Rhus aromatica</i>	10-30	5
LOW BUSH BLUEBERRY	<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>	5-20	3

#### Forbs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
NAKED FLOWER TICKTREFOL	<i>Desmodium nudiflorum</i>	5-20
VIOLET BUSH CLOVER	<i>Lespedeza violacae</i>	5-20
BIRD'S FOOT VIOLET	<i>Viola pedata</i>	5-20
ELM-LEAF SOLIDAGO	<i>Solidago ulmifolia</i>	5-20

LICORICE BEDSTRAW	<i>Galium circaeazans</i>	5-20
DOWNY RAGGED GOLDENROD	<i>Solidago petiolares</i>	5-20
PERPLEXED TICKTREFOL	<i>Desmodium perplexum</i>	5-20
MANYRAY ASTER	<i>Symphiotrichum anomalum</i>	5-20
TRAILING BUSH CLOVER	<i>Lespedeza procumbens</i>	5-20
ST. ANDREW'S CROSS	<i>Hypericum hypericoides</i>	5-20
HAIRY SUNFLOWER	<i>Helianthus hirsutus</i>	5-20
SKY BLUE ASTER	<i>Symphiotrichum oolentangiense</i>	5-20

Grasses and sedges

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
CYPRESS PANIC GRASS	<i>Panicum dichotomum</i>	5-10
LITTLE BLUESTEM	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	20-30
ROCK MULY	<i>Muhlenbergii sobolifera</i>	5-10
BROOMSEdge	<i>Andropogon virginicus</i>	5-10
WHITETINGE SEDGE	<i>Carex albicans</i>	5-10
POVERTY OAT GRASS	<i>Danthonia spicata</i>	5-10
RIBBED SEDGE	<i>Carex virescens</i>	5-10
ROSEY SEDGE	<i>Carex rosea</i>	5-10

Site Interpretations

Wildlife

- Oaks on this site provide abundant hard mast; scattered shrubs provide soft mast; native legumes provide high-quality wildlife food.
- Sedges and native cool-season grasses provide green browse; native warm-season grasses provide cover and nesting habitat; and a diversity of forbs provides a diversity and abundance of insects.
- Post-burn areas can provide temporary bare-ground and herbaceous cover habitat is important for turkey poults and quail chicks.
- Bird species associated with early-successional stages of this ecological site include Northern Bobwhite, Painted Bunting, Prairie Warbler, Field Sparrow, Blue-winged Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Brown Thrasher, and Bachman’s Sparrow;
- Birds associated with mid- to late successional woodlands include Indigo Bunting, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Bobwhite, Summer Tanager, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Whip-poor-will, Chuck-will’s widow, and Red-eyed Vireo.
- Reptiles and amphibians associated with these woodlands include ornate box turtle, northern fence lizard, five-lined skink, coal skink, broad-headed skink, six-lined racerunner, western slender glass lizard, prairie ring-necked snake, flat-headed snake, rough earth snake, red milk snake, western pygmy rattlesnake, and timber rattlesnake.

Forestry

- Management: Site index values for oaks and shortleaf pine range from 45 to 60. Timber management opportunities are fair. These sites have an abrupt textural change which impedes rooting. Reduced rooting depth restricts tree growth and increases windthrow hazards. These groups respond well to even-aged management. Create group openings of at least 2 acres. Large clearcuts should be minimized if possible to reduce impacts on wildlife and aesthetics. Uneven-aged management using single tree selection or small group selection cuttings of ½ to 1 acre are other options that can be used if clear cutting is not

desired or warranted. These sites respond well to prescribed fire as a management tool. Favor black oak, post oak, and white oak.

- **Limitations:** Restricted rooting depth; seasonal wetness. Unsurfaced roads and traffic areas tend to be slippery and form ruts easily. Graveling roads facilitates year-round use. Equipment use when wet may compact soil and damage tree roots. Planting is difficult during wet spring periods. Seedling mortality may be high due to excess seasonal wetness, shallow effective rooting depths or sodium. Ridging the soil and planting on the ridges may increase survival. The use of equipment can become restricted in spring and other excessively wet periods.

## Glossary

*Backslope* – a hillslope profile position that forms the steepest and generally linear, middle portion of the slope.

