

## *Ecological Site Description*

### **Loamy Dolomite Protected Backslope Forest**

**F116AY019MO**

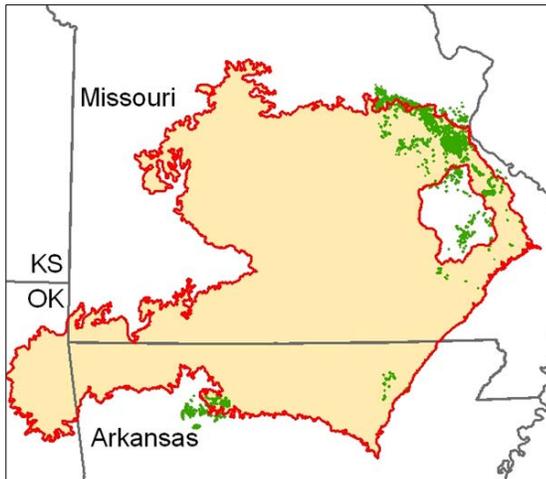
- (*Quercus alba* - *Quercus rubra*/Asimina triloba/Asarum canadense - *Polygonatum biflorum*)
- (white oak – northern red oak/paw paw/wild ginger – Solomon’s seal)

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 (MLRA):** 116A – Ozark Highland

#### **Introduction**

The Ozark Highland (area outlined in red on the map) constitutes the Salem Plateau of the Ozark Uplift. Elevation ranges from about 300 feet on the southeast edge of the Ozark escarpment, to about 1,600 feet in the west, adjacent to the Burlington Escarpment of the Springfield Plateau. The



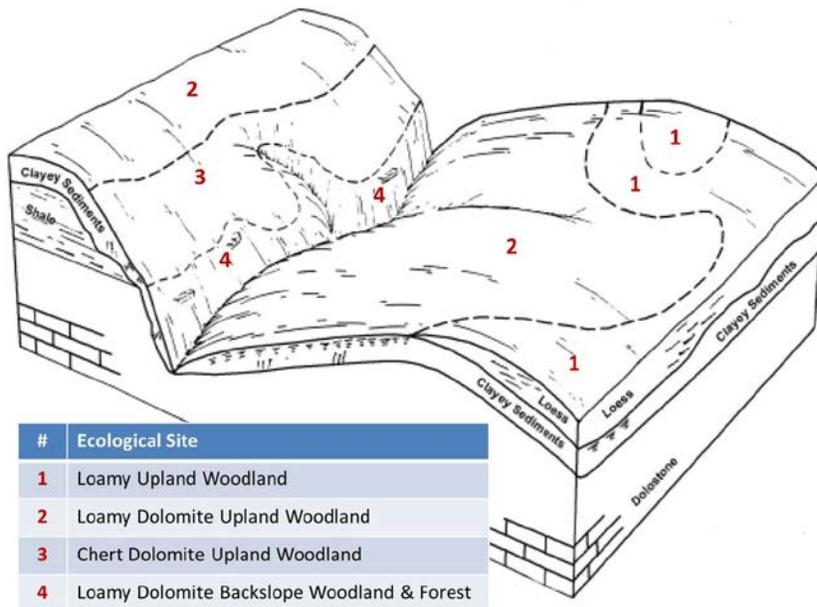
underlying bedrock is mainly horizontally bedded Ordovician-aged dolomites and sandstones that dip gently away from the uplift apex in southeast Missouri. Cambrian dolomites are exposed on deeply dissected hillslopes. In some places, Pennsylvanian and Mississippian sediments overlie the plateau. Relief varies, from the gently rolling central plateau areas to deeply dissected hillslopes associated with drainageways such as the Current and Eleven Point Rivers.

The Loamy Dolomite Protected Backslope Forests are within the green areas on the map. They occupy the northerly and easterly aspects of steep, dissected slopes, and are mapped in complex with the Loamy Dolomite Exposed Backslope Woodland ecological site. These ecological sites occur primarily in the Ozark Border counties of the northeastern Ozark Highland, near the border with MLRA 115B. Soils are typically moderately deep over limestone/dolomite bedrock, with loamy surfaces and clayey subsoils.

#### **Physiographic Features**

This site is on upland backslopes with slopes of 15 to 50 percent. It is on protected aspects (north, northeast, and east), which receive significantly less solar radiation than the exposed aspects. The site receives runoff from upslope summit and shoulder sites, and generates runoff to adjacent, downslope ecological sites. This site does not flood.

