

Ecological Site Description

Loamy Dolomite Exposed Backslope Woodland

F116AY051MO

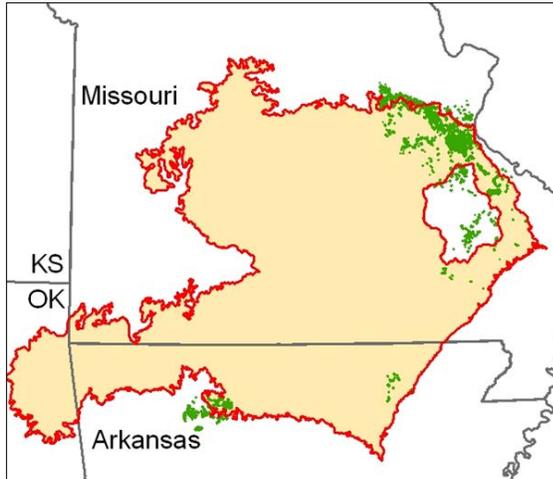
- (*Quercus alba* - *Quercus muehlenbergii*/*Cercis canadensis*/*Elymus virginicus*)
- (white oak – chinkapin oak/red bud/Virginia wildrye)

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



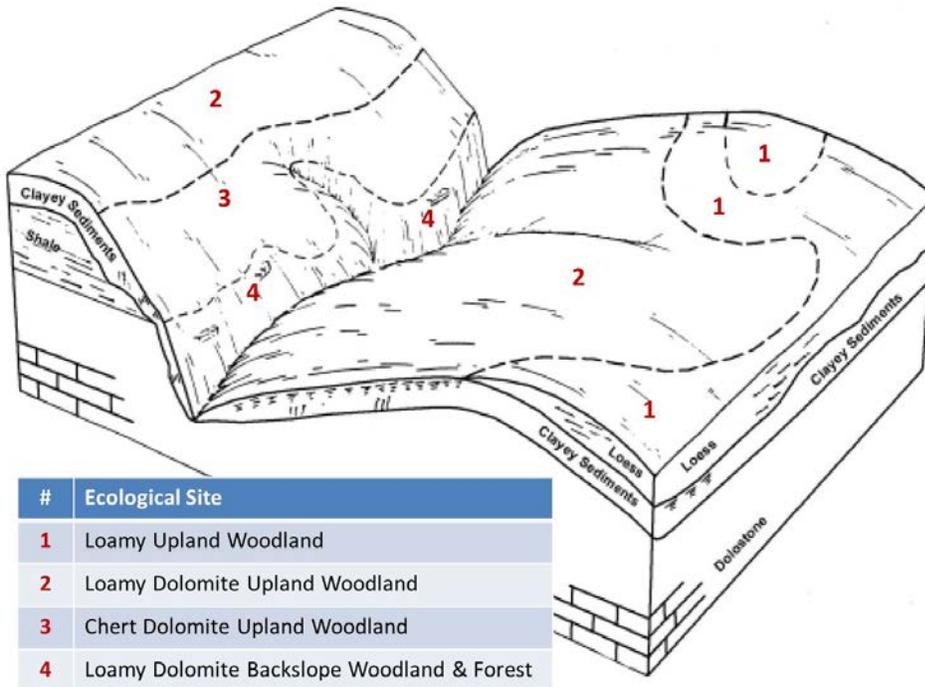
underlying bedrock is mainly horizontally bedded Ordovician-aged dolomites and sandstones that dip gently away from the uplift apex in southeast Missouri. Cambrian dolomites are exposed on deeply dissected hillslopes. In some places, Pennsylvanian and Mississippian sediments overlie the plateau. Relief 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 Exposed Backslope Woodlands are within the green areas on the map. They occupy the southerly and westerly aspects of steep, dissected

slopes, and are mapped in complex with the Loamy Dolomite Protected Backslope Forest 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 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 exposed aspects (south, southwest, and west), which receive significantly more solar radiation than the protected 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 southerly to westerly exposures. Loamy Dolomite Protected Backslope Forest sites are on the corresponding northerly to easterly

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.

