

# Ecological site F139XY013OH

## Mucky Depression

Last updated: 6/04/2024

Accessed: 04/10/2026

### 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): 139X–Lake Erie Glaciated Plateau

This area is mostly the northwest portion of the Allegheny Plateau, which is a gently to strongly rolling, and dissected glaciated highland. Along the north escarpment is a narrow

band of flat plains along Lake Erie. Stream valleys are narrow and are not deeply incised, but the valley walls are typically steep. In some areas the interfluvies are broad and nearly level. Elevation ranges from 174 m on Lake Erie to 663 m (570 to 2175 ft) increasing from north to south. Local topographic relief averages 20 m and ranges up to 267 m (65 to 875 ft) (unpublished analysis of digital elevation model downloaded from USGS, 2015).

Most of the rivers in this MLRA flow north to Lake Erie. Other rivers flowing south are part the Ohio River system, including headwaters of the Ohio River, in the northeast corner of this area, in Pennsylvania. The headwaters of the Muskingum River are in the central part of the area, in Ohio. The Grand River is designated as a National Wild and Scenic River in northeastern Ohio.

The bedrock in this area consists mostly of alternating beds of sandstone, siltstone, and shale of upper Devonian, Mississippian, and Pennsylvanian age (USDA-NRCS, 2022). Shale units are dominant closer to the surface along Lake Erie and the western edge of the area. The surface is mantled with glacial till, outwash of unconsolidated sand and gravel, glacial lake sediments, and stratified drift deposits (kames and eskers). The outwash, lake sediments, and stratified drift deposits that fill valleys are important sources of ground water. Younger stream deposits cover the glacial deposits in some of the river valleys.

The dominant soil order in this MLRA is Alfisols (USDA-NRCS, 2022). The soils in the area dominantly have a mesic soil temperature regime, an aquic or udic soil moisture regime, and mixed or illitic mineralogy. They are very deep, well drained to poorly drained, and loamy or clayey. The calcareous till on the northwestern lowland till plains have generally higher clay content and are dominated by Epiaqualfs (Mahoning series). Hapludalfs formed in outwash deposits on outwash plains, terraces, kames, and beach ridges (Chili series), and in till on till plains (Ellsworth series).

In contrast, the southeastern plateau has till capped with loess which is lower in carbonates and lower in clay relative to silt. Here fragipans commonly develop into Fragiudalfs (Canfield, Rittman, and Wooster series) and Fragiaqualfs (Frenchtown, Platea, Ravenna, Sheffield, Venango, and Wadsworth series) formed in till. This low carbonate/low clay trend combined with increased slope results in otherwise loamy soils with less clay film development, Dysdrudepts (Allard), becoming more common eastward. The southeast edge of the region was not glaciated during the most recent (Wisconsin) glaciation. Accordingly, the till deposits are more highly weathered and depleted of their bases as Fragiaquults (Alvira) and Fragiudults (Hanover). Due to the shallow nature of the glacial drift (plus any residuum and colluvium) towards the southeastern extreme of the MLRA, some of the soil series have bedrock within 50 cm and are thereby classified in Lithic subgroups, which are otherwise rare. The southern MLRA boundary is marked by unglaciated colluvium and residuum (mostly Dysdrudepts and Hapludults).

This area supports a matrix of North-Central Interior Beech-Maple Forest on the west across a wide range of upland substrates and drainage classes, but mostly on flat to

rolling, somewhat poorly drained fine tills (Landfire, 2017; Whitney, 1982). The matrix forest type transitions to Appalachian (Hemlock) Northern Hardwood Forest to the east (a function of increased precipitation and elevations, and decreasing calcium in the till). The transition to northern hardwoods may be geographically approximated with a separate ecological inference area starting near the Pennsylvania state line, eastward. The extensive flat interfluvial areas of fragipans and episaturated poorly drained tills may have patches of North-Central Interior Wet Flatwoods, whereas wetlands on loamy outwash lowlands are Central Interior and Appalachian Swamp Systems. Larger streams and river floodplains host Central Interior and Appalachian Floodplain Systems, but smaller creek margins may be more consistent with Central Interior and Appalachian Riparian Systems. In more rugged topography, concave slopes, particularly in older till areas is convergent with the concept of South-Central Interior Mesophytic Forest of unglaciated areas to the south. Northeastern Interior Dry-Mesic Oak Forest feathers into the area near Native American village sites due to local fire use, but also on convex slopes, coarser parent material, and older, more weathered till and residuum. Some outliers of Allegheny-Cumberland Dry Oak Forest and Woodland and Central Appalachian Dry Oak-Pine Forest may occur along sandstone outcrops and convex slopes on thin drift toward the southeastern edge of the area.

