

Ecological site F113XY923IL

Sandy Floodplain Forest

Last updated: 5/17/2024
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General information

Provisional. A provisional ecological site description has undergone quality control and quality assurance review. It contains a working state and transition model and enough information to identify the ecological site.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 113X–Central Claypan Areas

The eastern Illinois portion of the Central Claypan Areas MLRA is in the Till Plains Section of the Central Lowland Province of the Interior Plains (USDA-NRCS, 2006) and includes the Southern Till Plain Natural Division of the natural divisions of Illinois (Schwegman, 1973; 1997; IDNR, 2018) in south-central Illinois. South-central Illinois is a dissected Illinoian till plain south of the terminal Wisconsin moraine. This region consists of nearly level to gently sloping, old till plains. Stream valleys are shallow and generally are narrow. Elevation is about 660 feet (200 meters), increasing gradually from south to north. Local relief is generally low on the broad, flat till plains and flood plains and high on the dissected hills bordering rivers or drainage systems. The Kaskaskia, Little Muddy, Little Wabash, Embarras, and Skillet Fork rivers are part of this area. This region is covered with loess, which overlies old glacial drift (Illinoian till) that has a high content of clay. Fragipans are also present. Pennsylvanian limestone and shale bedrock underlay the glacial till. The dominant soil orders in this region are Alfisol and Mollisol. The soils in the area predominantly have a mesic soil temperature regime, an aquic or udic soil moisture regime, and mixed or smectitic mineralogy. They generally are very deep, well drained to poorly drained, and loamy or clayey. (USDA-NRCS, 2006).

Classification relationships

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) (USDA-NRCS, 2006):

113 – Central Claypan Areas, Eastern Part

U.S. Forest Service Ecoregions (Cleland et al. 2007):

Domain: Humid Temperate Domain

Division: Hot Continental Division

Province: Eastern Broadleaf Forest (Continental)

Province Code: 222

Section: Central Till Plains, Oak-Hickory Section

Section Code: 222G

Ecological site concept

The historic pre-European settlement vegetation on this site was dominated by broadleaf deciduous trees. Canopy closure is complete, or nearly so, with few shrubs and limited tree species. Sandy Floodplain Forests occur in floodplains on recently formed sand bars, front-land ridges and well-drained flats. Soils are excessively drained and very deep formed from sandy alluvium that is frequently flooded (Nelson 2010; SSS NRCS OSD, 2018; NatureServe 2018).

This cottonwood (*Populus deltoides* L.)* - black willow (*Salix nigra* Marshall) - silver maple (*Acer saccharinum* L.) forest is characteristic of the fronts and banks of rivers and streams. It develops on bare, moist soil on recently formed sand bars, front-land ridges, and well-drained flats, along with sandbar willow (*Salix interior*). This natural community can also be found on well-drained ridges in the first bottoms. The tree canopy is tall (to 30 m) and

dominated by cottonwood, black willow and silver maple, although green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica* Marshall), boxelder (*Acer negundo* L.), American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis* L.), and American elm (*Ulmus americana* L.) are also commonly encountered. Cottonwood trees can exceed 30 m in height with massive trunks which fork into stout branches when growing on sites protected from prolonged severe flooding. Tree diversity is limited due to the dynamics of flooding and resultant deposition and scouring of sediments. In earlier successional stages, the subcanopy can be strongly dominated by black willow. The shrub layer is conspicuously absent in many parts of the range. Herbaceous growth can be thick and lush but is often patchy and sparse due to frequent inundation. Species most often encountered in the ground layer include tall lovegrass (*Eragrostis hypnoides* (Lam.) Britton, Sterns & Poggenb.), mucronate sprangeltop (*Leptochloa panicea* (Retz.) Ohwi ssp. *brachiata* (Steud.) N. Snow), smallflower halfchaff sedge (*Lipocarpa micrantha* (Vahl) G. Tucker), golden dock (*Rumex maritimus* L.), Paradox cinquefoil (*Potentilla paradoxa* Nutt.), sedges (*Carex* spp.), rice cutgrass (*Leersia oryzoides* (L.) Sw.), beggarticks (*Bidens* spp.), and asters (*Asteraceae* spp.) Thick "dog hair" stands of cottonwood and willow can develop on newly formed sand bars.

Historically, seasonal flooding was the primary disturbance factor, while windthrow events and beaver alterations were secondary factors (LANDFIRE 2009; Nelson 2010; NatureServe 2018; Voigt and Mohlenbrock 1964; White 1978).

