Ecological Site Description

Loess Upland Woodland F109XY003MO

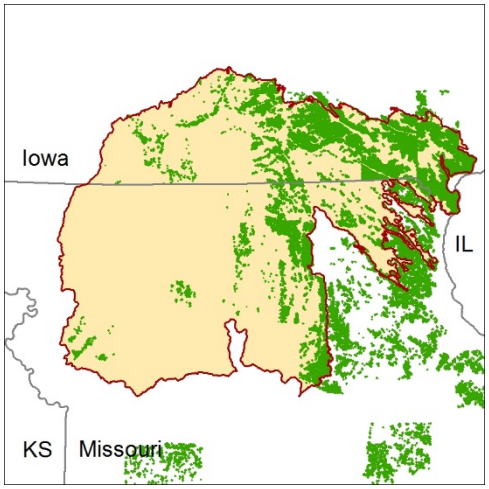
- *(Quercus alba - Quercus velutina/Rhus aromatica/Elymus virginicus - Carex pensylvanica)*
- (white oak – black oak/aromatic sumac/ Virginia wild rye – Pennsylvania sedge)

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: 109 – Iowa and Missouri Heavy Till Plain

Introduction

The Iowa and Missouri Heavy Till Plain (area outlined in red on the map) is an area of rolling hills interspersed with interfluve divides and alluvial valleys. Elevation ranges from about 660 feet along the lower reaches of rivers, to about 980 feet on stable interfluve summits in southern Iowa. Relief is about 80 to 160 feet between major streams and adjacent interfluve summits. Most of the till plain drains south to the Missouri River via the Grand and Chariton River systems, but the northeastern portion drains southeast to the Mississippi River. Loess caps the pre-Illinoisan aged till on interfluves, whereas the till is exposed on side slopes. Mississippian aged limestone and Pennsylvanian aged sandstone and shale crop out on lower slopes in some areas.



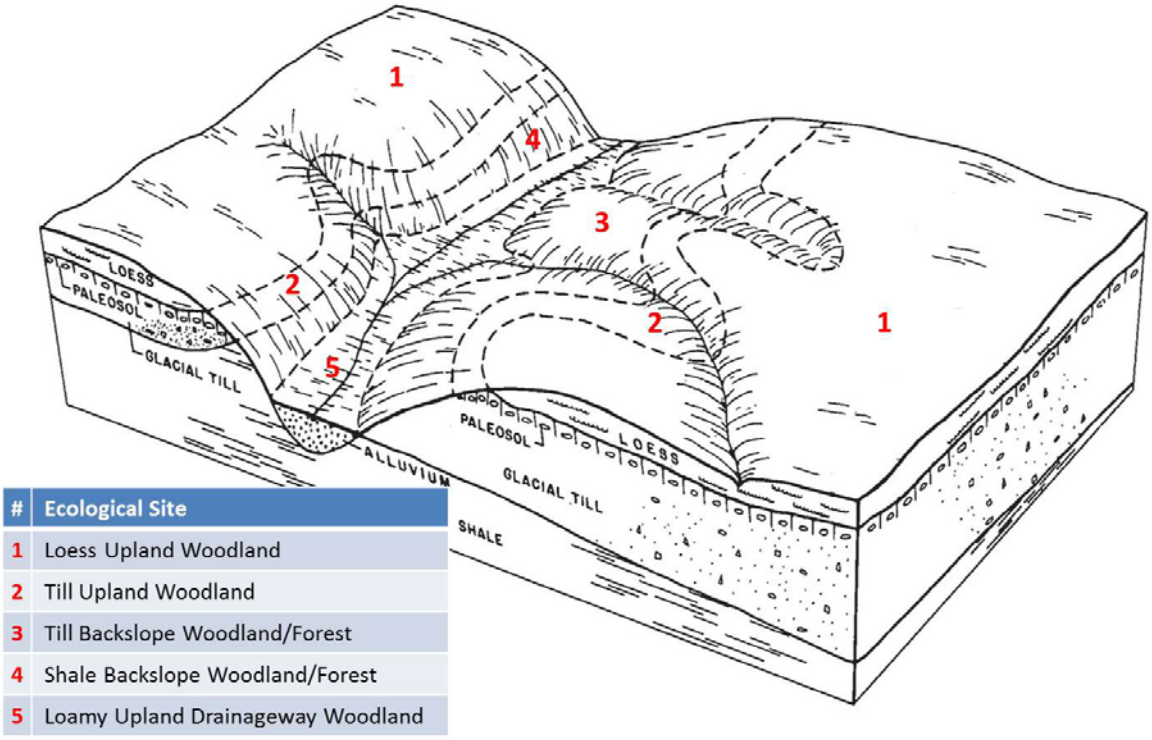
Loess Upland Woodlands are within the green areas on the map. Sites are more prevalent in the eastern part of the MLRA and adjacent areas, where woodlands and forests were historically present on hillslopes. This is the principal ecological site of woodland hillslope summits in the MLRA. Till woodland or forest ecological sites are typically downslope. Soils are very deep, with no rooting restrictions. The reference plant community is woodland with an overstory dominated by white oak and black oak, and a ground flora of native grasses and forbs.

