

Ecological site F143XY304ME

Wet Flat

Accessed: 05/03/2024

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): 143X–Northeastern Mountains

MLRA 143, known as the Northeastern Mountains, covers approximately 23 million acres of mountains, hills, and valleys in northern Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, and Massachusetts. The area is sparsely populated, with less than five percent of the land area developed for agriculture, residential, and urban development. About 90 percent of the area is forested, most of which is actively managed for timber. Elevations are mostly between 1,000 to 4,000 feet, with a few isolated peaks more than 5,000 feet above sea level. The present day mountains are but remnants of a much larger ancient range that has been eroding for approximately 500 million years. Bedrock consists of mostly very old metamorphic rock (gneiss, schist, slate, marble, quartzite, etc.) with younger intrusions of igneous rock (e.g. granite and granodiorite) from the Triassic and Cretaceous periods. MLRA 143 differs somewhat geologically from its neighboring MLRAs (142, 144A, 144B, 145, and 146), which have greater amounts of nutrient-rich sedimentary rock. Compared to MLRA 143, they are all lower in elevation, with longer growing seasons large areas that were once submerged by the ocean following glaciation.

The characteristic landforms and soils of northern New England were derived from the massive continental ice sheet that engulfed the region during North America's most recent glaciation. Mighty glaciers, embedded with sediment and rock fragments, scoured bedrock and compacted mineral beds in a steady march south and east toward the Atlantic Ocean. The softer sedimentary rocks were pulverized into fine silts and clays under the immense weight of ice a mile thick, while the more resistant igneous and metamorphic rocks were sculpted into steep mountains and hills or plucked and dragged along the base of the glacier. With a warming climate, the ice retreated northward, depositing a thin layer of unsorted glacial till sediment atop the newly-exposed bedrock and compacted mineral beds. Deeper mounds of unsorted till formed small hills, kames, moraines and drumlins. Enormous chunks of ice detached as the glacier retreated, melting slowly in place and forming many kettle lakes and basins where water and fine sediments collect. Raging torrents of glacial meltwater dissected much of the barren landscape, entraining coarse and fine sediments, carving river valleys, and leaving well-sorted deposits of mostly sand and gravel along the watercourse. By 10,000 years ago the ice sheet had fully receded from MLRA 143. Silty floodplains developed along perennial rivers, many of which occupy the same channels that once gushed with sediment-rich glacial meltwater. Over time, wet basins accumulated fine sediment, some dried out, and still others became acidified by organic matter inputs from colonizing vegetation.

In terms of climate, MLRA 143 is distinguished from neighboring MLRAs by a shorter growing season and the occurrence of cryic soil temperature regimes at high elevations. The majority of MLRA 143 averages 32 to 44 inches of precipitation annually with a five to six month growing season and frigid winter temperatures. However, the higher elevations may receive up to double the annual precipitation of the lower elevations, and have a three to four month growing season with extremely cold winters. As the northernmost MLRA in the region with the coldest temperatures and shortest growing season, the Northeastern Mountains have less overall tree diversity, fewer pine and oak trees, and more abundant spruce and fir trees than neighboring MLRAs.

Classification relationships

This site occurs in Ecological Site Group 3 (Wooded Wetlands) of MLRA 143 (The Northeastern Mountains), in the

Northeastern Forage and Forest Region (Land Resource Region R).

The Northeastern Forage and Forest LRR includes all of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, as well as large portions of Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Its southern boundary marks the extent of the Wisconsin ice sheet, which engulfed the entire LRR as recently as 10,000 to 15,000 years ago. Erosional and depositional processes associated with glaciation created many of the topographic patterns that distinguish MLRAs within the Northeastern region. Harder granitic and metamorphic bedrock to the north were more resistant to glacial erosion, resulting in the relatively nutrient poor mountains of MLRA 143; whereas nutrient-rich sedimentary bedrock of MLRAs 139, 140, and 146 resulted in relatively flat, fertile landscapes ideal for cultivation. Other areas were depressed below sea-level by the sheer mass of the glacier, resulting in pockets of marine sediments which distinguish MLRAs 142, 144A, 144B, and 145.

