USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Ecological site R104XY016IA
Wet Terrace Sedge Meadow

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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.

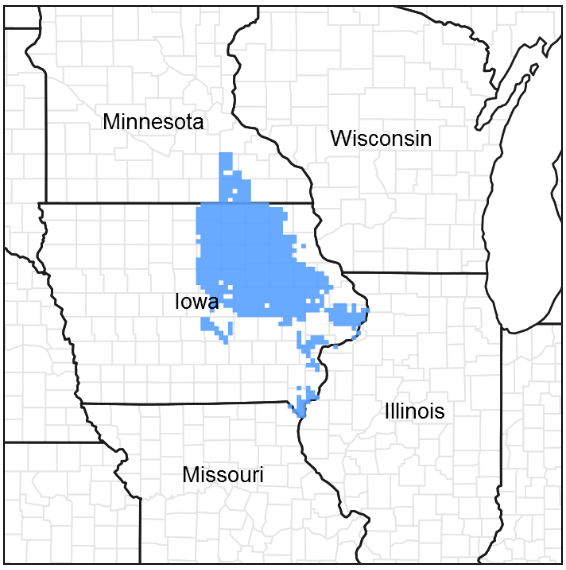


Figure 1. Mapped extent

Areas shown in blue indicate the maximum mapped extent of this ecological site. Other ecological sites likely occur within the highlighted areas. It is also possible for this ecological site to occur outside of highlighted areas if detailed soil survey has not been completed or recently updated.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 104X–Eastern Iowa and Minnesota Till Prairies

The Eastern Iowa and Minnesota Till Prairies (MLRA 104) includes the Iowan Surface, Oak Savanna, and Western Coulee and Ridges landforms (Prior 1991; MDNR 2005; WDNR 2015). It spans three states (Iowa, 74 percent; Minnesota, 22 percent; Wisconsin, 4 percent), encompassing approximately 9,660 square miles (Figure 1). The elevation ranges from approximately 1,310 feet above sea level (ASL) on the highest ridges to about 985 feet ASL in the lowest valleys. Local relief is mainly 10 to 20 feet. Glacial till and outwash deposits cover the uplands of the MLRA with recent alluvium located in the major river valleys. Paleozoic bedrock sediments, comprised primarily of shale and limestone, lies beneath the glacial material. The depth to limestone is shallow, resulting in karst topography across much of the area (USDA-NRCS 2006).

The vegetation in the MLRA has undergone drastic changes over time. Spruce forests dominated the landscape 30,000 to 21,500 years ago. As the last glacial maximum peaked 21,500 to 16,000 years ago, they were replaced with open tundras and parklands. The end of the Pleistocene Epoch saw a warming climate that initially prompted the return of spruce forests, but as the warming continued, spruce trees were replaced by deciduous trees (Baker et al. 1990). Not until approximately 9,000 years ago did the vegetation transition to prairies as climatic conditions continued to warm and subsequently dry. Between 4,000 and 3,000 years ago, oak savannas began intermingling within the prairie landscape, while the more wooded and forested areas maintained a foothold in sheltered areas. This prairie-forest transition ecosystem formed the dominant landscapes until the arrival of European settlers (Baker et al. 1992).

Classification relationships

USFS Subregions: North Central U.S. Driftless and Escarpment (222L), Minnesota and Northeast Iowa Morainal-Oak Savannah (222M), Central Dissected Till Plains (251C) Sections; Menominee Eroded Pre-Wisconsin Till (222La), Oak Savannah Till and Loess Plains (222Me), Southeast Iowa Rolling Loess Hills (251Ch) Subsections (Cleland et al. 2007)

U.S. EPA Level IV Ecoregion: Eastern Iowa and Minnesota Drift Plains (47c), Rolling Loess Prairies (47f), Lower St. Croix and Vermillion Valleys (47g), Rochester/Paleozoic Plateau Upland (52c) (USEPA 2013)

National Vegetation Classification – Ecological Systems: North-Central Interior Floodplain (CES202.033) (NatureServe 2015)

National Vegetation Classification - Plant Associations: Carex spp. – (Carex pellita, Carex vulpinoidea) Wet Meadow (CEGL005272) (Nature Serve 2015)

Biophysical Settings: Eastern Great Plains Floodplain Systems (BpS 4214710) (LANDFIRE 2009)

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Iowa Plant Community Species List: Sedge Meadow, Central Midwest (USDA-NRCS 2007)

Iowa Department of Natural Resources: Wet Meadow (INAI 1984)

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: WMs83 Southern Seepage Meadow/Carr (MDNR 2005)

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Sedge Meadow (Eggers and Reed 2015)

Ecological site concept

Wet Terrace Sedge Meadows are located within the green areas on the map (Figure 1). They occur on low stream terraces. The soils are Alfisols and Mollisols that are very poorly to poorly-drained and deep, formed in alluvium. The site can experience very rare to rare flooding from overbank flow, surface runoff from adjacent uplands, and precipitation.