*Backswamp* – marshy or swampy, depressed areas of flood plains between natural levees and valley sides or terraces

*Calcareous* – the presence of calcium carbonate in the soil parent material within the rooting zone; relatively alkaline

*Claypan* – a dense, compact, slowly permeable layer in the subsoil having much higher clay content than the overlying material

*Chert* – hard, extremely dense or compact crystalline sedimentary rock, consisting dominantly of interlocking crystals of quartz

*Cliff* – a significant vertical, or near vertical, rock exposure

*Dolomite* – a type of sedimentary rock that is a carbonate mineral composed of calcium magnesium carbonate

*Drainageway* – the upper most reach of a stream channel system characterized by little meandering

*Dry* – a site where soil moisture is limiting during the growing season; low available water capacity

*Dune* – a low mound, ridge, bank or hill of loose, wind-blown sand

*Exposed* – steep, south and west-facing slopes, which are warmer and drier than other slope aspects

*Flatwoods* – a type of woodland that occurs on soils with a root restricting subsoil layer within 20 to 30 inches, resulting in very slow runoff and ponding that remains saturated for most of the winter and early spring months but dries out and becomes very dry in the summer months; plants that grow there must be adapted to both conditions

*Floodplain* – the nearly level plain that borders a stream and is subject to inundation under flood-stage conditions

*Footslope* – a hillslope position at the base of a slope where hillslope sediment (colluvium) accumulates

*Forest* – a vegetative community dominated by trees forming a closed canopy and interspersed with shade-tolerant understory species

*Fragipan* – a dense, brittle subsoil horizon that is extremely hard and compact when dry

*Glade* – open, rocky, barren vegetative community dominated by drought-adapted forbs and grasses, typically with scattered, stunted woody plants

*Igneous* – bedrock created by cooling and crystallization of magma forming igneous rock. Granite and rhyolite are typical igneous bedrocks in Missouri

*Limestone* – a type of sedimentary rock composed largely of calcium carbonate

*Loess* – material transported and deposited by wind and consisting predominantly of silt-size particles

*Loamy* – soil material containing a relatively equal mixture of sand and silt and a somewhat smaller proportion of clay

*Marsh* – a type of wetland that is dominated by herbaceous rather than woody plant species

*Moist* – a site that is moderately well to well drained and has high available water capacity, resulting in a well-balanced supply of moisture (neither too dry nor too wet).

*Mudstone* – blocky or massive, fine-grained sedimentary rock in which the proportions of clay and silt are approximately equal

*Natric* – a soil horizon that displays a blocky, columnar, or prismatic structure and has a subhorizon with an exchangeable-sodium saturation of over 15%

*Outwash* – stratified sediments of sand and gravel removed or “washed out” from a glacier by melt-water streams

*Prairie* – a vegetative community dominated by perennial grasses and forbs with scattered shrubs and very few trees

*Protected* – steep, north- and east-facing slopes, which are cooler and moister than other slope aspects

*Residuum* - unconsolidated, weathered, or partly weathered mineral material that accumulates by disintegration of bedrock in place

*Riser* – a component of terraces and flood-plain steps consisting of the steep side slope; the escarpment

*Riverfront* – a vegetative community in the floodplain immediately adjacent and generally parallel to a river or stream channel

*River hills* – a geographic area characterized by thick, dissected loess deposits, formed immediately adjacent to the edges of the Missouri and Mississippi River floodplains

*Sandy* – a coarse-sized soil containing a large mixture of sand and gravels and a somewhat smaller proportion of silts and clays with excessive drainage

*Sandstone* – a sedimentary rock containing dominantly sand-size particles

*Savanna* – grasslands interspersed with open-grown scattered trees, groupings of trees, and shrubs

*Shale* – a sedimentary rock formed from clay, silty clay, or silty clay loam deposits and having the tendency to split into thin layers

*Shallow* – a site with bedrock within 20 inches of the surface

*Shoulder* – the slope profile position that forms the convex surface near the top of a hill slope; it comprises the transition zone from summit to backslope

*Sinkhole* – a closed, circular or elliptical depression, commonly funnel-shaped, characterized by subsurface drainage and formed either by dissolution of the surface of underlying bedrock or by collapse of underlying caves within bedrock

*Summit* – the top or highest area of a hillslope

*Swale* – shallow, closed depressions irregularly spaced across a floodplain or terrace with an irregularly undulating surface.

*Swamp* – an area of low, saturated ground, intermittently or permanently covered with water, and predominantly vegetated by shrubs and trees.

*Talus* – rock fragments of any size or shape (usually coarse and angular) derived from and lying at the base of a cliff or very steep rock slope.

*Terrace* – a step-like surface, bordering a valley floor that represents the former position of a flood plain

*Till* – dominantly unsorted and unstratified soil material deposited directly by a glacier

*Upland* – a general term for the higher ground of a region, in contrast with a low-lying, adjacent land such as a valley or floodplain

*Wet* – a somewhat poorly, poorly or very poorly drained site that has an oversupply of moisture during the growing season

*Woodland* – a highly variable vegetative community with a canopy of trees ranging from 30 to 100 percent closure with a sparse midstory and a dense ground flora of grasses, sedges and forbs

## **References**

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