

Ecological Site Description

Shale Backslope Woodland

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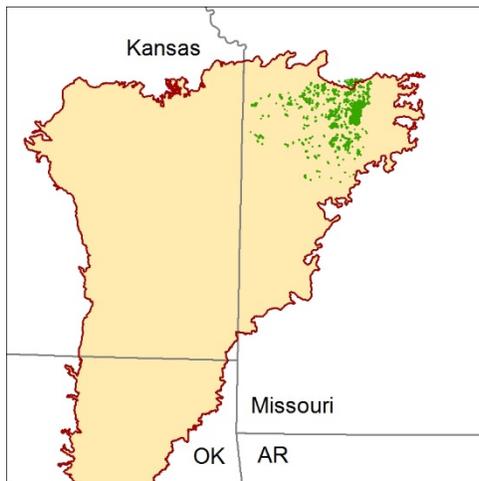
- (*Quercus stellata/Rhus aromatica/ Schizachyrium scoparium*)
- (post oak/fragrant sumac/little bluestem)

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: 112 – Cherokee Prairies

Introduction

The Cherokee Prairies MLRA (area outlined in red on the map) is a nearly level to rolling, weakly dissected plain. Elevation ranges from about 330 feet along the Verdigris River in the south to over 1,300 feet along the northwest border with the Flint Hills. Local relief is three to ten feet, with major valley floodplains typically less than eight feet below the adjacent uplands. The northern and eastern part of the area is primarily in the Osage River watershed, and the southern part is mainly in the Neosho and Verdigris River watersheds. Loess blankets the northern part of the area but thins to the south. Nearly all of the upland plain is underlain with Pennsylvanian aged sandstones and shales, and most upland soils are formed in residuum from these materials.



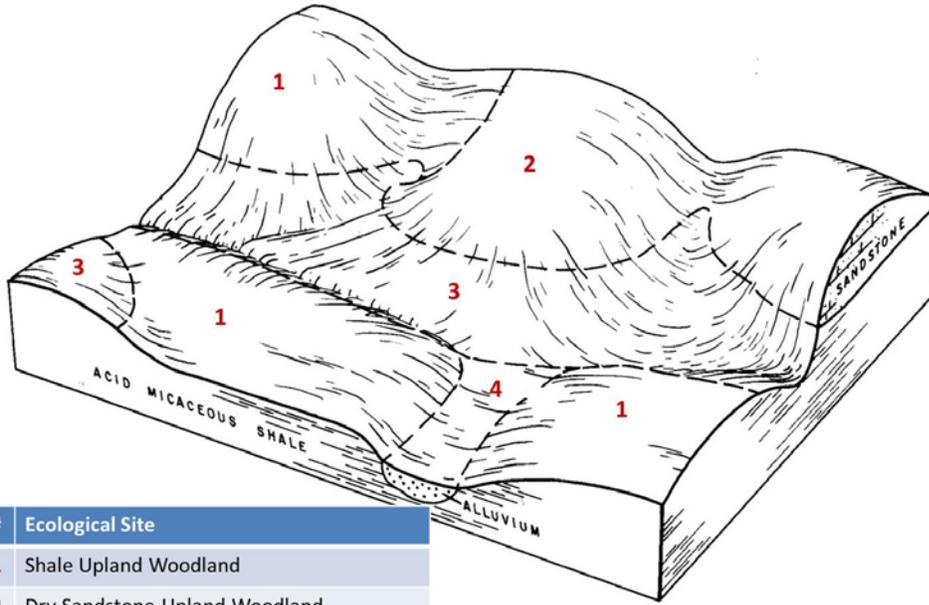
Shale Backslope Woodlands are within the green areas on the map (Missouri portion only; relationships to Kansas and Oklahoma Ecological Sites are currently under review).

These sites are not extensive. They are mainly in Johnson and Henry counties, Missouri. These sites are typically downslope from Shale Upland or Sandstone/Shale Upland ecological sites. Soils are shallow to soft shale.

Physiographic Features

This site is on upland shoulders and backslopes, with slopes of 5 to 35 percent. The site receives runoff from upslope summit and shoulder sites, and generates runoff to adjacent, downslope ecological sites. This site does not flood.

The following figure (adapted from Simmons, 1980) shows the typical landscape position of this ecological site, and landscape relationships with other ecological sites. It is within the area labeled “3” on the figure. This site is often downslope from Shale Upland Woodland sites as shown here.



#	Ecological Site
1	Shale Upland Woodland
2	Dry Sandstone Upland Woodland
3	Shallow Shale Backslope Glade/Woodland
4	Loamy Floodplain Woodland

Soil Features

These soils are underlain with soft shale bedrock at less than 20 inches. The soils were formed under woodland vegetation, and have thin, light-colored surface horizons. Parent material is shale residuum. These soils are loamy, with high amounts of shale channers. They are not affected by seasonal wetness. Soil series associated with this site include Norris.

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.

The Shale Backslope Woodlands harbor a wide diversity of plants and animals and occur with loess or till woodland ecological sites. The reference plant community is characterized as a woodland unit with an understory dominated by little and big bluestem, Indian grass, sideoats grama, and a wide variety of prairie wildflowers. Trees and shrubs such as bur oak, swamp white oak, post oak, American hazelnut, prairie willow and wild plum also occurred throughout the site.

While not as typically high, dry and fire prone as Claypan and Loess Prairies, this ecological site burned every 2 to 5 years. Fire removed dead plant litter and provided room for a lush growth of prairie vegetation. Fire also kept woody species at bay. Grazing by native large herbivores, such as bison, elk, and deer, also impacted these sites. Their activities altered the composition, fuel loads and structure of the vegetation, creating a diversity of structure and composition. The partially wooded draws would have burned less intensely and less frequently. During fire free intervals woody species would have increased in abundance and spread out onto the prairie.