The historic pre-European settlement vegetation on this ecological site was dominated by hydrophytic herbaceous vegetation. Shortbeak sedge (Carex brevior (Dewey) Mack.) and sweet coneflower (Rudbeckia subtomentosa Pursh) are the dominant and characteristic species of Wet Terrace Sedge Meadows, respectively. Other sedges can include quill sedge (Carex tenera Dewey) and rigid sedge (Carex tetanica Schkuhr). Species characteristic of an undisturbed plant community associated with this ecological site can include spotted water hemlock (Cicuta maculata L.), fourflower yellow loosestrife (Lysimachia quadriflora Sims), and bluntleaf bedstraw (Galium obtusum Bigelow) (Drobney et al. 2001). Flooding and periodic fire are the primary disturbance factors that maintain this site, while drought is a secondary factor (LANDFIRE 2009; NatureServe 2015).

Associated sites

R104XY015IA	**Terrace Savanna** Alluvial parent material that is somewhat poorly to excessively well-drained including Bertrand, Bixby, Coloma, Curran, Dakota, Dells, Ely, Finchford, Hayfield, Hoopeston, Judson, Lawler, Nevin, Oakton, Raddle, Radford, Richwood, Snider, Terril, Wapsie, Wapsie variant, Waukee, Waukegan, Wiota, and Worthen soils
F104XY020IA	**Loamy Floodplain Forest** Alluvial parent material that is somewhat poorly to moderately well-drained and located closer to the stream channel including Ackmore, Alluvial land, Arenzville, DU Page, Huntsville, Kennebec, Lawson, and Spillville soils

Similar sites

R104XY013IA	**Ponded Upland Depression Sedge Meadow** Ponded Upland Depression Sedge Meadows are located in uplands and are DEPRESSIONAL wetlands
R104XY018IA	**Wet Floodplain Sedge Meadow** Wet Floodplain Sedge Meadows are also a RIVERINE wetland but are located lower on the landscape on floodplains

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	(1) *Carex brevior* (2) *Rudbeckia subtomentosa*

Physiographic features

Wet Terrace Sedge Meadows occur on low stream terraces (Figure 2). They are situated on elevations ranging from approximately 492 to 2001 feet ASL. The site can experience very rare to flooding that can last up to seven days (Table 1).

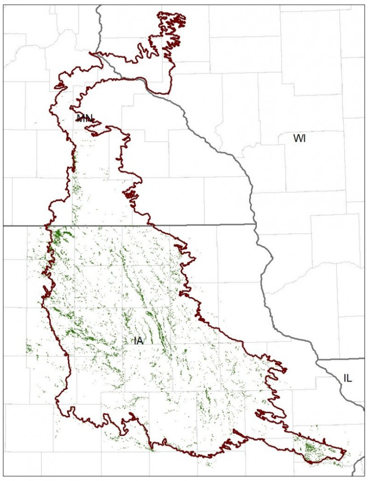
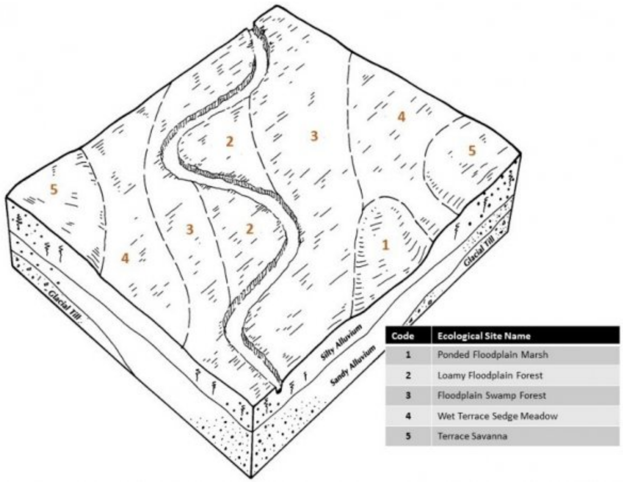


Figure 2. Figure 1. Location of Wet Terrace Sedge Meadow ecological site within MLRA 104.



Code	Ecological Site Name
1	Ponded Floodplain Marsh
2	Loamy Floodplain Forest
3	Floodplain Swamp Forest
4	Wet Terrace Sedge Meadow
5	Terrace Savanna

Figure 3. Figure 2. Representative block diagram of Wet Terrace Sedge Meadow and associated ecological sites.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Slope shape across	(1) Linear

Slope shape up-down	(1) Linear
Landforms	(1) River valley > Terrace
Runoff class	Low
Flooding duration	Very brief (4 to 48 hours) to brief (2 to 7 days)
Flooding frequency	Very rare to rare
Elevation	150–610 m
Slope	0–1%
Water table depth	0–15 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The Eastern Iowa and Minnesota Till Prairies falls into the hot-summer humid continental climate (Dfa) and warm-summer humid continental climate (Dfb) Köppen-Geiger climate classifications (Peel et al. 2007). In winter, dry, cold air masses periodically shift south from Canada. As these air masses collide with humid air, snowfall and rainfall result. In summer, moist, warm air masses from the Gulf of Mexico migrate north, producing significant frontal or convective rains. Occasionally, hot, dry winds originating from the Desert Southwest will stagnate over the region, creating extended droughty periods in the summer from unusually high temperatures. Air masses from the Pacific Ocean can also spread into the region and dominate producing mild, dry weather in the autumn known as Indian Summers (NCDC 2006).