About three-fourths of this area is in farms. Feed grains (corn, soybeans, winter wheat, and oats) and forage (grass-legume hay, tall fescue pasture, and alfalfa hay) for dairy cattle are the main crops in the western part of the area. Similar crops are grown in the eastern part, where there are many part-time farms and many rural residences. The area has some cow-calf operations. Some areas are used for potatoes or small fruit crops. A large amount of the milk produced in the area is converted to cheese. The areas of hardwood forest in the MLRA are mainly in farm woodlots. Sawlogs for rough construction, firewood, and some high-quality sawlogs for specialty uses are harvested from the numerous farm woodlots. Some large holdings are used for watershed protection. Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Pymatuning State Park (Pennsylvania), Presque Isle State Park (Pennsylvania), and Erie National Wildlife Refuge are among the more notable conservation lands.

Summary of existing land use (USGS, 2011):

Upland Forest (39%)

Hardwood (33%)

Conifer (3%)

Conifer-Hardwood (3%)

Agricultural (30%)

Developed (24%)

Swamps and Marshes (5%)

## **Classification relationships**

The USFS ecoregion classification for the majority of MLRA 139 is the Humid Temperate Domain, Hot Continental Division, Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province 222, Western

Glaciated Allegheny Plateau Section 221F (Cleland et al, 2007). The ecoregion subsection composition is 221Fa (Allegheny Plateau), 221Fb (Grand River-Pymatuning Lowlands), and 221Fc (Akron Kames). Along Lake Erie the land is classified as Midwest Broadleaf Forest Province, Erie and Ontario Lake Plain Section 222I. This narrow strip is subsection 222Ia (Lake Erie Plain). The southeast extreme or MLRA 139 that is of older glacial till and into the adjacent unglaciated MLRAs is classified as Warm Continental Division, Northeastern Mixed Forest Province 211, Northern Unglaciated Allegheny Plateau Section 211G. This small area is subsection 211Ga.

A majority of MLRA 139 is occupied by the EPA ecoregion 61c (Low Lime Drift Plain) with inclusions of 61b (Mosquito Creek/Pymatuning Lowlands), 61d (Erie Gorges), and 61e (Summit Interlobate Area). The northern strip along Lake Erie is 83a (Erie/Ontario Lake Plain) (Omernik and Griffith, 2014). The EPA ecoregions 62d (Unglaciated High Allegheny Plateau) and 70c (Pittsburgh Low Plateau) overlap the older till southern fringe of MLRA 139.

## Ecological site concept

The central concept of the Mucky Depressions is organic soils (typically muck) of intermediate pHs (5-7). Small delineations occur as base slope seeps. May occur on former lake beds as organic flats with minerotrophic ground water influence, with or without the accumulation of carbonates with depth. In more ombrotrophic depressions they may form in depressions that receive nutrient rich surface runoff from adjacent uplands. Vegetation tends to reflect high fertility, but patches may tend towards more acidic bog in stagnate areas or fen-like where groundwater flow is strongest.

## Associated sites

F139XY011OH	<b>Wet Calcareous Depression</b>
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## Similar sites

F139XY014OH	<b>Acidic Peaty Depression</b>
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) <i>Larix laricina</i> (2) <i>Acer rubrum</i>
Shrub	(1) <i>Dasiphora fruticosa</i>
Herbaceous	Not specified

## Physiographic features

Site occurs in depressions and toe slopes in glacial drift where groundwater maintains low

oxygen levels inhibiting the decay of thick layer of muck.

**Table 2. Representative physiographic features**

Landforms	(1) Depression
Runoff class	Negligible to low
Elevation	568–2,231 ft
Water table depth	0 in
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

## Climatic features

Mean annual extreme minimum temperatures range from -28.5 to -18.5 °C (-19 to -1 °F), or hardiness zones 5a to 6b (USDA, 2009). The warmest summer and winter temperatures, longer growing seasons, and less extreme highs and lows occur in the lowlands adjacent to Lake Erie. Temperatures inland decrease with elevation. Rainfall occurs as high-intensity, convective thunderstorms during the summer. Mean annual snowfall ranges from 0.4 to 5.6 m (15 to 220 in) (NOAA Climate Normals, 1981-2010). Maximum snowfall occurs on the higher hills at the northern edge of the Allegheny Plateau adjacent to Lake Erie, where air moistened by the lake is uplifted and cooled into narrow intense bands of lake effect snow. The higher elevations of the eastern plateau with its generally cooler summers and much higher precipitation to potential evapotranspiration ratios (>2.0, perhumid), warrants consideration as a separate ecological inference area.