The adjacent figure (adapted from Skaer & Cook, 2005) shows the typical landscape position of this ecological site, and landscape relationships with other ecological sites. It is within the area labeled “4” on the figure, on lower backslopes with northerly to easterly exposures. Loamy Dolomite Exposed Backslope Woodland sites are on the corresponding southerly to westerly exposures. Loamy Dolomite Upland Woodland sites, labeled “2”, are typically upslope. Loamy Upland Woodland sites are often on local crests, labeled “1”. The dashed lines within the Loamy Upland Woodland



area indicate the various soils included in this ecological site. Chert Dolomite Upland Woodland sites, labeled “3”, occur where the loess thins and surface chert fragment content increases.

Loamy Dolomite Exposed Backslope Woodland sites are on the corresponding southerly to westerly exposures. Loamy Dolomite Upland Woodland sites, labeled “2”, are typically upslope. Loamy Upland Woodland sites are often on local crests, labeled “1”. The dashed lines within the Loamy Upland Woodland

**Soil Features**

These soils are underlain with dolomite bedrock at 20 to 40 inches depth. The soils were formed under woodland vegetation, and have thin, light-colored surface horizons. Parent material is a thin layer of loess, over slope alluvium, over residuum weathered from dolomite, overlying dolomite bedrock. Some areas are underlain with shale. They have silt loam surface layers, with clayey subsoils that have low to moderate amounts of chert gravel and cobbles. Some soils are affected by seasonal wetness in spring months from a water table perched on the clayey subsoil. Soil series associated with this site include Caneyville and Useful.

**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.*

Loamy Dolomite Protected Backslope Forests have a well-developed forest canopy and subcanopy (70 to 80 feet tall and 80 to 90 percent canopy cover) dominated by a mixture of oaks and other hardwoods adapted to the cooler, more mesic conditions. White oak, chinkapin oak and northern red oak are common, along with, sugar maple, bitternut hickory, white ash, elm and an occasional walnut. This ecological site exhibits a structurally diverse understory and an abundant forest ground flora. While similar to deeper Chert Protected Backslope Forests, the shallower carbonate soils limit

tree height, but create an environment where a wider variety of species occur in a more complex structural arrangement.

Loamy Dolomite Protected Backslope Forests occur in rather protected landscape positions on steep slopes in the deeper valleys furthest from the prairie uplands. While the upland prairies and savannas had an estimated fire frequency of 1 to 3 years, this ecological site burned less frequently (estimated 10 to 25 years) and with lower intensity. The moderately deep soils and occasional fires make this community transitional between forest and woodland, with more open woodland conditions being created briefly after the periodic fires. Site conditions overall, however, favor shade and moisture loving forest species that quickly redevelop after fire.

Loamy Dolomite Protected Backslope Forests would have also been subjected to occasional disturbances from wind and ice, as well as grazing by native herbivores, such as bison, elk, and deer. Wind and ice would have periodically opened the canopy up by knocking over trees or breaking substantial branches off canopy trees. Such canopy disturbances allowed more light to reach the ground and favored reproduction of the dominant oak species. Grazing by native large herbivores, such as bison, elk, and deer, would have kept understory conditions more open, also creating conditions more favorable to oak reproduction.

Today, these communities have been cleared and converted to pasture, or have undergone repeated timber harvest and domestic grazing. Most existing occurrences have a younger (50 to 80 years) canopy layer whose composition has been altered by timber harvesting practices. An increase in hickories over historic conditions is common. In addition, in the absence of fire, the canopy, sub-canopy and woody understory layers are better developed. The absence of periodic fire has allowed more shade-tolerant tree species, such as sugar maple, white ash, or hickories to increase in abundance.

Uncontrolled domestic grazing has diminished the diversity and cover of woodland ground flora species, and has introduced weedy species such as gooseberry, buckbrush, poison ivy and Virginia creeper created a more open understory and increased soil compaction.