The soil temperature regime of MLRA 104 is classified as mesic, where the mean annual soil temperature is between 46 and 59°F (USDA-NRCS 2006). Temperature and precipitation occur along a north-south gradient, where temperature and precipitation increase the further south one travels. The average freeze-free period of this ecological site is about 154 days, while the frost-free period is about 127 days (Table 2). The majority of the precipitation occurs as rainfall in the form of convective thunderstorms during the growing season. Average annual precipitation is approximately 36 inches, which includes rainfall plus the water equivalent from snowfall (Table 3). The average annual low and high temperatures are 36 and 57°F, respectively.

Climate data and analyses are derived from 30-year averages gathered from six National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather stations contained within the range of this ecological site (Table 4).

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	119-135 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	141-167 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	889-965 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	115-137 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	139-169 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	864-965 mm
Frost-free period (average)	127 days
Freeze-free period (average)	154 days
Precipitation total (average)	914 mm

Climate stations used

- (1) BYRON 4NORTH [USC00211174], Byron, MN
- (2) AUSTIN WWT FAC [USC00210355], Austin, MN
- (3) OSAGE [USC00136305], Osage, IA
- (4) TRIPOLI [USC00138339], Tripoli, IA

- (5) ANAMOSA 1 WNW [USC00130213], Anamosa, IA
- (6) CEDAR RAPIDS NO 1 [USC00131319], Marion, IA

Influencing water features

Wet Terrace Sedge Meadows are classified as a RIVERINE: bottomland, flooded, herbaceous wetland under the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) classification system (Smith et al. 1995; USDA-NRCS 2008) and as a Palustrine, Persistent Emergent, Seasonally Flooded Wetland under the National Wetlands Inventory (FGDC 2013). Overbank flow from the stream and subsurface hydraulic connections are the main sources of water for this ecological site, but additional sources can include overland flow from adjacent uplands and precipitation (Smith et al. 1995). Infiltration is very slow (Hydrologic Group D) for undrained soils, and surface runoff is low to medium (Figure 5).

Primary wetland hydrology indicators for an intact Wet Terrace Sedge Meadow may include: A1: Surface water, A2 High water table, A3 Saturation, and B10 Drainage patterns. Secondary wetland hydrology indicators may include: C2: Dry-season water table and D5 FAC-neutral test (USACE 2010).

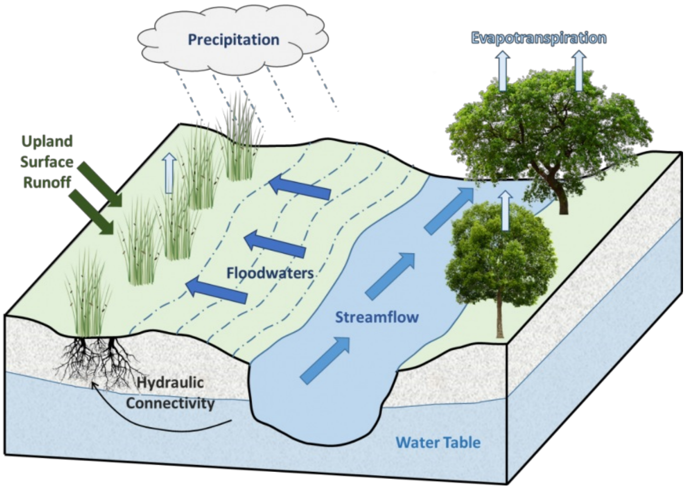


Figure 10. Figure 5. Hydrologic cycling in Wet Terrace Sedge Meadow ecological site.

Soil features

Soils of Wet Terrace Sedge Meadows are in the Alfisols and Mollisols orders, further classified as Mollic Endoaqualfs, Typic Argiudolls, Typic Calciaquolls, and Typic Endoaquolls with very slow infiltration and low runoff potential. The soil series associated with this site includes Bremer, Harcot, Marshan, Selmass, Talcot, and Udolpho. The parent material is alluvium, and the soils are very poorly to poorly-drained and deep with seasonal high-water tables. Soil pH classes are strongly acid to moderately alkaline. No rooting restrictions are noted for the soils of this ecological site (Table 5).

Some soil map units in this ecological site, if not drained, may meet the definition of hydric soils and are listed as meeting criteria 2 of the hydric soils list (77 FR 12234).