These sites are moderately productive. Today, Shale Backslope Woodlands are nearly extirpated from the region as the former prairies, savannas, and woodlands have been converted to intensive

agriculture and grasslands. A few known remnants exist but are degraded by fire suppression and grazing by domestic livestock. While re-establishing woodlands on converted agriculture sites is beneficial to wildlife, restoration to the reference state from agricultural land is a long term proposition with uncertain outcomes.

Reference State Plant Community

Canopy Trees

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
CHINKAPIN OAK	<i>Quercus muehlenbergii</i>	5-20	40
POST OAK	<i>Quercus stellata</i>	5-10	40
BLACKJACK OAK	<i>Quercus marilandica</i>	5-10	30
SWAMP WHITE OAK	<i>Quercus bicolor</i>	5-20	60
BUR OAK	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	5-20	60

Shrubs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
CAROLINA ROSE	<i>Rosa carolina</i>	5-10	2
NEW JERSEY TEA	<i>Ceanothus americanus</i>	5-10	4
LEAD PLANT	<i>Amorpha canescens</i>	5-10	3
PRAIRIE WILLOW	<i>Salix humilis</i>	5-10	3
WILD PLUM	<i>Prunus americana</i>	5-10	8
AMERICAN HAZELNUT	<i>Corylus americana</i>	5-10	6

Forbs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
WILD QUININE	<i>Parthenium integrifolium</i>	5-20
BUTTERFLY WEED	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	5-20
BLAZING STAR	<i>Liatris pycnostachya</i>	5-20
GOLDENROD	<i>Solidago missouriensis</i>	5-20
ASHY SUNFLOWER	<i>Helianthus mollis</i>	5-20
RATTLESNAKE MASTER	<i>Eryngium yuccifolium</i>	5-20
CREAM WHITE INDIGO	<i>Baptisia bracteata</i>	5-20
WHITE WILD INDIGO	<i>Baptisia alba</i>	5-10
PRAIRIE MILKWEED	<i>Asclepias sullivantii</i>	5-20
FIELD MILKWORT	<i>Polygala sanguinea</i>	5-10
ROSINWEED	<i>Silphium integrifolium</i>	5-20
ILLINOIS BUNDLE FLOWER	<i>Desmanthus illinoensis</i>	5-10

Grasses and sedges

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
LITTLE BLUESTEM	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	30-50
MEAD'S SEDGE	<i>Carex meadii</i>	5-10
BUSH SEDGE	<i>Carex bushii</i>	5-10
SPIKE RUSH	<i>Eleocharis tenuis</i>	5-10
SIDEOATS GRAMA	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	10-20
BIG BLUESTEM	<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	30-50
INDIAN GRASS	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	10-20
SWITCHGRASS	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	5-10
EASTERN GAMAGRASS	<i>Tripsacum dactyloides</i>	5-10

Supporting Information

Wildlife*

- Wildlife habitat: oaks provide hard mast; numerous native legumes provide high-quality wildlife food; native warm-season grasses provide extensive 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 poult and quail chicks.
- Game species that utilize this ecological site include:
Northern Bobwhite will utilize this ecological site for food (seeds, insects), cover needs (escape, nesting and roosting cover) and brood-rearing habitat.

Cottontail rabbits will utilize this ecological site for food (seeds, soft mast) and cover needs.

Turkey will utilize this ecological site for food (seeds, green browse, soft mast, insects) and nesting and brood-rearing cover. Turkey poult feed heavily on insects provided by this site type.

White-tailed Deer will utilize this ecological site for browse (plant leaves in the growing season, seeds and soft mast in the fall/winter). This site type also can provide escape cover.

- Bird species associated with this ecological site's reference state condition:
Breeding Birds: Field Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, Blue-winged Warbler, Brown Thrasher, Indigo Bunting, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Bobwhite, Summer Tanager and Eastern Wood-Pewee.
- Amphibian and reptile species that may be associated with this ecological site's reference state: Five-lined Skink (*Eumeces fasciatus*), Six-lined Racerunner (*Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*), Flat-headed Snake (*Tantilla gracilis*), Eastern Coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum flagellum*), Red Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum sypila*), Ground Snake (*Snora semiannulata*) and Prairie Ring-necked Snake (*Diadophis punctatus arnyi*).
- Small mammals likely associated with this ecological site's reference state condition:
Eastern Woodrat (*Neotoma floridana*) and *Peromyscus* species.
- Invertebrates – Many native insect species are likely associated with this phase of this ecological site's reference state condition, especially native bees, ants, beetles, butterflies and moths, and crickets, grasshoppers and katydids.

Insect species likely associated with this ecological site's reference state condition: Lichen Grasshopper (*Trimerotropis saxatilis*), a prickly pear borer moth (*Melitara prodenialis*), native ants (*Pheidole tysoni*, *Formica schaufussi*), and native bees (*Colletes aestivalis*, *Andrena helianthiformis*, *Protandrena rudbeckiae*, *Lasioglossum coreopsis*, *Anthidium psoraleae* and *Dianthidium subrufulum*),

*This section prepared by Mike Leahy, Natural Areas Coordinator, Missouri Department of Conservation, 2013

Forestry

- **Management:** Estimated site index values are less than 50 for oak. Productivity is fair. Limited timber management opportunities exist. These sites are valuable for wildlife purposes and watershed protection. Reduced rooting depth restricts tree growth and increases windthrow hazards. These sites respond well to prescribed fire as a management tool.
- **Limitations:** Surface stones and surface rock; Surface stones and rocks are problems for efficient and safe equipment operation. Machine planting and mechanical site preparation is not recommended. Surface stones and rocks will make equipment use difficult. 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

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