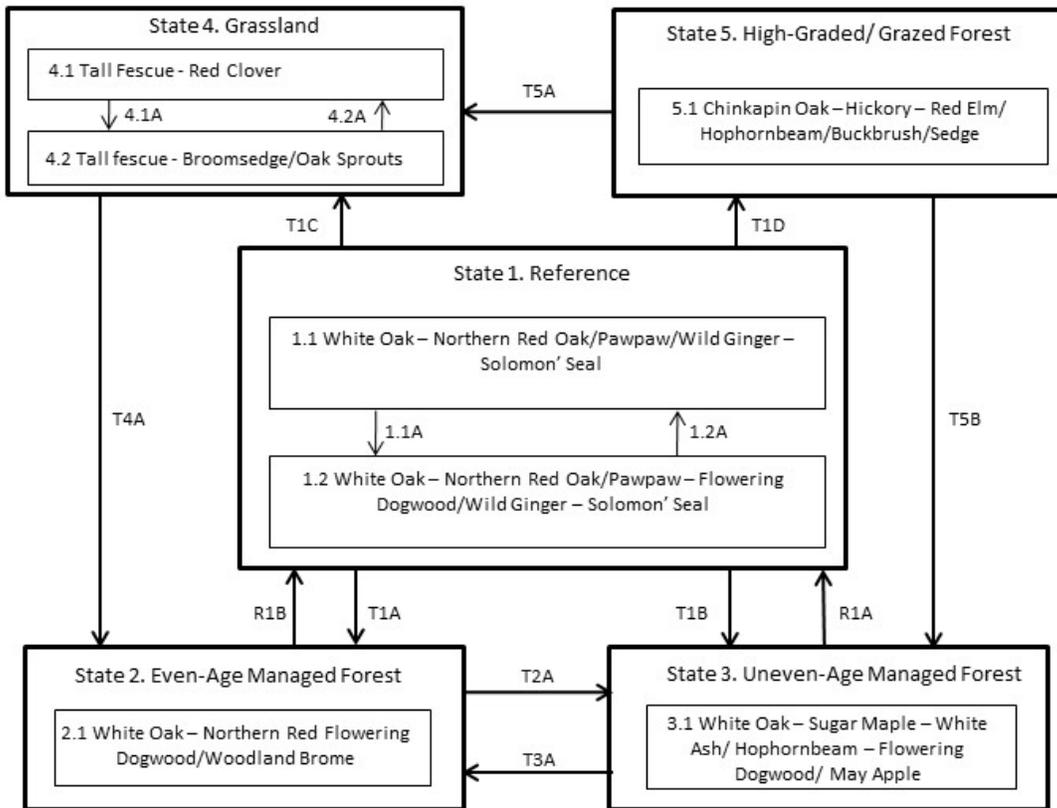
Loamy Dolomite Protected Backslope Forests are moderately productive timber sites. Carefully planned single tree selection or the creation of small group openings can help regenerate more desirable oak species and increase vigor on the residual trees. Clear-cutting does occur and results in dense, even-aged stands of primarily 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, the ground flora diversity can be shaded out and productivity of the stand may suffer.

Oak regeneration is typically problematic. Sugar maple, red elm, ironwood, hickories, grapes, pawpaw and spicebush are often dominant competitors in the understory. Maintenance of the oak component will require disturbances that will impair the cool, moist, shaded conditions, so trade-offs will have to be made carefully. Prescribed fire can play a beneficial but limited role in the management of this ecological site. The higher productivity of these sites makes it more challenging than on other forest sites in the region. Protected aspect forests did evolve with some fire, but their composition often reflects more closed, forested conditions, with fewer woodland ground flora species that can respond to fire. Consequently, while having protected aspects in a burn unit is acceptable, targeting them solely for woodland restoration is not advisable.

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**

**Loamy Dolomite Protected Backslope Forest, F116AY019MO**



Code	Event/Process
T1A	Harvesting; even-aged management
T1B	Harvesting; uneven-age management
T1C, T5A	Clearing; pasture planting
T1D	High-grade harvesting; uncontrolled grazing
T2A	Uneven-age management
T3A	Even-age management
T4A, T5A	Tree planting; long-term succession; no grazing
T5B	Uneven-age management; tree planting; no grazing

Code	Event/Process
1.1A	No disturbance (10+ yrs)
1.2A	Disturbance (fire, wind, ice) < 10 yrs
4.1A	Over grazing; no fertilization
4.2A	Brush management; grassland seeding; grassland management

Code	Event/Process
R1A	Extended rotations
R1B	Uneven-age mgt, extended rotations

**State 1: Reference**

The Reference State was dominated by white oak and northern red oak. Maximum tree age was likely 150 to 300 years. Periodic disturbances from wind or ice maintained the dominance of oaks by opening up the canopy and allowing more light for oak reproduction. In the absence of disturbance, more shade tolerant species such as sugar maple and hickory, white ash and others increase in importance and add structural diversity to the system. Two community phases are recognized in this state, with shifts between phases based on disturbance frequency.

The reference state is rare today. Some sites have been converted to grassland (State 4). Others have been subject to repeated, high-graded timber harvest coupled with domestic livestock grazing (State 5). Lack of disturbances has resulted in increased canopy density, which has affected the abundance and diversity of ground flora. Many Reference sites have been managed for timber harvest, resulting in either even-age (State 2) or uneven-age (State 3) forests.

**State 2: Even-Age Managed Forest**

These forests tend to have an under developed understory and ground flora. Thinning can increase overall tree vigor and improve understory diversity. Continual timber management, depending on the practices used, will either maintain this state, or convert the site to uneven-age (State 3) forests.

**State 3: Uneven-Age Managed Forest**

Uneven-Age Managed forests can resemble the reference state. The biggest difference is tree age, most being only 50 to 90 years old. Composition is also likely altered from the reference state depending on tree selection during harvest. In addition, without a regular 15 to 20 year harvest re-entry into these stands, they will slowly increase in more shade tolerant species such as sugar maple and white oak will become less dominant.

