

Land Capability Classification

Land capability classification shows, in a general way, the suitability of soils for most kinds of field crops. Crops that require special management are excluded. The soils are grouped according to their limitations for field crops, the risk of damage if they are used for crops, and the way they respond to management. The criteria used in grouping the soils do not include major and generally expensive landforming that would change slope, depth, or other characteristics of the soils, nor do they include possible but unlikely major reclamation projects. Capability classification is not a substitute for interpretations designed to show suitability and limitations of groups of soils for rangeland, for forestland, or for engineering purposes.

In the capability system, soils are generally grouped at three levels: capability class, subclass, and unit.

Capability classes, the broadest groups, are designated by the numbers 1 through 8. The numbers indicate progressively greater limitations and narrower choices for practical use. The classes are defined as follows:

Class 1 soils have slight limitations that restrict their use.

Class 2 soils have moderate limitations that restrict the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices.

Class 3 soils have severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants or that require special conservation practices, or both.

Class 4 soils have very severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants or that require very careful management, or both.

Class 5 soils are subject to little or no erosion but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat.

Class 6 soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat.

Class 7 soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to grazing, forestland, or wildlife habitat.

Land Capability Classification (cont.)

Class 8 soils and miscellaneous areas have limitations that preclude commercial plant production and that restrict their use to recreational purposes, wildlife habitat, watershed, or esthetic purposes.

Capability subclasses are soil groups within one class. They are designated by adding a small letter, **e**, **w**, **s**, or **c**, to the class numeral, for example, 2e. The letter e shows that the main hazard is the risk of erosion unless close-growing plant cover is maintained; w shows that water in or on the soil interferes with plant growth or cultivation (in some soils the wetness can be partly corrected by artificial drainage); s shows that the soil is limited mainly because it is shallow, droughty, or stony; and c, used in only some parts of the United States, shows that the chief limitation is climate that is very cold or very dry.

In class 1 there are no subclasses because the soils of this class have few limitations. Class 5 contains only the subclasses indicated by w, s, or c because the soils in class 5 are subject to little or no erosion. They have other limitations that restrict their use to pasture, rangeland, forestland, wildlife habitat, or recreation.

Capability units are soil groups within a subclass. The soils in a capability unit are enough alike to be suited to the same crops and pasture plants, to require similar management, and to have similar productivity. Capability units are generally designated by adding an Arabic numeral to the subclass symbol, for example, 2e-4 and 3e-6. These units are not given in all soil survey reports.

The capability classification of map units in each soil survey area is given in the tables: “**Land Capability and Yields per Acre of Crops**”, “**Land Capability and Yields per Acre of Pasture**”, and “**Land Capability Class, Prime Farmland, and Acres**” .