**Table 3. Representative climatic features**

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	113-146 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	152-183 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	39-45 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	104-154 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	140-199 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	38-47 in
Frost-free period (average)	130 days
Freeze-free period (average)	167 days
Precipitation total (average)	42 in

## Climate stations used

- (1) CHARDON [USC00331458], Chardon, OH

- (2) OBERLIN [USC00336196], Oberlin, OH
- (3) CORRY [USC00361790], Corry, PA
- (4) SLIPPERY ROCK 1 SSW [USC00368184], Slippery Rock, PA
- (5) TITUSVILLE WTR WKS [USC00368888], Titusville, PA
- (6) AKRON CANTON RGNL AP [USW00014895], North Canton, OH
- (7) JAMESTOWN 4 ENE [USC00304207], Jamestown, NY
- (8) ASHLAND 2 SW [USC00330256], Ashland, OH
- (9) KIRTLAND-HOLDEN 2 [USC00334260], Chardon, OH
- (10) MANSFIELD 5 W [USC00334874], Mansfield, OH
- (11) NORWALK WWTP [USC00336118], Norwalk, OH
- (12) WOOSTER EXP STN [USC00339312], Wooster, OH
- (13) MEADVILLE 1 S [USC00365606], Meadville, PA
- (14) YOUNGSTOWN RGNL AP [USW00014852], Vienna, OH
- (15) ERIE INTL AP [USW00014860], Erie, PA
- (16) AKRON [USC00330061], Akron, OH
- (17) DORSET [USC00332251], Dorset, OH
- (18) HIRAM [USC00333780], Garrettsville, OH
- (19) MILLPORT 4 NE [USC00335315], Lisbon, OH
- (20) MINERAL RIDGE WTR WKS [USC00335356], Mineral Ridge, OH
- (21) FRANKLIN [USC00363028], Franklin, PA
- (22) JAMESTOWN 2 NW [USC00364325], Jamestown, PA
- (23) LINESVILLE 1 S [USC00365050], Linesville, PA
- (24) NEW CASTLE 1 N [USC00366233], New Castle, PA
- (25) SPRINGBORO 3 WNW [USC00368361], Springboro, PA
- (26) ASHTABULA [USC00330264], Ashtabula, OH
- (27) CANFIELD 1 S [USC00331245], Canfield, OH
- (28) ELYRIA 3 E [USC00332599], North Ridgeville, OH
- (29) WARREN 3 S [USC00338769], Niles, OH
- (30) GREENVILLE 2 NE [USC00363526], Greenville, PA
- (31) MERCER [USC00365651], Mercer, PA
- (32) CLEVELAND [USW00014820], Cleveland, OH

## **Influencing water features**

Site has a stable source of minerotrophic groundwater flowing through it at less than 25 cm in depth.

## **Soil features**

Soils are very poorly drained muck. They are commonly classified Typic Medisaprists, Typic Haplosaprists, and Terric Medisaprists, and commonly mapped as Carlisle, Palms, and Linwood series or components.

**Table 4. Representative soil features**

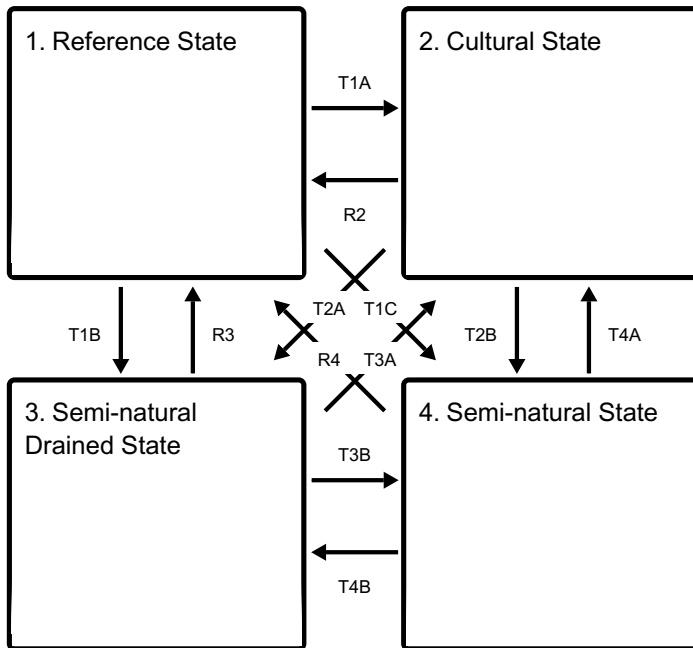
Parent material	(1) Organic material
Surface texture	(1) Muck (2) Marl
Drainage class	Very poorly drained
Permeability class	Slow to moderately rapid
Soil depth	79 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (0-39.4in)	35–55 in
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-19.7in)	5.5–8
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (0-59.1in)	0%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (0-59.1in)	0%