* All plant common and scientific names in this document were obtained from the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service National PLANTS Database (USDA NRCS, 2018).

Associated sites

F113XY919IL	Wet Silty Floodplain Forest This ecological site is located in lower floodplains along with Loamy Floodplain Forests.
F113XY920IL	Silty Floodplain Forest This ecological site is located in floodplains generally adjacent to but lower in elevation than Sandy Floodplain Forests.

Similar sites

F113XY920IL	Silty Floodplain Forest This ecological site has poorer drainage and is located in floodplains generally adjacent to but lower than Sandy Floodplain Forests.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) <i>Populus deltoides</i> (2) <i>Salix nigra</i>
Shrub	(1) <i>Salix interior</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Carex</i> (2) <i>Bidens</i>

Physiographic features

This site is on very deep, excessively drained soils on flood plains. These soils formed in sandy alluvium that is frequently flooded. Slopes range from 2 to 5 percent. (Table 1). The site generates some runoff to adjacent lower floodplain sites.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Alluvial plain > Flood plain
Runoff class	Negligible to very low
Flooding duration	Brief (2 to 7 days) to long (7 to 30 days)
Flooding frequency	Occasional to frequent

Elevation	508–699 ft
Slope	2–5%
Water table depth	72 in
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The soil temperature regime of MLRA 113 is classified as mesic, where the mean annual soil temperature is between 47 and 59°F. Temperature and precipitation occur along a north-south gradient, where temperature and precipitation increase the further south you travel (USDA-NRCS 2006). The majority of the precipitation occurs as rainfall in the form of convective thunderstorms during the growing season.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	155-165 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	187-192 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	43-44 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	152-168 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	185-194 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	43-44 in
Frost-free period (average)	160 days
Freeze-free period (average)	190 days
Precipitation total (average)	43 in