Precipitation is sufficient to support productive forestland throughout the Northeastern region. Still, a latitudinal temperature gradient from mesic to frigid soil temperatures results in a general transition from central hardwoods and pine in the southern MLRAs to northern hardwoods and spruce-fir forests farther north (no true boreal forests exist in the region). Elevations are generally low throughout the Northeastern region, with the exception of MLRA 143 which has many high mountain ecosystems with cryic temperature regimes and alpine vegetation above the tree line.

Ecological site concept

This site occurs in gently sloping areas near the bottom of watersheds where water saturates glacial till deposits for much of the growing season. Soils are poorly-drained with varying textures and parent materials. The water table is seasonally high (within 18 inches of the surface) and typically dries out in late summer and fall. This site is typically drier than Loamy Till Seepage Bottoms (Cedar), is not usually ponded, and does not include a major component of very poorly-drained soils. Black spruce and red spruce are abundant, with larch common and balsam fir occurring in younger patches. Cinnamon fern and other herbs are often abundant in the understory.

Associated sites

F143XY301ME	Loamy Till Swamp (Northern White Cedar) The Loamy Till Swamp site can occur downslope of the Wet Flat as soil moisture increases farther down the watershed.
F143XY303ME	Acidic Swamp The Acidic Swamp site can occur downslope of the Wet Flat as soil moisture increases farther down the watershed.
F143XY502ME	Loamy Till Toeslope The Loamy Till Toeslope can occur upslope of the Wet Flat site.
F143XY503ME	Loamy Flat The Loamy Flat site can occur upslope from the Wet Flat.

Similar sites

F143XY303ME	Acidic Swamp The Acidic Swamp site is wetter than the Wet Flat site, with both poorly- and very poorly-drained soils occurring together, whereas the Wet Flat site has only poorly-drained soils. AS a result, the Acidic Swamp supports mostly black spruce and very little red spruce.
-------------	--

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) <i>Picea rubens</i> (2) <i>Picea mariana</i>
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site occurs on gently sloping landforms of diverse origins. Though soils are poorly-drained with a seasonally-high water table, this site does not experience ponding of water on the soil surface. During dry periods from June to September, the water table may drop to more than 18 inches below the soil surface.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Till plain (2) Ground moraine (3) Lake terrace
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	3–762 m
Slope	0–8%
Water table depth	0–46 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The climate of this site is typical of MLRA 143, with very cold snowy winters, warm rainy summers, and a relatively short growing season. Precipitation is fairly constant from month to month and averages about 45 inches annually. Growing degree days ranges from 105-128 days from June to September.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	105 days
Freeze-free period (average)	128 days
Precipitation total (average)	1,143 mm