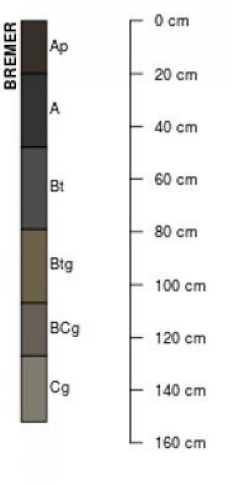


Figure 11. Figure 6. Profile sketch of soil series associated with Wet Terrace Sedge Meadow.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium
Family particle size	(1) Fine (2) Fine-silty (3) Fine-loamy
Drainage class	Very poorly drained to poorly drained
Permeability class	Very slow to moderately slow
Depth to restrictive layer	203 cm
Soil depth	203 cm

Ecological dynamics

The information in this Ecological Site Description, including the state-and-transition model (STM), was developed based on historical data, current field data, professional experience, and a review of the scientific literature. As a result, all possible scenarios or plant species may not be included. Key indicator plant species, disturbances, and ecological processes are described to inform land management decisions.

The MLRA lies within the transition zone between the eastern deciduous forests and the tallgrass prairies. The heterogeneous topography of the area results in variable microclimates and fuel matrices that in turn are able to support prairies, savannas, woodlands, and forests. Wet Terrace Sedge Meadows form an aspect of this vegetative continuum. This ecological site occurs on low stream terraces on very poorly to poorly-drained soils. Species characteristic of this ecological site consist of hydrophytic herbaceous vegetation.

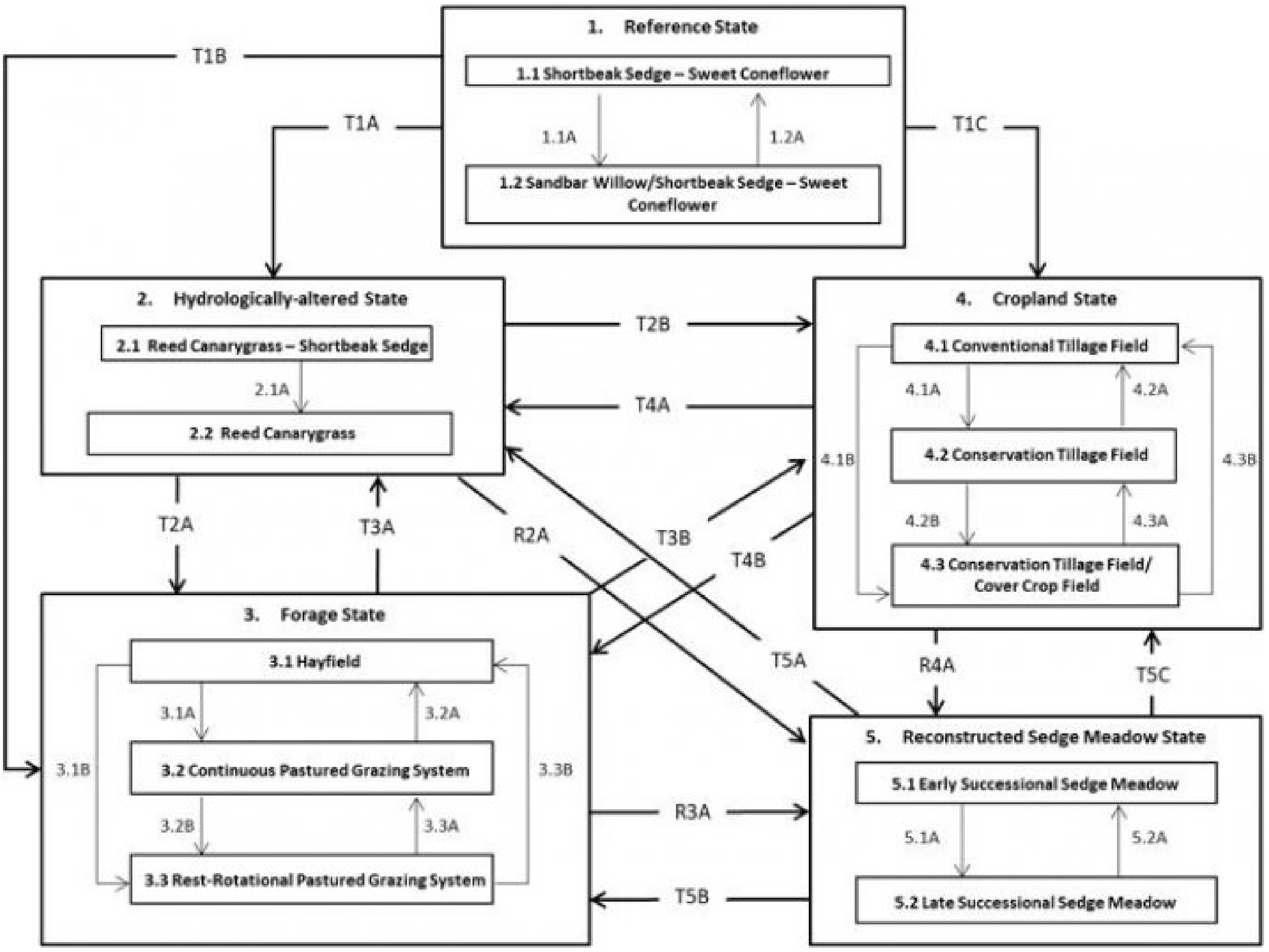
Flooding and fire are the most important ecosystem drivers for maintaining this ecological site. The frequency and duration of flooding affect species composition, cover, and vegetative production due to alternating aerobic and anaerobic surface substrate conditions. Replacement fires likely occurred on a regular rotation interval and helped to reduce the accumulation of peat. The combination of fire and saturated soil conditions prevented the establishment of shrubs for any significant amount of time.