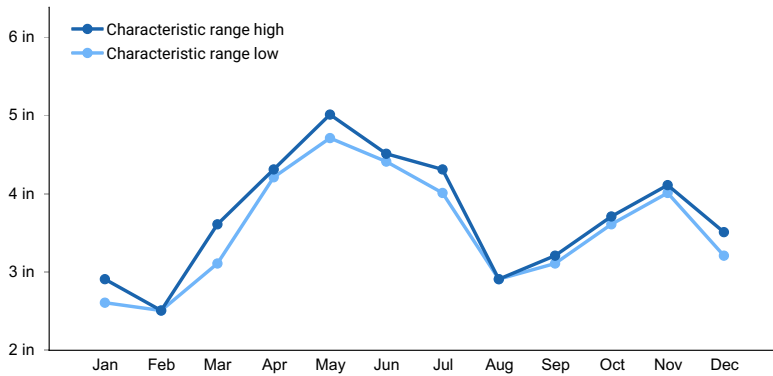


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

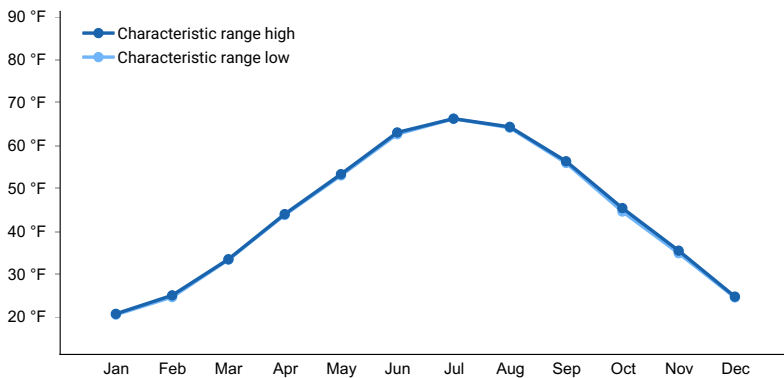


Figure 2. Monthly minimum temperature range

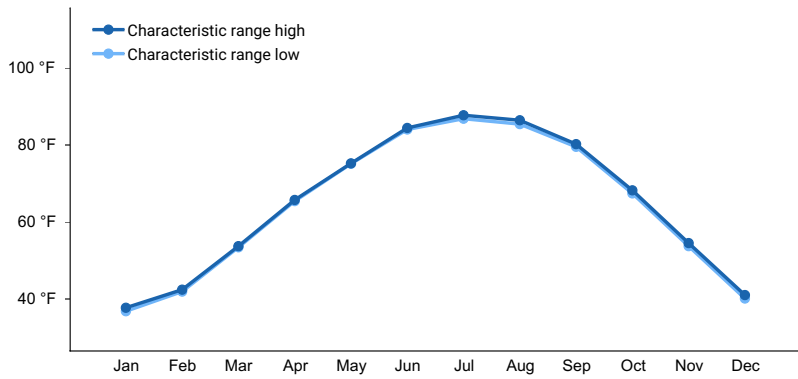


Figure 3. Monthly maximum temperature range

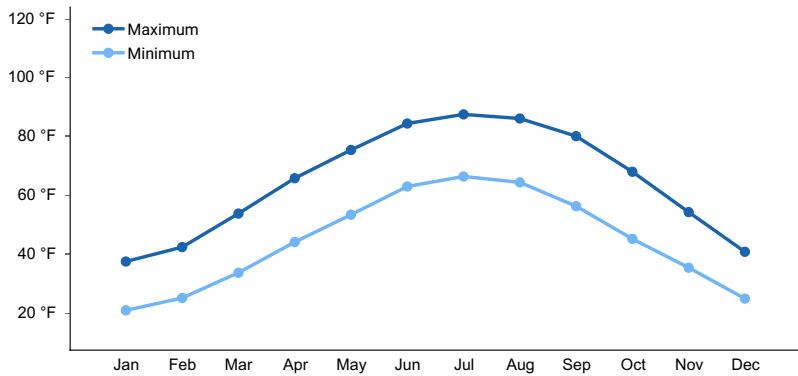


Figure 4. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

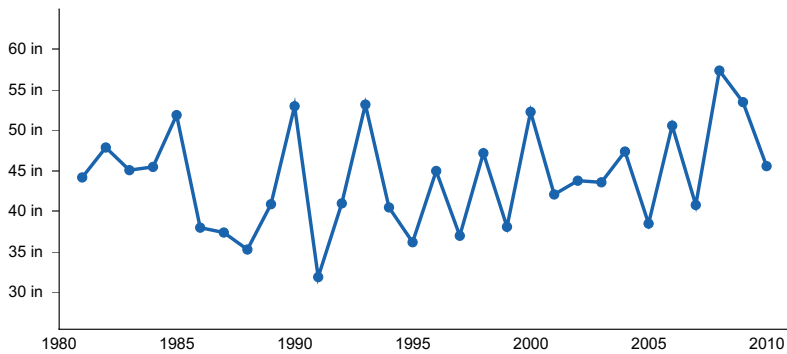


Figure 5. Annual precipitation pattern

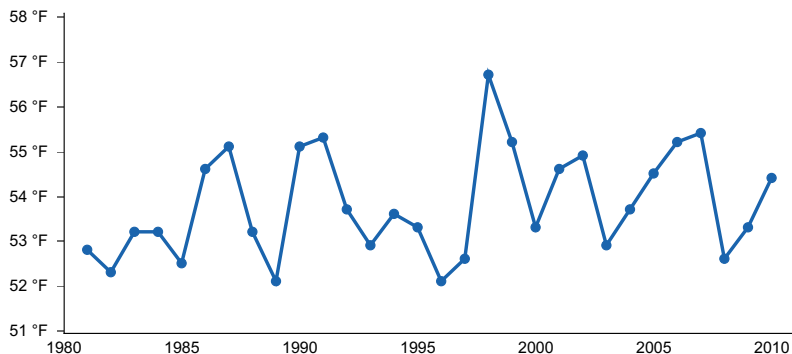


Figure 6. Annual average temperature pattern

Climate stations used

- (1) CHARLESTON [USC00111436], Charleston, IL
- (2) NEWTON [USC00116157], Newton, IL

Influencing water features

This ecological site is typically in natural levee positions directly adjacent to a perennial stream. Stream levels typically respond quickly to storm events, especially in watersheds where surface runoff is dominant. Short- to medium- duration flooding is common in many areas, particularly during spring and early summer storm events. Land use conversions have altered the hydrology and flooding dynamics in many places.

Wetland description

This site is in the RIVERINE wetlands class of the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) classification system (Brinson, 1993). The stream hydrograph drives the inflows and outflows of RIVERINE wetlands. As the flood stage recedes, surface and groundwater return to the channel. The direction of movement is horizontal. The direction is also bi-directional in the lateral axis across the floodplain, but is unidirectional on the longitudinal axis parallel to the valley as water flows downhill along the valley gradient.