**State 4: Grassland**

Conversion of forests to planted, non-native pasture species such as tall fescue has been common in this MLRA. Steep slopes, abundant surface fragments, low organic matter contents and soil acidity make non-native pastures challenging to maintain in a healthy, productive state on this ecological site. If grazing and active pasture management is discontinued, the site will eventually transition, over time, to State 2 (Even-Age).

**State 5: High-Graded/Grazed Forest**

Forested sites subjected to repeated, high-graded timber harvests and uncontrolled domestic grazing transition to this state. This state exhibits an over-abundance of hickory and other less desirable tree species, and weedy understory species such as buckbrush, gooseberry, poison ivy and Virginia creeper. The vegetation offers little nutritional value for cattle, and excessive stocking damages tree boles, degrades understory species composition and results in soil compaction and accelerated erosion and runoff. Exclusion of livestock from sites in this state coupled with uneven-age management techniques will cause a transition to State 3 (Uneven-Age).

## Reference State Plant Community

### Canopy Trees

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
WHITE OAK	<i>Quercus alba</i>	30-50	60
NORTHERN RED OAK	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	20-30	70
SHAGBARK HICKORY	<i>Carya ovata</i>	20-30	50
CHINKAPIN OAK	<i>Quercus muehlenbergii</i>	20-30	60
SUGAR MAPLE	<i>Acer saccharum</i>	5-20	60
RED MAPLE	<i>Acer rubrum</i>	5-20	50
RED ELM	<i>Ulmus rubra</i>	10-20	50
BITTERNUT HICKORY	<i>Carya cordiformis</i>	5-10	60
WHITE ASH	<i>Fraxinus americana</i>	5-10	60

### Understory Trees

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
HORNBEAM	<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>	10-20	40
PAWPAW	<i>Asimina triloba</i>	10-20	20
FLOWERING DOGWOOD	<i>Cornus florida</i>	10-20	30

### Shrubs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
SPICEBUSH	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	10-30	5

### Forbs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
VIRGINIA-SNAKEROOT	<i>Aristolochia serpentaria</i>	10-20
VIRGINIA SPRINGBEAUTY	<i>Claytonia virginica</i>	10-20
WHITE DOG'S TOOTH VIOLET	<i>Erythronium albidum</i>	10-20
HEPATIC	<i>Hepatica nobilis</i>	10-20
GOLDEN SEAL	<i>Hydrastis canadensis</i>	10-20
FEATHERY FALSE SOLOMON'S-SEAL	<i>Maianthemum racemosum</i>	10-20
WILD BLUE PHLOX	<i>Phlox divaricata</i>	10-20
MAYAPPLE	<i>Podophyllum peltatum</i>	10-20
TOAD SHADE	<i>Trillium sessile</i>	10-20
BELLWORT	<i>Uvularia grandiflora</i>	10-20
WOODNETTLE	<i>Laportea canadensis</i>	10-20
HARBINGER OF SPRING	<i>Erigenia bulbosa</i>	10-20
SOLOMON'S SEAL	<i>Polygonatum biflorum</i>	10-20
WILD GINGER	<i>Asarum canadense</i>	10-20

### Grasses and sedges

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
GRACEFUL SEDGE	<i>Carex gracilescens</i>	5-20
OVAL-LEAF SEDGE	<i>Carex cephalophora</i>	5-20
WOODLAND BROME	<i>Bromus pubescens</i>	5-20
BOTTLEBRUSH GRASS	<i>Elymus hystrix</i>	5-20
SILKY WILDRYE	<i>Elymus villosus</i>	5-20

## 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.
- Birds associated with this ecological site include Worm-eating warbler, Whip-poor-will, Great Crested Flycatcher, Ovenbird, Pileated Woodpecker, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Louisiana Waterthrush (near streams), and Broad-winged Hawk.
- Reptile and amphibian species associated with mature forests include: ringed salamander, spotted salamander, marbled salamander, central newt, long-tailed salamander, dark-sided salamander, southern red-backed salamander, three-toed box turtle, western worm snake, western earth snake, and American toad.

### Forestry

- **Management:** Site index values range from 53 to 60 for oak. Timber management opportunities are generally 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 small 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 and should be used with caution on a particular site if timber management is the primary objective. Favor white oak, northern red oak, black oak, chinkapin oak.
- **Limitations:** Coarse fragments occur throughout the lower profile; bedrock is within 40 inches. Surface stones and rocks are problems for efficient and safe equipment operation and will make equipment use somewhat difficult. Disturbing the surface excessively in harvesting operations and building roads increases soil losses, which leaves a greater amount of coarse fragments on the surface. Hand planting or direct seeding may be necessary. Seedling mortality due to low available water capacity may be high. Mulching or providing shade can improve seedling survival. Mechanical tree planting will be limited. 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

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