Drought has also played a role in shaping this ecological site. The periodic episodes of reduced soil moisture in conjunction with the very poorly to poorly-drained soils have favored the proliferation of plant species tolerant of such conditions. Drought can slow the growth of plants and result in dieback of certain species. When coupled with fire, periods of drought can eliminate or greatly reduce the occurrence of woody vegetation, substantially altering the extent of shrubs and trees (Pyne et al. 1996).

Today, Wet Terrace Sedge Meadows have been greatly reduced as the land has mostly been converted to agricultural production. Corn (*Zea mays* L.) and soybeans (*Glycine max* (L.) Merr.) are the dominant crops grown, but patches of forage land are also present on the landscape. A return to the historic plant community is likely not possible due to significant hydrologic and water quality changes in the watershed, but long-term conservation agriculture or habitat reconstruction efforts can help to restore some natural diversity and ecological functioning. The state-and-transition model that follows provides a detailed description of each state, community phase, pathway, and transition. This model is based on available experimental research, field observations, literature reviews, professional consensus, and interpretations.

State and transition model

R104XY016IA WET TERRACE SEDGE MEADOW



Code	Process
1.1A	Extended fire return interval
1.2A	Replacement fire
T1A, T3A, T4A, T5A	Changes to natural hydroperiod and/or land abandonment
2.1A	Increasing changes to hydrology and increasing sedimentation
T1B, T2A, T4B, T5B	Cultural treatments are implemented to increase forage quality and yield
3.1A	Mechanical harvesting is replaced with domestic livestock and continuous grazing
3.1B	Mechanical harvesting is replaced with domestic livestock and rest-rotational grazing
3.2A, 3.3B	Tillage, forage crop planting, and mechanical harvesting replace grazing
3.2B	Implementation of rest-rotational grazing
3.3A	Implementation of continuous grazing
T1C, T2B, T3B, T5C	Agricultural conversion via tillage, seeding, and non-selective herbicide
4.1A	Less tillage, residue management
4.1B	Less tillage, residue management, and implementation of cover cropping
4.2B	Implementation of cover cropping
4.2A, 4.3B	Intensive tillage, remove residue, and reinitiate monoculture row cropping
4.3A	Remove cover cropping
R2A, R3A, R4A	Site preparation, non-native species control, and native seeding
5.1A	Invasive species control and implementation of disturbance regimes
5.2A	Drought or improper timing/use of management actions

State 1
Reference State

The reference plant community is categorized as a sedge meadow community, dominated by hydrophytic, herbaceous vegetation. The two community phases within the reference state are dependent on flooding and periodic fire. The frequency and duration of flooding alter species composition, cover, and extent, while periodic fires prevent woody species from dominating. Drought and herbivory have more localized impacts in the reference phases, but do contribute to overall species composition, diversity, cover, and productivity.

Community 1.1
Shortbeak Sedge – Sweet Coneflower

Sites in this reference community phase are composed of sedges and hydrophytic grasses and forbs. Vegetative cover is generally continuous and dense with plants reaching heights between 1.5 and 5 feet tall (NatureServe 2015). Shortbeak sedge is the dominant species, but other sedges can be present including quill sedge and rigid sedge. Common forbs may include Virginia mountainmint (*Pycnanthemum virginianum* (L.) T. Dur & B.D. Jacks. ex B.L. Rob. & Fernald), Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis* L.), and giant goldenrod (*Solidago gigantea* Aiton). Seasonal flooding maintains the wetland plant community, while periodic fires maintain the herbaceous dominance. However, an extended fire return interval allows some wetland shrubs to establish shifting the community to phase 1.2.

Community 1.2
Sandbar Willow/Shortbeak Sedge – Sweet Coneflower

This reference community phase represents natural succession as a result of an extended fire return interval. Shrubs, such as sandbar willow (*Salix interior* Rowlee) and silky dogwood (*Cornus obliqua* Raf.), can form a scattered canopy across the sedge meadow. The prolonged absence of fire will maintain this state, but a replacement fire will shift the community back to phase 1.1.

Pathway 1.1A
Community 1.1 to 1.2

Extended fire return interval.

Pathway 1.2A
Community 1.2 to 1.1

Replacement fire.

State 2
Hydrologically-altered State

Hydrology is the most important determinant of wetlands and wetland processes. Hydrology modifies and determines the physiochemical environment (i.e., sediments, soil chemistry, water chemistry) which in turn directly affects the vegetation, animals, and microbes (Mitsch and Gosselink 2007). Human activities on landscape hydrology have greatly altered Wet Terrace Sedge Meadows. Alterations such as agricultural tile draining and conversion to cropland on adjacent lands have changed the natural hydroperiod, increased the rate of sedimentation, and intensified nutrient pollution (Werner and Zedler 2003; Mitsch and Gosselink 2007).