Soil features

These soils are very deep and coarse-textured throughout, with moderate to low plant-available water capacity. The soils were formed under woodland vegetation, and have thin, light-colored surface horizons. Parent material is sandy alluvium. They have loamy fine sand surface layers, with slightly alkaline, fine sand subsurface layers. These soils are not affected by seasonal wetness. Soils of this ecological site are in the Entisol order. Soil series associated with this site include Sarpy. (NCSS, 2018; SSS NRCS OSD, 2018)

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium
Surface texture	(1) Loamy fine sand
Drainage class	Excessively drained
Permeability class	Rapid
Soil depth	72 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (Depth not specified)	3 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (Depth not specified)	0–15%
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (Depth not specified)	6.6–8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0%

Ecological dynamics

The MLRA lies within the transition zone between the eastern deciduous forests and the central tallgrass prairies. The heterogeneous topography of the area results in variable microclimates and fuel matrices that in turn can support prairies, savannas, woodlands, and forests. Sandy Floodplain Forests form an aspect of this vegetative continuum. This ecological site occurs on sandy floodplains. Species characteristic of this ecological site consist of broadleaf deciduous floodplain forest species which exhibits high canopy diversity. (Anderson, 1975; White, 1978).

Historically, Sandy Floodplain Forests were on floodplain positions and natural levees that frequently flooded. These forests were structurally and compositionally diverse, with occasional tree fall gaps caused by flooding and natural mortality providing opportunities for regeneration of overstory species. Catastrophic floods will often partially

or completely knock down the early successional species and regenerate this ecological system. Consequently, this ecological site is often made up of a mosaic of early to late successional floodplain forests.

Coarse loamy and sandy deposits of sediment were common, occurring along the floodplains with the sandy materials the youngest and most recently deposited substrate in this matrix. This ecological site is located on former streamside areas where frequent swift currents dumped the heavier sandy sediment load next to the river. It is normally surrounded by Loamy or Wet Loamy Floodplain Forests on slightly lower areas. It is likely that the hydrology of these streams has been altered since pre-settlement because of changes in land use. Current flooding is likely more frequent but brief. (NatureServe 2018)

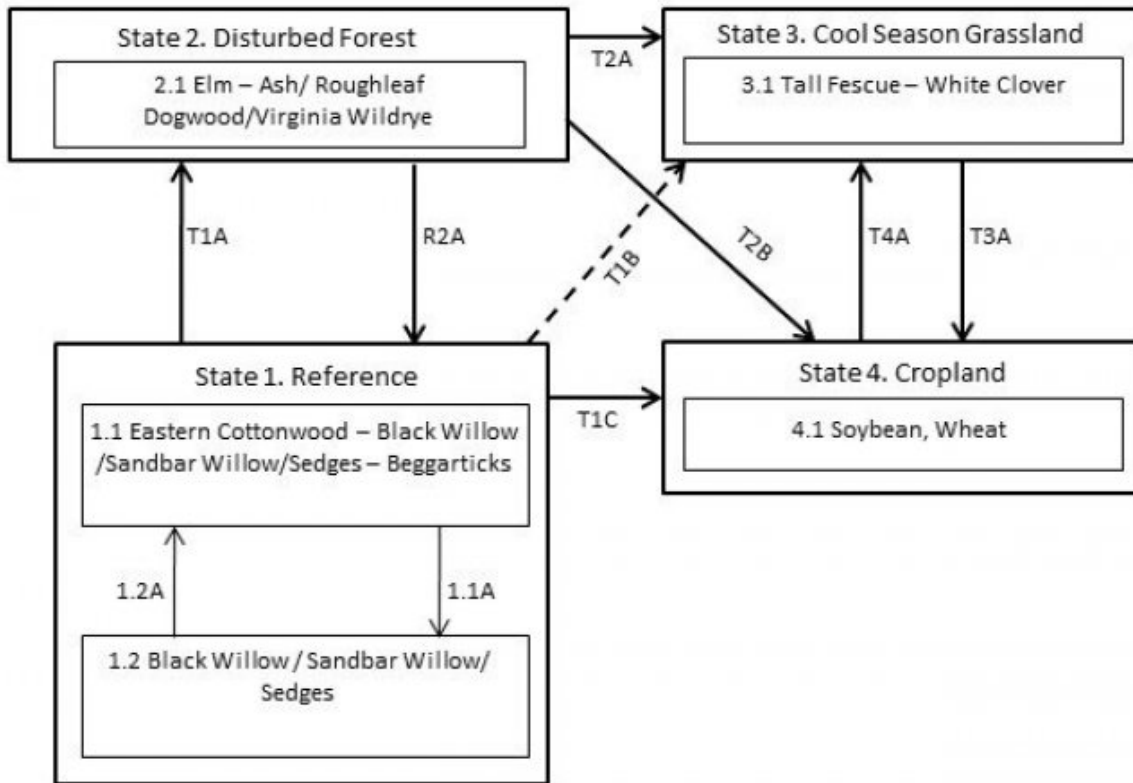
Today many of these ecological sites have been cleared and converted to intensive agriculture. The remaining forests often occur as a narrow band in the floodplain. These remaining bands of forest play an important role as a source of food and shelter for migrating birds. In addition, they are very important for streambank stabilization, capturing sediment and mitigating scour during flood events.