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.

The somewhat shallow soils and south to west aspects of Loamy Dolomite Exposed Backslope Woodlands limits the growth of trees and supports an abundance of native grasses and forbs in the

understory. While more productive than adjacent glades moderately tall (50 to 70 feet) white oak and chinkapin oak dominated a semi-open overstory, with occasional post, black and northern red oaks and hickories. Shrubs were scattered within a dense matrix of native grasses and forbs.

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.

Fire played an important role in the maintenance of these systems. It is likely that these ecological sites, along with adjacent glades and woodlands burned at least once every 5 years. These periodic fires kept woodlands open, removed the litter, and stimulated the growth and flowering of the grasses and forbs. They would have also further limited the growth and dominance of trees, especially eastern redcedar. During fire free intervals, woody species would have increased and the herbaceous understory diminished. But the return of fire would have re-opened the woodlands and stimulated the ground flora. In the long term absence of fire, woody species, especially eastern red cedar have encroached into these ecological sites. Most of these ecological sites today are dense, and shady with a greatly diminished ground flora. Removal of the younger understory by chainsaw and the application of prescribed fire have proven to be effective restoration methods.

Loamy Dolomite Exposed Backslope Woodlands were also subjected to occasional disturbances from wind and ice, as well as grazing by native large 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. Grazing by native herbivores would have effectively kept understory conditions more open, creating conditions more favorable to oak reproduction and sun-loving ground flora species.

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. It also promotes the invasion of eastern red cedar. Grazed sites have a more open understory. In addition, soil compaction and soil erosion from grazing can be a problem and lower site productivity.

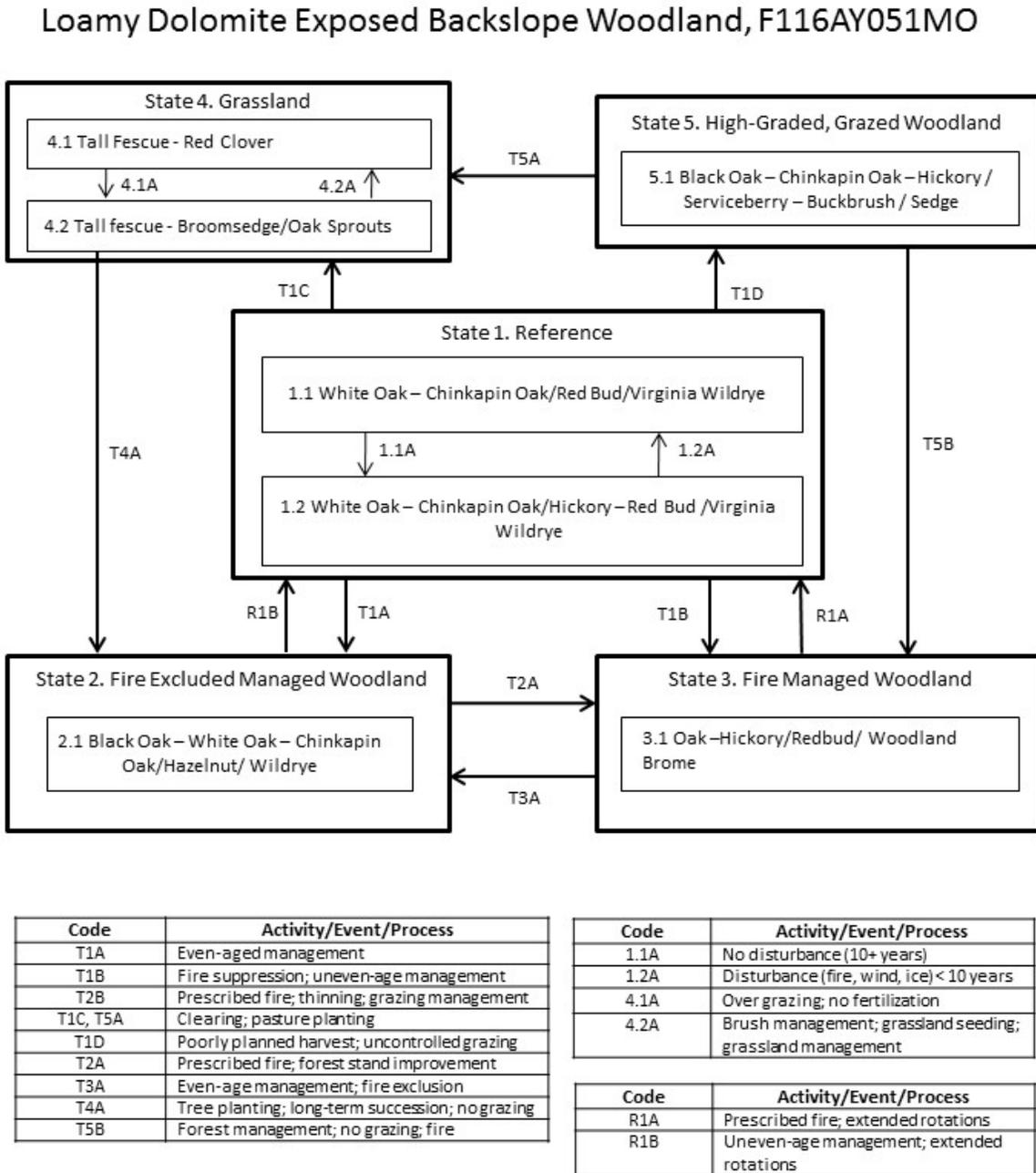
These ecological sites are only moderately productive, especially when compared to adjacent protected slopes and loess covered units. Maintenance of the oak component may require disturbances that will encourage more sun adapted species and reduce shading effects although the droughty site characteristics do help to maintain oaks naturally on the site.