## Ecological dynamics

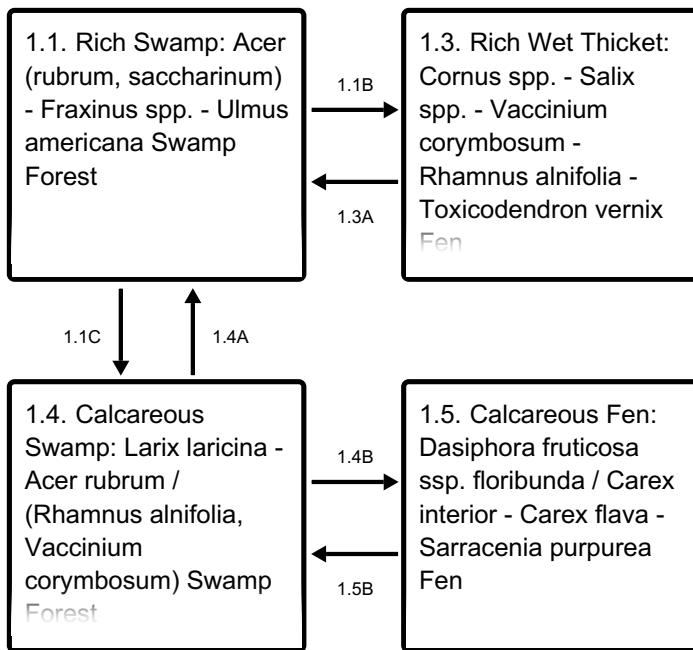
Mucky Depression tends to share the same ecological dynamics as Natureserve/Landfire system, Central Interior and Appalachian Swamp Systems (Landfire, 2017). Stand replacing fires occurred every 500-2000 years, while light surface fires were very rare. Overstory was dominated by species like tamarack (*Larix laricina*) and red maple (*Acer rubrum*) which thrive in soils saturated with minerotrophic groundwater. The minerotrophic groundwater seeping into the mucks supports an understory of marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) and skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*). Open phases may have calcium-loving shrubs like shrubby cinquefoil (*Dasiphora fruticosa*).

