

Ecological Site Description

Loamy Floodplain Forest

F115CY009MO

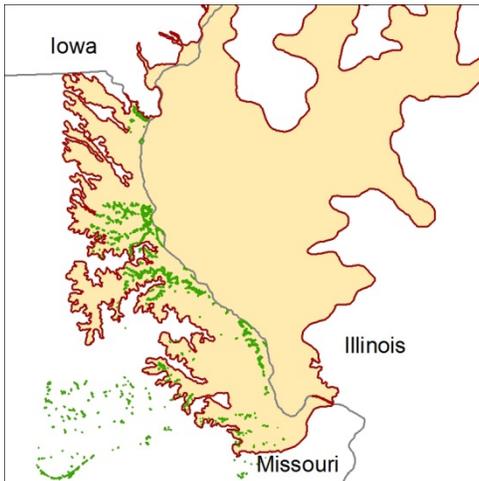
- (*Populus deltoides* - *Ulmus americana*/*Vitis* - *Staphylea trifolia*/*Carex* - *Laportea canadensis*)
- (eastern cottonwood – American elm/grape – American bladdernut/sedge – Canadian woodnettle)

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: 115C – Central Mississippi Valley Wooded Slopes, Northern Part

Introduction

The Central Mississippi Valley Wooded Slopes, Northern Part (area outlined in red on the map) is centered on the dissected, loess-covered hills bordering the Mississippi and Illinois River floodplain and terrace systems, and associated tributaries. Local physiographic regions include the Galesburg Plain and the Springfield Plain in Illinois, and the Lincoln Hills in Missouri. Elevation ranges from about 420 feet along the Mississippi River just upstream from St. Louis, to nearly 900 feet on the highest upland summits in Illinois. Local relief varies from 10 to 20 feet in the major river floodplains, to 50 to 100 feet in the dissected uplands, with bluffs of up to 250 feet along the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. Loess caps both stream and glacial outwash terraces along the major rivers, as well as both Illinoian and Pre-Illinoian till near the edges of the area. The underlying Mississippian-aged limestone influences soils on lower, steeper slopes.

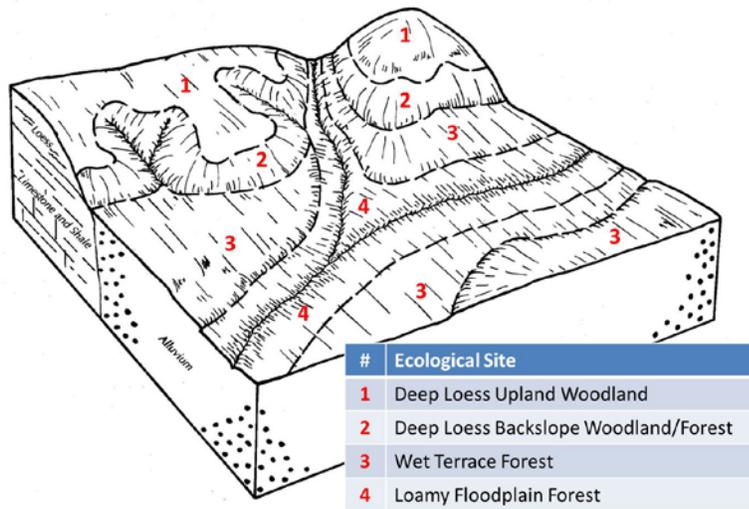


Loamy Floodplain Forests are within the green areas on the map (Missouri portion only; Illinois distributions are currently under review). This site occurs on the Mississippi River and Des Moines River floodplains and major tributaries. Soils are loamy and very deep, and are subject to flooding. Soils are loamy and very deep, and are subject to flooding.

Physiographic Features

This site is on the Missouri River and Des Moines River floodplains, with slopes of less than 2 percent. Areas not protected by levees are subject to flooding.

The following figure (adapted from Love, 1997) shows the typical landscape position of this



ecological site, and landscape relationships among the major ecological sites of the floodplains and adjacent uplands. This site is within the area labeled as “4” on the figure, and typically contains the active stream channel of the floodplain system. Wet Terrace Forest sites are often in adjacent, higher positions farther from the channel. More than one terrace step and soil may be present, as indicated by the dashed line within the Wet Terrace Forest on the diagram. Several sites occur in adjacent upland positions, particularly the Deep Loess

Woodlands and Forests shown in the figure.