Community 2.1
Reed Canarygrass – Shortbeak Sedge

This community phase represents the early changes to the natural wetland hydroperiod, sedimentation, and nutrient runoff. Sedimentation results in a reduction of soil organic matter and high dry bulk density. It also leads to a homogenization of the local microtopography, reducing the surface area and associated species diversity (Green and Galatowitsch 2002; Werner and Zedler 2002). Native sedges continue to form a component of the herbaceous layer, but the highly-invasive reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea* L.) co-dominates.

Community 2.2
Reed Canarygrass

Sites falling into this community phase have experienced significant sedimentation and are dominated by a monoculture of reed canarygrass (NatureServe 2015). Reed canarygrass stands can significantly alter the physiochemical environment as well as the biotic communities, making the site only suitable to reed canarygrass. These monotypic stands create a positive feedback loop that perpetuates increasing sedimentation, altered hydrology, and dominance by this non-native species, especially in sites affected by nutrient enrichment from agricultural runoff (Vitousek 1995; Bernard and Lauve 1995; Green and Galatowitsch 2002; Werner and Zedler 2002; Kercher et al. 2007; Waggy 2010).

Pathway 2.1A
Community 2.1 to 2.2

Continuing alterations to the natural hydrology and increasing sedimentation.

State 3
Forage State

The forage state occurs when the reference state is converted to a farming operation that emphasizes domestic livestock production known as grassland agriculture. Fire suppression, periodic cultural treatments (e.g., clipping, drainage, soil amendment applications, planting new species and/or cultivars, mechanical harvesting), hydrologic alterations and grazing by domesticated livestock transition and maintain this state (USDA-NRCS 2003). Early settlers seeded non-native species, such as smooth brome (*Bromus inermis* Leyss.) and Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis* L.), to help extend the grazing season (Smith 1998). Over time, as lands were continuously harvested or grazed by herds of cattle, the non-native species were able to spread and expand across the landscape, reducing the native species diversity and ecological function.

Community 3.1
Hayfield

Sites in this community phase consist of forage plants that are planted and mechanically harvested. Mechanical harvesting removes much of the aboveground biomass and nutrients that feed the soil microorganisms (Franzluebbers et al. 2000; USDA-NRCS 2003). As a result, soil biology is reduced leading to decreases in nutrient uptake by plants, soil organic matter, and soil aggregation. Frequent biomass removal can also reduce the site’s carbon sequestration capacity (Skinner 2008).

Community 3.2
Continuous Pastured Grazing

This community phase is characterized by continuous grazing where domestic livestock graze a pasture for the entire season. Depending on stocking density, this can result in lower forage quality and productivity, weed invasions, and uneven pasture use. Continuous grazing can also increase the amount of bare ground and erosion and reduce soil organic matter, cation exchange capacity, water-holding capacity, and nutrient availability and retention (Bharati et al. 2002; Leake et al. 2004; Teague et al. 2011). Smooth brome, Kentucky bluegrass, and white clover (*Trifolium repens* L.) are common pasture species used in this phase. Their tolerance to continuous grazing has allowed these species to dominate, sometimes completely excluding the native vegetation.

Community 3.3
Periodic-rest Pastured Grazing

This community phase is characterized by periodic-rest grazing where the pasture has been subdivided into several smaller paddocks. Subdividing the pasture in this way allows livestock to utilize one or a few paddocks, while the remaining area is rested allowing plants to restore vigor and energy reserves, deepen root systems, develop seeds, as well as allow seedling establishment (Undersander et al. 2002; USDA-NRCS 2003). Periodic-rest pastured grazing includes deferred periods, rest periods, and periods of high intensity – low frequency, and short duration methods. Vegetation is generally more diverse and can include orchardgrass (*Dactylis glomerata* L.), timothy (Phleum pretense L.), red clover (*Trifolium pratense* L.), and alfalfa (*Medicago sativa* L.). The addition of native prairie species can further bolster plant diversity and, in turn, soil function. This community phase promotes numerous ecosystem benefits including increasing biodiversity, preventing soil erosion, maintaining and enhancing soil quality, sequestering atmospheric carbon, and improving water yield and quality (USDA-NRCS 2003).

Pathway 3.1A
Community 3.1 to 3.2

Mechanical harvesting is replaced with domestic livestock utilizing continuous grazing.

Pathway 3.1B
Community 3.1 to 3.3

Mechanical harvesting is replaced with domestic livestock utilizing periodic-rest grazing.

Pathway 3.2A
Community 3.2 to 3.1

Domestic livestock are removed, and mechanical harvesting is implemented.

Pathway 3.2B
Community 3.2 to 3.3

Periodic-rest grazing replaces continuous grazing.

Pathway 3.3B
Community 3.3 to 3.1

Domestic livestock are removed, and mechanical harvesting is implemented.