These remaining remnants that still exist also play an important role as a source of food and shelter for migrating birds. In addition, large floodplain trees that extend above the canopy are important nesting sites for bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and herons (*Ardea* spp.). (Guyon et. al. 2016). Carefully planned timber harvest can be tolerated by this system, but high-grading of the timber will also degrade the system. Re-establishment of these riparian forests is important for stream quality and health, as well as for migratory birds. Planting of appropriate species has proven to be quite successful.

A provisional state and transition diagram is depicted in Figure 2. 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 may change as knowledge increases.

State and transition model

Sandy Floodplain Forest, F113XY923IL



Code	Event/Activity/Process
T1A	grazing; repeated timber harvests; no major natural disturbance
T3A	Tillage; conservation cropping system; water management
T1B,T2A	Woody removal; vegetative seeding; grassland management
T1C, T2B	Woody removal; tillage; conservation cropping system; water management
T4A	Vegetative seeding ; grassland management
1.1A	Damaging natural disturbance event
1.2A	Lack of natural disturbance events 30+ years
R2A	Forest stand improvement

State 1
Reference State

The historical reference state for this ecological site was a riverine forest. This community phase is characterized by frequent flood events which impact on the canopy structure and species composition. The forest was dominated by cottonwoods and willows. Maximum tree age was likely 75 to 100 years. Periodic disturbances from occasional flooding, wind or ice affected the structure and ground flora species. Catastrophic floods will often partially or completely knock down the early successional species and regenerate this ecological system. Consequently, this ecological site is often made up of a mosaic of early to late successional floodplain forest. Long disturbance-free periods allowed an increase in canopy cover, 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. Altered drainage has resulted in increased canopy density, which has affected the abundance and diversity of ground flora. Most reference states are currently altered because of timber harvesting, clearing and conversion to grassland or cropland.

Dominant plant species

- eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), tree
- black willow (*Salix nigra*), tree
- sandbar willow (*Salix interior*), shrub
- beggarticks (*Bidens*), other herbaceous

Community 1.1

Elm - Ash/Roughleaf Dogwood/Virginia Wildrye

This community is characterized by eastern cottonwood, black willow, sandbar willow, sedges and beggarticks.

Dominant plant species

- eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), tree
- black willow (*Salix nigra*), tree
- sandbar willow (*Salix interior*), shrub
- sedge (*Carex*), grass
- beggarticks (*Bidens*), other herbaceous

Community 1.2

Black Willow / Sandbar Willow/ Sedges

This community is dominated by willows and sedges.

Dominant plant species

- black willow (*Salix nigra*), tree
- eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), tree
- sandbar willow (*Salix interior*), shrub
- sedge (*Carex*), grass
- beggarticks (*Bidens*), other herbaceous

Pathway 1.1.A

Community 1.1 to 1.2

Damaging natural disturbance event

Pathway 1.2.A

Community 1.2 to 1.1

Lack of natural disturbance events for 30 plus years.

State 2

Disturbed Forest

Composition is altered from the reference state due to tree selection during harvest and lack of natural

disturbances. Without periodic canopy disturbance, stem densities and more shade tolerant species will increase in abundance. Some periodic uncontrolled grazing may be occurring.

Dominant plant species

- elm (*Ulmus*), tree
- ash (*Fraxinus*), tree
- roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*), shrub
- Virginia wildrye (*Elymus virginicus*), grass

Community 2.1

Elm - Ash/ Roughleaf Dogwood/ Virginia Wildrye

Species composition is altered from the reference state due to disturbances.