Soil Features

These soils have no rooting restriction. They were formed under forest vegetation, with periodic depositional flood events. Organic matter content is variable. Parent material is alluvium. They have silt loam surface horizons, and loamy or clayey subsoils lacking argillic horizons. Most are affected by a seasonal high water table during the spring months. Soil series associated with this site include Belknap, Dupo, Huntsville, and Westerville.

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 reference plant community is a forest dominated by an overstory of cottonwood, American elm and hackberry with sycamore, green ash and other early successional species scattered throughout. Occasionally, bur oak, shellbark hickory, black walnut and other hardwood species may occur in later stages of development. Canopy height is 85 to 110 feet and canopy closure, 80 to 100%.

Loamy Floodplain Forests are on the Missouri River and Des Moines River floodplains. They occur on natural levees and low floodplains that flood frequently. Flooding of these ecological sites commonly occurs annually or at least once every 3 years. Loamy sediments, originating from the loess and till in the surrounding uplands, make up a significant portion of the alluvium in these floodplains.

The forest is dominated by flood tolerant, pioneer tree species such as elm, hackberry, sycamore, cottonwood and green ash. Young stands of these species tend to stabilize the low floodplain and continue to accumulate loamy materials. Consequently, these ecological sites tend to be near even aged. Young stands are often dense with a sparse understory and ground flora.

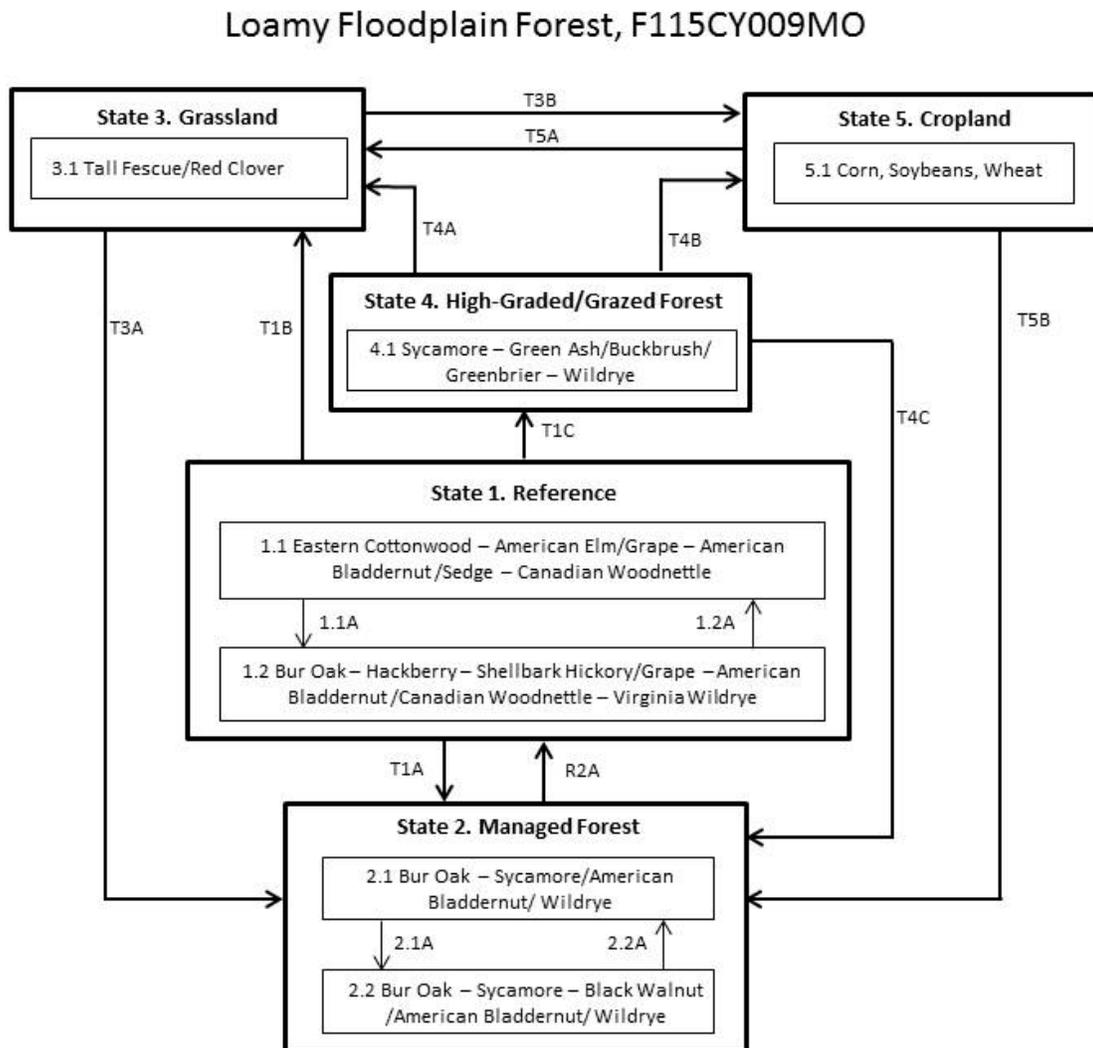
Over the long term, these floodplains may become so elevated and/or isolated that they begin to accumulate more fine sediments and become more stable and enduring. Oak, shellbark hickory and black walnut begin to accumulate in these later stages of succession. Catastrophic floods will often partially or completely knock down the early species and regenerate this site creating a mosaic of early to late successional floodplain forests.