Single tree selection timber harvests are common for this ecological site 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 beneficial for existing stands whose composition has been highly altered by past management practices. However, without some thinning of the dense stands and application of prescribed fire, the ground flora diversity can be shaded out and diversity of the stand will 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



Ecological States

State 1: Reference

The historical reference state for this ecological site was old growth, oak woodland. The reference state was dominated by white oak and chinkapin oak. Maximum tree age was likely 150 to 200 years. Periodic disturbances from fire, wind or ice 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 rare today. Many sites have been converted to grassland (State 4). Others have been subject to repeated, high-graded timber harvest coupled with uncontrolled domestic livestock grazing (State 5). Fire suppression has resulted in increased canopy density, which has affected the abundance and diversity of ground flora. Some former reference states have been managed as woodlands with fire (State 2) or without fire (State 3).

State 2: Fire Excluded Managed Woodland

These stands will slowly increase in more shade tolerant species and white oak will become less dominant. These woodlands tend to be rather dense, with a sparse understory and ground flora. Thinning can increase overall tree vigor and improve understory diversity. However, in the absence of fire, the diversity and cover of the ground flora is still diminished. Without periodic disturbance, stem density and fire intolerant species, like sassafras and hickory, increase in abundance. Prescribed fire along with a more open canopy can transition this state to a Fire Managed Woodland state (State 3).

State 3: Fire Managed Woodland

The Fire Managed Woodland state results from managing woodland communities (States 2) with prescribed fire and canopy thinning,. This state can resemble the Reference State, but with younger maximum tree ages, more open canopies and lower ground flora diversity. Cessation of prescribed fire will allow transition to various managed woodland states.

If controlled grazing is introduced to this state, a silvopasture system can be created. Opening of the canopy may need to occur to allow sufficient light levels to exist for suitable grazing needs.

State 4: Grassland

Conversion of woodlands to planted, non-native cool season grassland species such as tall fescue is common for this region. Steep slopes, surface fragments, low organic matter contents and soil acidity make grasslands harder to maintain in a healthy, productive state on this ecological site.