## State and transition model

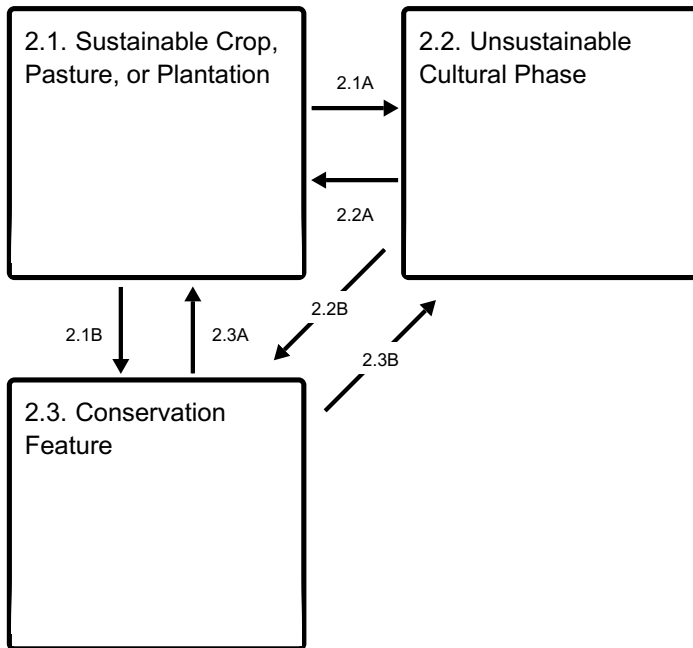
## Ecosystem states



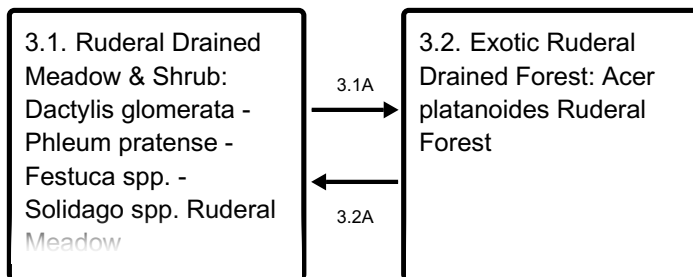
## State 1 submodel, plant communities



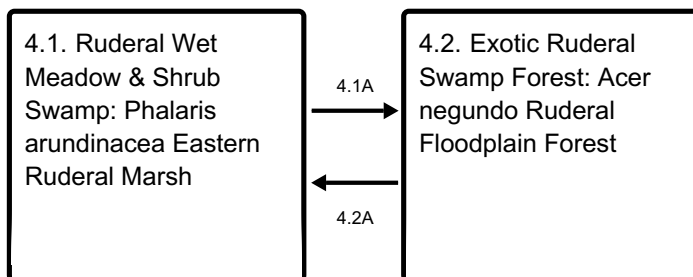
### State 2 submodel, plant communities



### State 3 submodel, plant communities



### State 4 submodel, plant communities



## State 1 Reference State

The Reference State consists of plant-community-types in settings where natural ecological processes are operating that are unmanaged or only minimally-managed by land-use conditioning, e.g., ranging from old-growth plant community-types (sometimes construed as mature, or pre-settlement vegetation) to inherent transitional ruderal plant community-type phases.

### Dominant plant species

- tamarack (*Larix laricina*), tree
- red maple (*Acer rubrum*), tree

- shrubby cinquefoil (*Dasiphora fruticosa*), shrub

### **Community 1.1**

**Rich Swamp: Acer (rubrum, saccharinum) - Fraxinus spp. - Ulmus americana Swamp Forest**

### **Community 1.2**

**Rich Wet Thicket: Cornus spp. - Salix spp. - Vaccinium corymbosum - Rhamnus alnifolia - Toxicodendron vernix Fen**

### **Community 1.3**

**Calcareous Swamp: Larix laricina - Acer rubrum / (Rhamnus alnifolia, Vaccinium corymbosum) Swamp Forest**

### **Community 1.4**

**Calcareous Fen: Dasiphora fruticosa ssp. floribunda / Carex interior - Carex flava - Sarracenia purpurea Fen**

### **Pathway 1.1B**

**Community 1.1 to 1.2**

Clearcut/Blowdown/Fire.

#### **Conservation practices**

Prescribed Burning
Early Successional Habitat Development/Management
Forest Stand Improvement

### **Pathway 1.1C**

**Community 1.1 to 1.3**

Increase peat or marl thickness, decrease nitrogen or phosphorus availability

### **Pathway 1.3A**

**Community 1.2 to 1.1**

Succession.

#### **Conservation practices**

Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
Tree/Shrub Establishment

**Pathway 1.4A**  
**Community 1.3 to 1.1**

Decrease peat or marl thickness, increase nitrogen or phosphorus availability.

**Pathway 1.4B**  
**Community 1.3 to 1.4**

Clearcut/Blowdown/Fire.

**Conservation practices**

Prescribed Burning
Early Successional Habitat Development/Management
Forest Stand Improvement

**Pathway 1.5B**  
**Community 1.4 to 1.3**

Succession.

**Conservation practices**

Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
Tree/Shrub Establishment

**State 2**  
**Cultural State**

The Cultural State includes settings where natural ecological processes are absent or eclipsed by significant land-use conditioning and the conversion/transformation of plant cover is considered as Cultivated/Pasture/Plantation.

**Community 2.1**  
**Sustainable Crop, Pasture, or Plantation**

**Community 2.2**  
**Unsustainable Cultural Phase**

**Community 2.3**  
**Conservation Feature**

Can be a grassed waterway, conservation reserve, a small patch pollinator garden, or other land taken out of its primary cultural production to mitigate or reduce impacts of adjacent land use, and is not by itself a permanent restoration of a complete native biological community and associated ecosystem services.

### **Pathway 2.1A**

#### **Community 2.1 to 2.2**

Revert to unsustainable cultural practices.

### **Pathway 2.1B**

#### **Community 2.1 to 2.3**

Establish conservation feature.

#### **Conservation practices**

Conservation Cover
Grassed Waterway

### **Pathway 2.2A**

#### **Community 2.2 to 2.1**

Implement sustainable cultural practices.