These sites are productive. Today most of these ecological sites have been cleared and converted to agriculture. While some cleared fields have retained a narrow strip of forest along the river, other sites are often cleared right up to the bank. In such cases, flooding may cause severe stream bank erosion.

Loamy Floodplain Forests, generally occurring as a rather narrow band of forests traversing the river edge, are an abundant floodplain forest type. These bands of forest still play an important role as a source of food and shelter for migrating birds and as a source for coarse woody debris for the adjacent stream systems.

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	Uneven-age timber management; harvesting
T1B, T4A	Clearing; pasture planting; prescribed grazing
T5A	Pasture planting; prescribed grazing
T1C	Poorly planned harvest (high-grading); uncontrolled grazing
T3B	Tillage; conservation cropping system
T4B	Clearing; tillage; conservation cropping system
T3A, T5B	Tree planting; long-term succession (+30-50 years); forest stand improvement; access control
T4C	Forest stand improvement; access control
R2A	Forest stand improvement; long term succession (+10-20 years)
1.1A	Long term succession (+10-30 years); sediment accumulation
1.2A	Catastrophic flood: blow-down
2.1A	Crop Tree Release; little to no harvesting (10-20 years)
2.2A	Uneven-age timber management; harvesting

Ecological States

State 1: Reference

The historical reference state for this ecological site was old growth bottomland forest. Natural flooding cycles were the primary processes affecting this ecologic site. Maximum tree age was likely 150 to 200 years. The understory was complex, with multiple layers of shade-tolerant species. A highly diverse ground flora was also present. Vines were common and went well into the canopy. Scattered open areas were common. A change to more frequent, higher-intensity floods on the modern landscape creates more frequent canopy gaps, and introduces or helps to maintain more flood-tolerant species such as sycamore, eastern cottonwood, green ash and hackberry.

Over the long term, these floodplains may become more elevated and/or isolated and accumulate more fine sediments, becoming more stable and enduring. Oaks, shellbark hickory and black walnut begin to accumulate in these later stages of succession. Catastrophic floods will often partially or completely knock down the early species and regenerate this site creating a mosaic of early to late successional floodplain forests.

State 2: Managed Forest

Where this state remains, it has often been subjected to very selective timber harvests. While these forested areas may resemble the reference state, the diversity of tree species has been selectively (removal of oak and walnut) altered. Reducing harvests and extending rotations will cause a transition to *community phase 2.2*. Eliminating harvests, implementing selective thinning, and allowing long term succession may allow a return to the reference state where hydrologic regimes are least altered.

State 3: Grassland

Many acres of this ecological site have been converted to non-native grasslands of tall fescue and red clover. This state frequently transitions to a cropland state especially when commodity prices are high. A return to a near-reference state from this state is not recommended. Transitioning to a Managed Forest state is possible through long-term commitments of time and money.