Pathway 3.3A
Community 3.3 to 3.2

Continuous grazing replaces periodic-rest grazing.

State 4
Cropland State

Hydrologic alterations and the continuous use of tillage, row-crop planting, and chemicals (i.e., herbicides, fertilizers, etc.) have effectively eliminated the reference community and many of its natural ecological functions in favor of crop production. Corn and soybeans are the dominant crops for the site, and oats (Avena L.) and alfalfa (*Medicago sativa* L.) may be rotated periodically. These areas are likely to remain in crop production for the foreseeable future.

Community 4.1
Conventional Tillage Field

Sites in this community phase typically consist of monoculture row-cropping maintained by conventional tillage practices. They are cropped in either continuous corn or alternating periods of corn and soybean crops. The frequent use of deep tillage, low crop diversity, and bare soil conditions during the non-growing season negatively impacts soil health. Under these practices, soil aggregation is reduced or destroyed, soil organic matter is reduced, erosion and runoff are increased, and infiltration is decreased, which can ultimately lead to undesirable changes in the hydrology of the watershed (Tomer et al. 2005).

Community 4.2
Conservation Tillage Field

This community phase is characterized by periodically alternating crops and utilizing various conservation tillage methods to promote soil health and reduce erosion. Conservation tillage methods include strip-till, ridge-till, vertical-till, or no-till planting operations. Strip-till keeps seedbed preparation to narrow bands less than one-third the width of the row where crop residue and soil consolidation are left undisturbed in-between seedbed areas. Strip-till planting may be completed in the fall and nutrient application either occurs simultaneously or at the time of planting. Ridge-till uses specialized equipment to create ridges in the seedbed and vegetative residue is left on the surface in between the ridges. Weeds are controlled with herbicides and/or cultivation, seedbed ridges are rebuilt during cultivation, and soils are left undisturbed from harvest to planting. Vertical-till operations employ machinery that lightly tills the soil and cuts up crop residue, mixing some of the residue into the top few inches of the soil while leaving a large portion on the surface. No-till management is the most conservative, disturbing soils only at the time of planting and fertilizer application. Compared to conventional tillage operations, conservation tillage methods can improve soil ecosystem function by reducing soil erosion, increasing organic matter and water availability, improving water quality, and reducing soil compaction.

Community 4.3
Conservation Tillage Field/Alternative Crop Field

This community phase applies conservation tillage methods as described above as well as adds cover crop practices. Cover crops typically include nitrogen-fixing species (e.g., legumes), small grains (e.g., rye, wheat, oats), or forage covers (e.g., turnips, radishes, rapeseed). The addition of cover crops not only adds plant diversity but also promotes soil health by reducing soil erosion, limiting nitrogen leaching, suppressing weeds, increasing soil organic matter, and improving the overall soil ecosystem. In the case of small grain cover crops, surface cover and water infiltration are increased, while forage covers can be used to graze livestock or support local wildlife. Of the three community phases for this state, this phase promotes the greatest soil sustainability and improves ecological functioning within a row crop operation.

Pathway 4.1A
Community 4.1 to 4.2

Tillage operations are greatly reduced, alternating crops occurs on a regular interval, and crop residue remains on the soil surface.

Pathway 4.1B
Community 4.1 to 4.3

Tillage operations are greatly reduced or eliminated, alternating crops occurs on a regular interval, crop residue remains on the soil surface, and cover crops are planted following crop harvest.

Pathway 4.2A
Community 4.2 to 4.1

Intensive tillage is utilized, and monoculture row-cropping is established.

Pathway 4.2B
Community 4.2 to 4.3

Cover crops are implemented to minimize soil erosion.

Pathway 4.3B
Community 4.3 to 4.1

Intensive tillage is utilized, cover crops practices are abandoned, monoculture row-cropping is established on a more-or-less continuous basis.

Pathway 4.3A
Community 4.3 to 4.2

Cover crop practices are abandoned.

State 5
Reconstructed Sedge Meadow State

Sedge meadow habitats provide multiple ecosystem services including flood abatement, water quality improvement, and biodiversity support. However, many sedge meadow communities have been stressed from watershed-scale changes in hydrology or eliminated as a result of type conversions to agricultural production, thereby significantly reducing these services (Zedler 2003). The extensive alterations of lands adjacent to Wet Terrace Sedge Meadows may not allow for restoration back to the historic reference condition. However, ecological reconstruction can aim to aid the recovery of degraded, damaged or destroyed functions. A successful reconstruction will have the ability to structurally and functionally sustain itself, demonstrate resilience to the natural ranges of stress and disturbance, and create and maintain positive biotic and abiotic interactions (SER 2002; Mitsch and Jørgensen 2004).