Physiographic Features

This site is on upland summit crests and shoulders, with slopes of 3 to 9 percent. The site generates runoff to adjacent, downslope ecological sites. This site does not flood.

The following figure (adapted from Oelmann, 1984) shows the typical landscape position of this ecological site, and landscape relationships among the major ecological sites in the uplands. The site is within the area labeled "5", and is typically downslope from Till Upland Woodland or, less

commonly, Loess Upland Prairie ecological sites. In most areas, Upland Drainageway or Floodplain ecological sites are directly downslope.



#	Ecological Site
1	Loess Upland Woodland
2	Till Upland Woodland
3	Till Backslope Woodland/Forest
4	Shale Backslope Woodland/Forest
5	Loamy Upland Drainageway Woodland

Soil Features

These soils have no major rooting restriction. The soils were formed under woodland vegetation, and have thin, light-colored surface horizons. Parent material is loess. Some soils have residuum in the lower part. The soils have silt loam surface horizons. Subsoils are silty clay loam to silty clay. These soils are slightly affected by seasonal wetness. Soil series associated with this site include Clinton, Gorin and Weller.

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.

This ecological site is a well-developed woodland dominated by an overstory of white oak, along with occasional black oak. The canopy is moderately tall (65 to 80 feet) with a 55 to 75 percent canopy closure. This community is more structurally diverse than the adjacent protected slopes. Increased light from a more open canopy causes a diversity of woodland ground flora species to

flourish. Woodlands are distinguished from forest, by their relatively open understory, and the presence of sun-loving ground flora species. Characteristic plants in the ground flora can be used to gauge the restoration potential of a stand along with remnant open-grown old-age trees, and tree height growth.

Because of their proximity to prairies, fire played a significant role in the maintenance of these ecological sites which likely burned at least once every 3 to 10 years. These periodic fires kept woodlands open, removed the litter, and stimulated the growth and flowering of the grasses and forbs. During fire free intervals, woody understory species increased and the herbaceous understory diminished. The return of fire would open the woodlands up again and stimulate the abundant ground flora.

Loess Upland Woodlands 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 herbivores would have effectively kept understory conditions more open, creating conditions more favorable to oak reproduction and woodland ground flora species.

Today, many of these ecological sites have been cleared and converted to pasture or have undergone repeated timber harvest and domestic grazing. Most existing forested ecological sites have a younger (50 to 80 years) canopy layer whose species composition and quality has been altered by timber harvesting practices. In the long term absence of fire, woody species, especially hickory and sugar maple, encroach into these woodlands. Once established, these woody plants can quickly fill the existing understory increasing shade levels with a greatly diminished ground flora. Removal of the younger understory and the application of prescribed fire have proven to be effective restoration means.

Uncontrolled 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. Grazed sites also have a more open understory. In addition, soil compaction and soil erosion from grazing can be a problem and lower site productivity.