State 4: High Graded/Grazed Forest

This state is subjected to uncontrolled grazing and high-graded timber harvests. The grazing will open up the understory and remove much of the diverse ground flora. This can lead to erosion of the topsoil during floods. Grazed units also often undergo timber harvest removing a wide variety of outstanding hardwood trees, further diminishing the structural and compositional diversity. A return to the near-reference state will require a long-term commitment including the elimination of grazing, planting of trees and perhaps shrub and herbaceous species, and very limited targeted timber harvests and thinning.

State 5: Cropland

Some areas of this ecological site have been converted to row crop agriculture. They often transition to a grassland state. A return to the near-reference state is not practical from this state. Transitioning to a Managed Forest state may be possible through long-term commitments of time and money.

Reference State Plant Community

Canopy Trees

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
COTTONWOOD	<i>Populus deltoides</i>	10-30	100
BUR OAK	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	5-20	90
GREEN ASH	<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>	5-20	90
HACKBERRY	<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	5-30	90
SUGARBERRY	<i>Celtis laevigata</i>	5-30	90
BITTERNUT HICKORY	<i>Carya cordiformis</i>	5-20	80
SHELLBARK HICKORY	<i>Carya laciniosa</i>	5-20	70
BLACK WALNUT	<i>Juglans nigra</i>	5-20	80
SYCAMORE	<i>Platanus occidentalis</i>	5-30	100
AMERICAN ELM	<i>Ulmus americana</i>	10-30	90

Understory Trees

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
RED ELM	<i>Ulmus rubra</i>	10-20	50
OHIO BUCKEYE	<i>Aesculus glabra</i>	10-20	40
BLUE BEECH	<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>	10-20	20
RED MULBERRY	<i>Morus rubra</i>	10-20	40

Shrubs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
WAHOO	<i>Euonymus atropurpureus</i>	5-10	12
BLADDERNUT	<i>Staphylea trifolia</i>	10-20	10

Vines

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
VIRGINIA CREEPER	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	10-20
SUMMER GRAPE	<i>Vitis aestivalis</i>	10-20
POISON IVY	<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>	10-20

Forbs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
BLUEBELLS	<i>Mertensia virginica</i>	5-20
PALE VIOLET	<i>Viola striata</i>	5-10
WOOD NETTLE	<i>Laportea canadensis</i>	10-30
GOLDENGLow	<i>Rudbeckia laciniata</i>	5-20
WATERLEAF	<i>Hydrophyllum virginianum</i>	5-20
FALSE RUE ANEMONE	<i>Isopyrum biternatum</i>	5-20
SNOWY CHAMPION	<i>Silene nivea</i>	5-20
TOUCH-ME-NOT	<i>Impatiens pallida</i>	5-20

Grasses and sedges

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
HOP SEDGE	<i>Carex lupulina</i>	5-30
SQUARROSE SEDGE	<i>Carex squarrosa</i>	5-30
SCOURING RUSH	<i>Equisetum hyemale</i>	5-30
INDIAN WOODOATS	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	5-30
VIRGINIA WILD RYE	<i>Elymus virginicus</i>	5-30

Site Interpretations

Wildlife

- Wild turkey, white-tailed deer, and eastern gray squirrel depend on hard and soft mast food sources and are typical game species of this type
- This ecological site is a dense, multi-layered forest, with snags and cavities and down dead wood that provides habitat for many species requiring cool, rich, moist conditions.
- Bird species associated with these mature forests include Great Blue Heron (colonies especially in large sycamores and cottonwoods), Bald Eagle, Belted Kingfisher, Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Parula, Louisiana Waterthrush, Wood Duck, Hooded Merganser, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Cerulean Warbler, and Yellow-throated Warbler.
- Reptiles and amphibians associated with this ecological site include small-mouthed salamander, central newt, midland brown snake, and gray treefrog.

Forestry

- **Management:** Estimated site index values range from 70 to 110. Timber management opportunities are good to excellent. 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. Harvest methods that leave some mature trees to provide shade and soil protection may be desirable. Where possible, favor swamp white oak, bur oak, black walnut, pecan, sycamore, and cottonwood. Maintain adequate riparian buffer areas.
- **Limitations:** Wetness from flooding – short duration and/or high water table; Use of equipment may be restricted in spring and other excessively wet periods. Equipment use when wet may compact soil and damage tree roots. Tree planting is difficult during spring flooding periods. Seedling mortality may be high due to excess wetness. Ridging the soil and planting on the ridges may increase survival.

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

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