#### **Conservation practices**

Conservation Crop Rotation
Cover Crop
Nutrient Management
Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

### **Pathway 2.2B**

#### **Community 2.2 to 2.3**

Establish conservation feature.

#### **Conservation practices**

Conservation Cover
Grassed Waterway

**Pathway 2.3A**  
**Community 2.3 to 2.1**

Implement sustainable cultural practices.

**Conservation practices**

Conservation Crop Rotation
Cover Crop
Nutrient Management
Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

**Pathway 2.3B**  
**Community 2.3 to 2.2**

Revert to unsustainable cultural practices.

**State 3**  
**Semi-natural Drained State**

The Semi-natural Drained State consists of plant community-types in settings where natural ecological processes are primarily still operating but with effects of drainage in the past or present.

**Community 3.1**  
**Ruderal Drained Meadow & Shrub: *Dactylis glomerata* - *Phleum pratense*  
- *Festuca* spp. - *Solidago* spp. Ruderal Meadow**

**Community 3.2**  
**Exotic Ruderal Drained Forest: *Acer platanoides* Ruderal Forest**

**Pathway 3.1A**  
**Community 3.1 to 3.2**

Succession

**Pathway 3.2A**  
**Community 3.2 to 3.1**

Blowdown/clearcut.

**Conservation practices**

Early Successional Habitat Development/Management
Forest Stand Improvement

## **State 4**

### **Semi-natural State**

The Semi-natural State consists of plant community-types in settings where natural ecological processes are primarily still operating but with some land-use conditioning in the past or present, e.g., varieties of managed sites with replacement plant community-types such as results of harvests or planting, or settings that possess a significant artifact of land management e.g., predominately invasive plants.

### **Community 4.1**

#### **Ruderal Wet Meadow & Shrub Swamp: *Phalaris arundinacea* Eastern Ruderal Marsh**

### **Community 4.2**

#### **Exotic Ruderal Swamp Forest: *Acer negundo* Ruderal Floodplain Forest**

#### **Pathway 4.1A**

#### **Community 4.1 to 4.2**

Succession.

#### **Pathway 4.2A**

#### **Community 4.2 to 4.1**

Blowdown/clearcut.

### **Conservation practices**

Early Successional Habitat Development/Management
Forest Stand Improvement

### **Transition T1A**

#### **State 1 to 2**

Drain; clear vegetation; cultivate domesticated species.

### **Transition T1B**

#### **State 1 to 3**

Drain; clear vegetation, invasive species introduced.

### **Transition T1C**

#### **State 1 to 4**

Clear vegetation, invasive species introduced.

### **Restoration pathway R2**

#### **State 2 to 1**

Restore hydrology; remove domesticated species; restore native species.

#### **Conservation practices**

Brush Management
Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitats
Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management
Wetland Restoration
Herbaceous Weed Control

### **Transition T2A**

#### **State 2 to 3**

Abandon, succession.

### **Transition T2B**

#### **State 2 to 4**

Restore hydrology; abandon; succession.

#### **Conservation practices**

Wetland Restoration
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### **Restoration pathway R3**

#### **State 3 to 1**

Restore hydrology; control invasive species; restore native species

#### **Conservation practices**

Brush Management
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Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitats
Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management
Wetland Restoration
Herbaceous Weed Control

### **Transition T3A**

#### **State 3 to 2**

Clear vegetation; cultivate domesticated species.

### **Transition T3B**

#### **State 3 to 4**

Restore hydrology.

#### **Conservation practices**

Wetland Restoration
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### **Restoration pathway R4**

#### **State 4 to 1**

Control invasive species; restore native species.

#### **Conservation practices**

Brush Management
Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitats
Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management
Herbaceous Weed Control

### **Transition T4A**

#### **State 4 to 2**

Drain; clear vegetation; cultivate domesticated species.

### **Transition T4B**

#### **State 4 to 3**

Drain.

## **Additional community tables**

### **Inventory data references**

Future work, as described in a project plan, to validate the information in this provisional ecological site description is needed. This will include field activities to collect low and medium intensity sampling, soil correlations, and analysis of that data. Annual field reviews should be done by soil scientists and vegetation specialists. A final field review, peer review, quality control, and quality assurance reviews of the ESD will be needed to produce the final document. Annual reviews of the project plan are to be conducted by the Ecological Site Technical Team.

### **Other references**

References consulted for MLRA 139 PES:

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## Contributors

Greg J. Schmidt

## 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	04/10/2026
Approved by	Nels Barrett
Approval date	

## Indicators

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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:**

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