Two community phases are recognized in the grassland state, with shifts between phases based on types of management. Poor management will result in a shift to *Community 4.2* that shows an increase in oak sprouting and increases in broomsedge densities. If grazing and active pasture management is discontinued, the site will eventually transition to State 2 from this phase.

State 5: High-Graded, Grazed Woodland

States that were subjected to repeated, high-grading timber harvests and uncontrolled domestic grazing transitioned to a High-Graded, Grazed Woodland 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 existing vegetation offers little nutritional value for cattle, and excessive cattle stocking damages tree boles, degrades understory species composition and results in soil compaction and accelerated erosion and runoff.

Two common transitions from this state are woody clearing and conversion to State 5, grassland or removing livestock, limited harvesting, and allowing long term succession to occur to some other woodland state.

Reference State Plant Community

Canopy Trees

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height (ft)
WHITE OAK	<i>Quercus alba</i>	30-60	60
BLACK OAK	<i>Quercus velutina</i>	10-30	70
CHINKAPIN OAK	<i>Quercus muehlenbergii</i>	10-30	60
POST OAK	<i>Quercus stellata</i>	10-30	60
SHAGBARK HICKORY	<i>Carya ovata</i>	10-20	60
NORTHERN RED OAK	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	10-30	70

Shrubs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)	Canopy Height(ft)
AROMATIC SUMAC	<i>Rhus aromatica</i>	10-20	5
AMERICAN HAZELNUT	<i>Corylus americana</i>	10-20	5
DWARF HACKBERRY	<i>Celtis tenuifolia</i>	10-20	3
RED BUD	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	10-20	12

Forbs

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
YELLOW PINPERNEL	<i>Taenidia integerrima</i>	5-20
ORANGE PUCCOON	<i>Lithospermum canescens</i>	5-20
BENT MILK VETCH	<i>Astragalus distortus</i>	5-20
BUTTERFLYWEED	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	5-20
ELM-LEAVED GOLDENROD	<i>Solidago ulmifolia</i>	5-20
POINTED LEAF TICK-TREFOIL	<i>Desmodium glutinosum</i>	5-20
EASTERN BEEBALM	<i>Monarda bradburiana.</i>	5-20
PURPLE CONEFLOWER	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	5-20
HAIRY SUNFLOWER	<i>Helianthus hirsutus</i>	10-30
BLAZING STAR	<i>Liatris aspera</i>	5-20

Grasses and sedges

Common Name	Botanical Name	Cover % (low-high)
SLENDER WOODLAND SEDGE	<i>Carex digitalis</i>	10-20
OVAL-LEAF SEDGE	<i>Carex cephalophora</i>	10-20
LITTLE BLUESTEM	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	10-30
WOODLAND BROME	<i>Bromus pubescens</i>	10-20
BOTTLEBRUSH GRASS	<i>Elymus hystrix</i>	10-20
VIRGINIA WILDRYE	<i>Elymus virginicus</i>	10-30

Site Interpretations

Wildlife

- Oaks provide hard mast for wildlife; scattered shrubs provide soft mast.
- Sedges and native grasses provide green browse; native 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 Dolomite Woodlands include Indigo Bunting, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Bobwhite, Summer Tanager, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Whip-poor-will, Chuck-will's widow, and Red-eyed Vireo.
- Reptiles and amphibians associated with mature Dolomite Woodlands include: ornate box turtle, northern fence lizard, five-lined skink, coal skink, broad-headed skink, six-lined racerunner, western slender glass lizard, prairie ring-necked snake, flat-headed snake, rough earth snake, red milk snake, western pygmy rattlesnake, and timber rattlesnake.

Forestry

- Management: Field determined site index values average 56 for oak. Timber management opportunities are fair. This site responds well to prescribed fire as a management tool. Using prescribed fire as a management tool could have a negative impact on timber quality if timber management is the primary objective. Favor post oak, black oak, chinkapin oak, and Shumard oak.
- Limitations: Large amounts of coarse fragments throughout profile; bedrock 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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