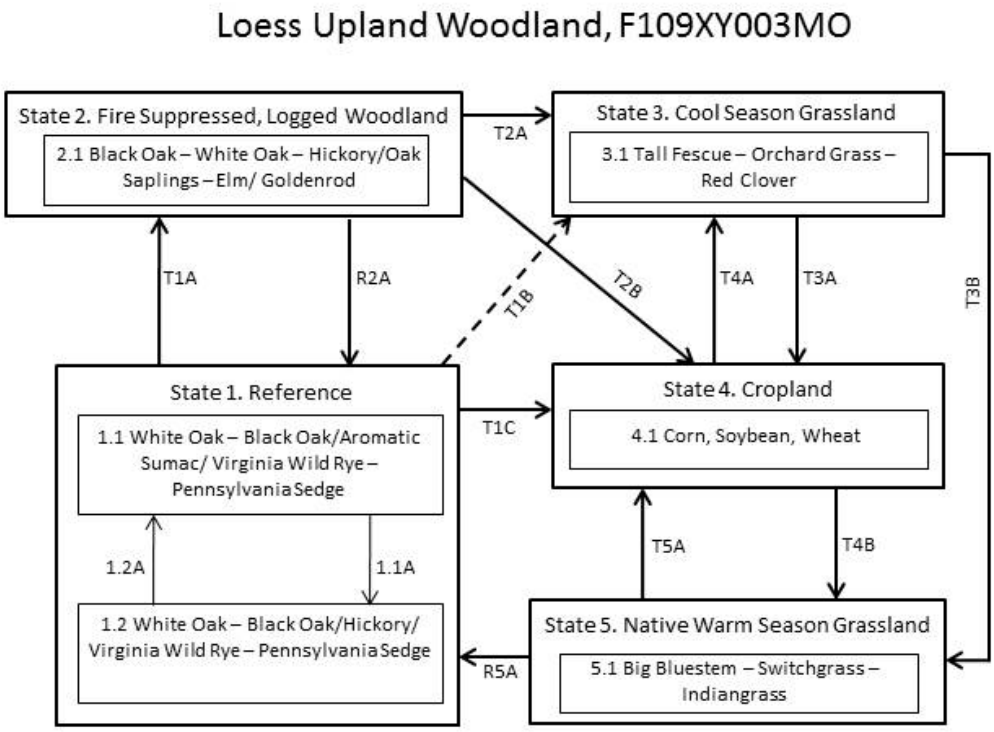
These ecological sites are moderately productive. Oak regeneration is typically problematic. Eastern hop hornbeam and hickories are often dominant competitors in the understory. Maintenance of the oak component will require disturbances that will encourage more sun adapted species and reduce shading effects. Single tree selection timber harvests are common in this region and often results in removal of the most productive trees (high grading) in the stand leading to poorer quality timber and a shift in species composition away from more valuable oak species. Better planned single tree selection or the creation of group openings can help regenerate and maintain more desirable oak species and increase vigor on the residual trees.

Clearcutting also occurs and results in dense, even-aged stands dominated by oak. This may be most beneficial for existing stands whose composition has been highly altered by past management practices. However, without some thinning of the dense stands and the application of prescribed fire, the ground flora diversity can be shaded out and diversity of the stand may suffer.

A State and Transition Diagram is depicted in Figure 1. Detailed descriptions of each state,

transition, plant community, and pathway follow the model. This model is based on available experimental research, field observations, professional consensus, and interpretations. It is likely to change as knowledge increases.

Figure 1: State and transition diagram



Code	Event/Activity/Process
T1A	Fire suppression > 20 years; woody invasion; repeated timber harvests
T1B	Tillage; vegetative seeding; grassland management
T1C, T3A, T5A	Tillage; conservation cropping system
T2A	Woody removal; tillage; vegetative seeding; grassland management
T2B	Woody removal; tillage; conservation cropping system
T4A	Vegetative seeding ; grassland management
T3B, T4B	Vegetative seeding; prescribed fire; grassland management
1.1A	Fire-free interval 10+ years
1.2A	Fire interval 1-3 years
R2A	Woody removal; prescribed fire 1-3 years
R5A	Vegetative seeding; prescribed fire 1-3 years

Ecological States

State 1: Reference

The historical reference state for this ecological site was old growth oak woodland. The woodland was dominated by white oak and black oak. Maximum tree age was likely 150 to 300 years. Periodic disturbances from fire, wind or ice as well as grazing by native large herbivores maintained

the woodland structure and diverse ground flora species. Long disturbance-free periods allowed an increase in both the density of trees and the abundance of shade tolerant species. Two community phases are recognized in the Reference State, with shifts between phases based on disturbance frequency. Reference states are very rare today. Fire suppression has resulted in increased canopy density, which has affected the abundance and diversity of ground flora. Most Reference States are currently altered because of timber harvesting, domestic grazing or clearing and conversion to grassland or cropland.

State 2: Fire Suppressed, Logged Woodland
Composition is likely altered from the Reference State depending on tree selection during harvest. This state will slowly increase in more shade tolerant species and white oak will become less dominant and is also dense because of fire suppression. Without periodic canopy disturbance, stem density and fire intolerant species, like hickory, will increase in abundance. Uncontrolled grazing if present will also have an impact on community composition and understory quality further diminishing the diversity of native plants and introducing species that are tolerant of grazing, such as buckbrush, gooseberry, and Virginia creeper.

State 3: Cool Season Grassland
Conversion of other states to non-native cool season species such as tall fescue, orchard grass, and red clover has been common. Occasionally, these pastures will have scattered oaks. Long term uncontrolled grazing can cause significant soil erosion and compaction. A return to the Reference State may be impossible, requiring a very long term series of management options.