Community 5.1
Early Successional Sedge Meadow

This community phase represents the early community assembly from sedge meadow reconstruction and is highly dependent on seed viability, hydroperiod, soil organic matter content, and site preparation. Successful establishment of sedges can be maximized by using seed collected during the same growing season, utilizing genotypes adapted to the environmental location, ensuring soil moisture is saturated at the time of seeding, and improving the water holding capacity and fertility of the soil (Budelsky and Galatowitsch 1999; van der Valk et al. 1999; Mitsch and Gosselink 2007; Hall and Zedler 2010). In addition, suppression and removal of non-native species is essential for reducing competition (Perry and Galatowitsch 2003).

Community 5.2
Late Successional Sedge Meadow

Appropriately timed disturbance regimes (e.g., hydroperiod, prescribed fire) and nutrient management applied to the early successional community phase can help increase the species richness, pushing the site into a late successional community phase over time (Mitsch and Gosselink 2007).

Pathway 5.1A
Community 5.1 to 5.2

Maintenance of proper hydrology and nutrient balances in line with a developed wetland management plant.

Pathway 5.2A
Community 5.2 to 5.1

Reconstruction experiences a setback from extreme weather event or improper timing of management actions.

Transition T1A
State 1 to 2

Direct and indirect alterations to the landscape hydrology from human-induced land development transition the site to the hydrologically-altered state (2).

Transition T1B
State 1 to 3

Cultural treatments to enhance forage quality and yield transition the site to the forage state (3).

Transition T1C
State 1 to 4

Installation of drain tiles, seeding of agricultural crops, and non-selective herbicide transition the site to the cropland state (4).

Transition T2A
State 2 to 3

Cultural treatments to enhance forage quality and yield transition the site to the forage state (3).

Transition T2B
State 2 to 4

Installation of drain tiles, seeding of agricultural crops, and non-selective herbicide transition the site to the cropland state (4).

Restoration pathway R2A
State 2 to 5

Hydroperiod restoration, site preparation, non-native species control, and seeding native species transition the site to the reconstructed sedge meadow state (5).

Transition T3A
State 3 to 2

Land abandonment transitions the site to the hydrologically-altered (2).

Transition T3B
State 3 to 4

Tillage, seeding of agricultural crops, and non-selective herbicide transition this site to the cropland state (4).

Restoration pathway R3A
State 3 to 5

Site preparation, tree planting, invasive species control, and seeding native species transition this site to the reconstructed sedge meadow state (5).

Transition T4A
State 4 to 2

Land abandonment transitions the site to the hydrologically-altered state (2).

Transition T4B
State 4 to 3

Cultural treatments to enhance forage quality and yield transitions the site to the forage state (3).

Restoration pathway R4A
State 4 to 5

Site preparation, tree planting, invasive species control, and seeding native species transition this site to the reconstructed sedge meadow state (5).

Transition T5A
State 5 to 2

Fire suppression and removal of active management transitions this site to the hydrologically-altered (2).

Transition T5B
State 5 to 3

Cultural treatments to enhance forage quality and yield transition the site to the forage state (3).

Transition T5C

State 5 to 4

Tillage, seeding of agricultural crops, and non-selective herbicide transition this site to the cropland state (4).

Additional community tables

Inventory data references

Tier 3 Sampling Plot used to develop the reference state, community phase 1.1:

State County Ownership Easting Northing
Iowa Clinton Duke Prairie – Clinton County Conservation Board 693180 4627814

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Contributors

Lisa Kluesner
Ryan Dermody

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Drake University:
Dr. Tom Rosburg, Professor of Ecology and Botany, Des Moines, IA

Iowa Department of Natural Resources:
John Pearson, Ecologist, Des Moines, IA
Greg Schmitt, Private Lands Biologist, West Union, IA

Conservation Districts of Iowa:
Sean Kluesner, Private Lands Wetland Easement Team Specialist, New Hampton, IA

LANDFIRE (The Nature Conservancy):
Randy Swaty, Ecologist, Evanston, IL

Natural Resources Conservation Service :
Rick Bednarek, Iowa State Soil Scientist, Des Moines, IA
Scott Brady, Acting Regional Ecological Site Specialist, Havre, MT
Leland Camp, Soil Scientist, Waverly, IA
Patrick Chase, Area Resource Soil Scientist, Fort Dodge, IA
Stacey Clark, Regional Ecological Site Specialist, St. Paul, MN
James Cronin, State Biologist, Des Moines, IA
Ryan Dermody, Soil Survey Leader, Waverly, IA
Tonie Endres, Senior Regional Soil Scientist, Indianapolis, IN
Gregg Hadish, GIS Specialist, Des Moines, IA
John Hammerly, Soil Data Quality Specialist, Indianapolis, IN
Lisa Kluesner, Ecological Site Specialist, Waverly, IA
Jeff Matthias, State Grassland Specialist, Des Moines, IA
Louis Moran, Area Resource Soil Scientist, Sioux City, IA
Kevin Norwood, Soil Survey Regional Director, Indianapolis, IN
James Phillips, GIS Specialist, Des Moines, IA
Neil Sass, Area Resource Soil Scientist, West Union, IA
Jason Steele, Area Resource Soil Scientist, Fairfield, IA

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	05/01/2024
Approved by	Chris Tecklenburg
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:

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

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

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

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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:**

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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:**