Dominant plant species

- pin oak (*Quercus palustris*), tree
- elm (*Ulmus*), tree
- ash (*Fraxinus*), tree
- roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*), shrub
- Virginia wildrye (*Elymus virginicus*), grass

State 3

Cool Season Grassland

Conversion of other states to non-native cool season species such as tall fescue (*Schedonorus arundinaceus* (Schreb.) Dumort., nom. cons.), red top (*Agrostis alba* auct. non L.) and white clover (*Trifolium repens* L.) has occurred. Long term uncontrolled grazing can cause significant soil erosion and compaction. A return to the reference state may be impossible, requiring a very long term series of management options and transitions.

Dominant plant species

- tall fescue (*Schedonorus arundinaceus*), grass
- bentgrass (*Agrostis*), grass
- white clover (*Trifolium repens*), other herbaceous

Community 3.1

Tall Fescue - White Clover

A community dominated by seeded cool season grasses and legumes.

Dominant plant species

- tall fescue (*Schedonorus arundinaceus*), grass
- white clover (*Trifolium repens*), other herbaceous

State 4

Cropland

This is a state that exists currently with intensive row cropping of soybeans (*Glycine max* (L.) Merr.), and wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.). Some conversion to cool season hay land occurs, but when commodity prices are high, that alternative state transitions back to cropland.

Dominant plant species

- corn (*Zea mays*), grass
- wheat (*Triticum*), grass
- soybean (*Glycine max*), other herbaceous

Community 4.1 Soybeans, Wheat

Agricultural state with crops such as corn, beans, and winter wheat.

Dominant plant species

- corn (*Zea mays*), grass
- wheat (*Triticum*), grass
- soybean (*Glycine max*), other herbaceous

Transition T1A State 1 to 2

Lack of natural disturbance events for 20 years or more. Repeated timber harvesting may have occurred.

Transition T1B State 1 to 3

Woody removal; vegetative seeding; grassland management

Transition T1C State 1 to 4

Woody removal and tillage of the site. Conservation cropping system and water management often occurs.

Restoration pathway R2A State 2 to 1

Forest stand improvement

Transition T2A State 2 to 3

Woody removal; vegetative seeding; grassland management

Transition T2B State 2 to 4

Woody removal; tillage; conservation cropping system; water management

Transition T3A State 3 to 4

Tillage; conservation cropping system; water management

Transition T4A State 4 to 3

Vegetative seeding; grassland management

Additional community tables

Inventory data references

No field plots were available for this site. A review of the scientific literature and professional experience were used to approximate the plant communities and ecological dynamics for this provisional ecological site. Information for the state-and-transition model was obtained from the same sources. All states and community phases are

considered provisional based on the sources identified in ecological site description.

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Other references

Relationship to other established ecological classifications (done)

Biophysical Setting (LANDFIRE, 2009); the reference community of this ecological site is most similar to: South-Central Interior Large Floodplain (CES202.705)

National Vegetation Classification System (NatureServe, 2018): the reference community of this ecological site is most similar to: *Populus deltoides* - *Salix nigra* - *Acer Saccharinum* Floodplain Forest (CEGL002018)

Illinois Natural Areas Survey (INAS) (White, 1978); the reference community of this ecological site is most similar to: INAS Community Class – Floodplain Forest

Contributors

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Approval

Suzanne Mayne-Kinney, 5/17/2024

Acknowledgments

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Rangeland health reference sheet

Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health is a qualitative assessment protocol used to determine ecosystem condition based on benchmark characteristics described in the Reference Sheet. A suite of 17 (or more) indicators are typically considered in an assessment. The ecological site(s) representative of an assessment location must be known prior to applying the protocol and must be verified based on soils and climate. Current plant community cannot be used to identify the ecological site.

Author(s)/participant(s)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	05/19/2024
Approved by	Suzanne Mayne-Kinney
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:**

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:**

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:**

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):**

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:**

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:**

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):**

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):**

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):**

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:**

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):**

12. **Functional/Structural Groups (list in order of descending dominance by above-ground annual-production or live foliar cover using symbols: >>, >, = to indicate much greater than, greater than, and equal to):**

Dominant:

Sub-dominant:

Other:

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):**

14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):**

15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):**

16. **Potential invasive (including noxious) species (native and non-native). List species which BOTH characterize degraded states and have the potential to become a dominant or co-dominant species on the ecological site if their future establishment and growth is not actively controlled by management interventions. Species that become dominant for only one to several years (e.g., short-term response to drought or wildfire) are not invasive plants. Note that unlike other indicators, we are describing what is NOT expected in the reference state for the ecological site:**

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:**