State 4: Cropland
This is a State that exists currently with intensive cropping of corn, soybeans, and wheat occurring especially when commodity prices are high. Some conversion to cool season grassland occurs for a limited period of time before transitioning back to cropland. Limited acres are sometimes converted to native warm season grassland.

State 5: Native Warm Season Grassland
Conversion from the Cool Season Grassland (State 3) or the Cropland (State 4) to this State is increasing due to renewed interest in warm season grasses as a supplement to cool season grazing systems or as a native restoration activity. Restoration to the Reference state will require substantial restoration time and management inputs.

Reference State Plant Community
Canopy Trees

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
WHITE OAK	*Quercus alba*	40-70	70
BLACK OAK	*Quercus velutina*	20-40	80
MOCKERNUT HICKORY	*Carya alba*	0-10	70
SHAGBARK HICKORY	*Carya ovata*	0-10	60

Shrubs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
HAZELNUT	*Corylus Americana*	10-20	4
FRAGRANT SUMAC	*Rhus aromatica*	10-30	3
NEW JERSEY TEA	*Ceanothus americanus*	5-20	3

Forbs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
ELM-LEAFED GOLDENROD	*Solidago ulmifolia*	5-30
HAIRY SUNFLOWER	*Helianthus hirsutus*	10-30
SMOOTH BLUE ASTER	*Aster laevis*	10-30
PURPLE CONEFLOWER	*Echinacea purpurea*	5-20
NAKED FLOWER TICK TREFOIL	*Desmodium nudiflorum*	10-20
SLENDER LESPEDEZA	*Lespedeza virginica*	10-20
CANADIAN BLACKSNAKEROOT	*Sanicula canadensis*	10-20
EASTERN BEEBALM	*Monarda bradburiana*	10-20
WHORLED MILKWEED	*Asclepias quadrifolia*	10-20
CULVER'S ROOT	*Veronicastrum virginicum*	5-10
SMOOTH SPIDERWORT	*Tradescantia ohiensis*	5-10

Grasses and sedges

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
WOODLAND BROME	*Bromus pubescens*	5-20
BIG BLUESTEM	*Andropogon gerardii*	5-20
LITTLE BLUESTEM	*Schizachyrium scoparium*	5-20
PENNSYLVANIA SEDGE	*Carex pensylvanica*	10-30
PARASOL SEDGE	*Carex umbellata*	10-20
ROCK MUHLY	*Muhlenbergia sobolifera*	5-20
VIRGINIA WILD-RYE	*Elymus virginicus*	10-20

Site Interpretations

Wildlife

- Wild turkey, white-tailed deer, and eastern gray squirrel depend on hard and soft mast food sources and are typical upland game species of this type.
- Oaks provide hard mast; scattered shrubs provide soft mast; native legumes provide high-quality wildlife food; sedges and native cool-season grasses provide green browse; patchy 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 – herbaceous cover habitat important for turkey poults and quail chicks.
- Bird species associated with mature communities include Indigo Bunting, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Broad-winged Hawk, Great-Crested Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, and Red-eyed Vireo.
- Reptile and amphibian species associated with the Loess Upland Woodland include tiger salamander, small-mouthed salamander, ornate box turtle, northern fence lizard, five-lined skink, broad-headed skink, flat-headed snake, and rough earth snake.

Forestry

- Management: Estimated site index values range from 55 to 65 for oak. Timber management opportunities are good. 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 group selection cuttings of ½ to 1 acre are other options that can be used if clear cutting is not desired or warranted. Using

prescribed fire as a management tool could have a negative impact on timber quality, may not be fitting, or should be used with caution on a particular site if timber management is the primary objective. Favor white oak and northern red oak on higher productivity sites and post oak, chinkapin oak, black oak and scarlet oak on lower productivity sites.

- Limitations: No major equipment restrictions or limitations exist. Erosion is a hazard when slopes exceed 15 percent. On steep slopes greater than 35 percent, traction problems increase and equipment use is not recommended.

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 formed by cooling and solidification of magma. 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

MDC, 2006. Missouri Forest and Woodland Community Profiles. Missouri Department of Conservation, Jefferson City, Missouri.

Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2002. Woodland Suitability Groups. Missouri FOTG, Section II, Soil Interpretations and Reports. 30 pgs.

Nelson, Paul W. 2010. The Terrestrial Natural Communities of Missouri. Missouri Department of Conservation, Jefferson City, Missouri.

Nigh, Timothy A., and Walter A. Schroeder. 2002. Atlas of Missouri Ecoregions. Missouri Department of Conservation, Jefferson City, Missouri.

Oelmann, Douglas B. 1984. Soil Survey of Monroe County, Iowa. U.S. Dept. of Agric. Soil Conservation Service.