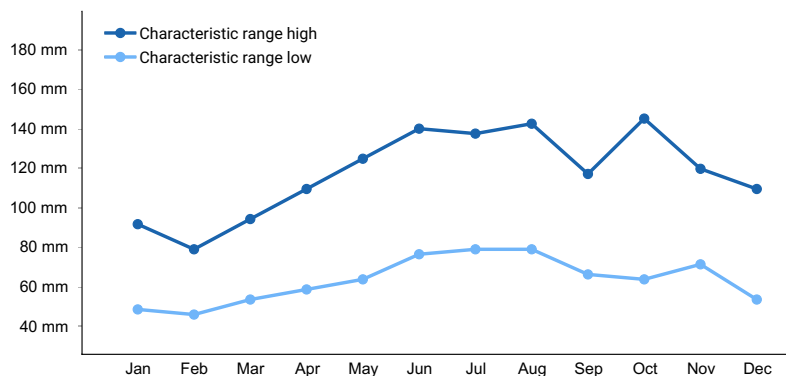


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

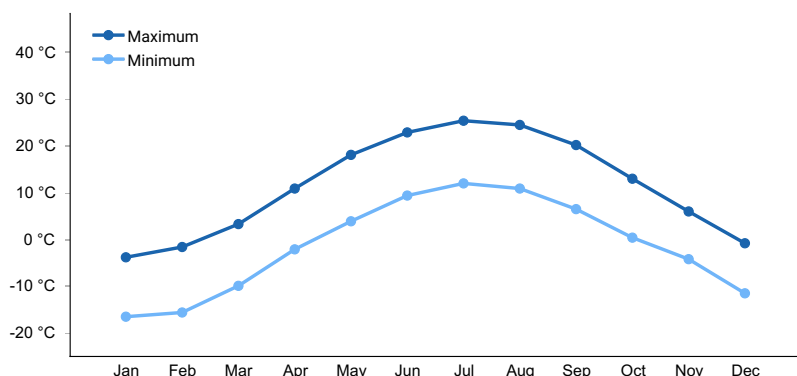


Figure 2. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

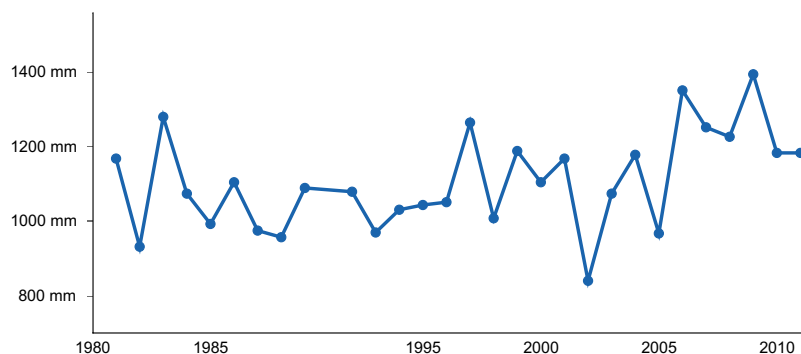


Figure 3. Annual precipitation pattern

Climate stations used

- (1) NORTH STRATFORD [USC00276234], Guildhall, NH
- (2) PLYMOUTH [USC00276945], Campton, NH
- (3) SOUTH LINCOLN [USC00437612], Bristol, VT
- (4) EUSTIS [USC00172700], Eustis, ME
- (5) CAVENDISH [USC00431243], Cavendish, VT
- (6) FIRST CONNECTICUT LAKE [USC00272999], Pittsburg, NH
- (7) MORRISVILLE 4 SSW [USC00435376], Morrisville, VT
- (8) ROCHESTER [USC00436893], Rochester, VT
- (9) JACKMAN [USC00174086], Jackman, ME
- (10) COLEBROOK 3SW [USC00271647], Canaan, NH

Influencing water features

Soil features

Soils of this site are poorly-drained. They formed in a variety of parent materials, including till, lake sediments, and outwash. There is often a thin organic cap underlain by silt loam to fine sandy loam textures. Textures in the subsoil can range from fine clays to coarse sands, though further study is needed to better understand how these differences in soil texture affect species composition and/or productivity on this site. The same can be said for pH, which ranges very broadly, from 3.5 to 7.3.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Lodgment till–mica schist (2) Glaciolacustrine deposits–granite (3) Glaciofluvial deposits–gneiss
Surface texture	(1) Silt loam (2) Channery silt loam (3) Fine sandy loam
Drainage class	Poorly drained
Soil depth	152 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–2%
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	5.08–30.48 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0%
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0 mmhos/cm

Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	3.5–7.3
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0–14%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0–11%

Ecological dynamics

This site is dominated by red spruce, sometimes mixed with black spruce, and a sphagnum moss understory. It is often logged, which sets the stand through a series of phases, beginning with herbaceous colonizers, then dense spruce and balsam fir saplings, and eventually to mature spruce-fir forest. Within 100 years, any balsam fir dies out from the overstory, and red spruce once again dominates the site. Similar community dynamics occur within stands on this site as blowdowns or spruce budworm open up small patches of mature overstory trees for establishment by herbs and conifer saplings. Large-scale budworm outbreaks are expected to have result in similar dynamics as large-scale timber harvest.

In some areas this site has been converted to perennial grass hayland.

State and transition model

F143XY304ME – Wet Flat

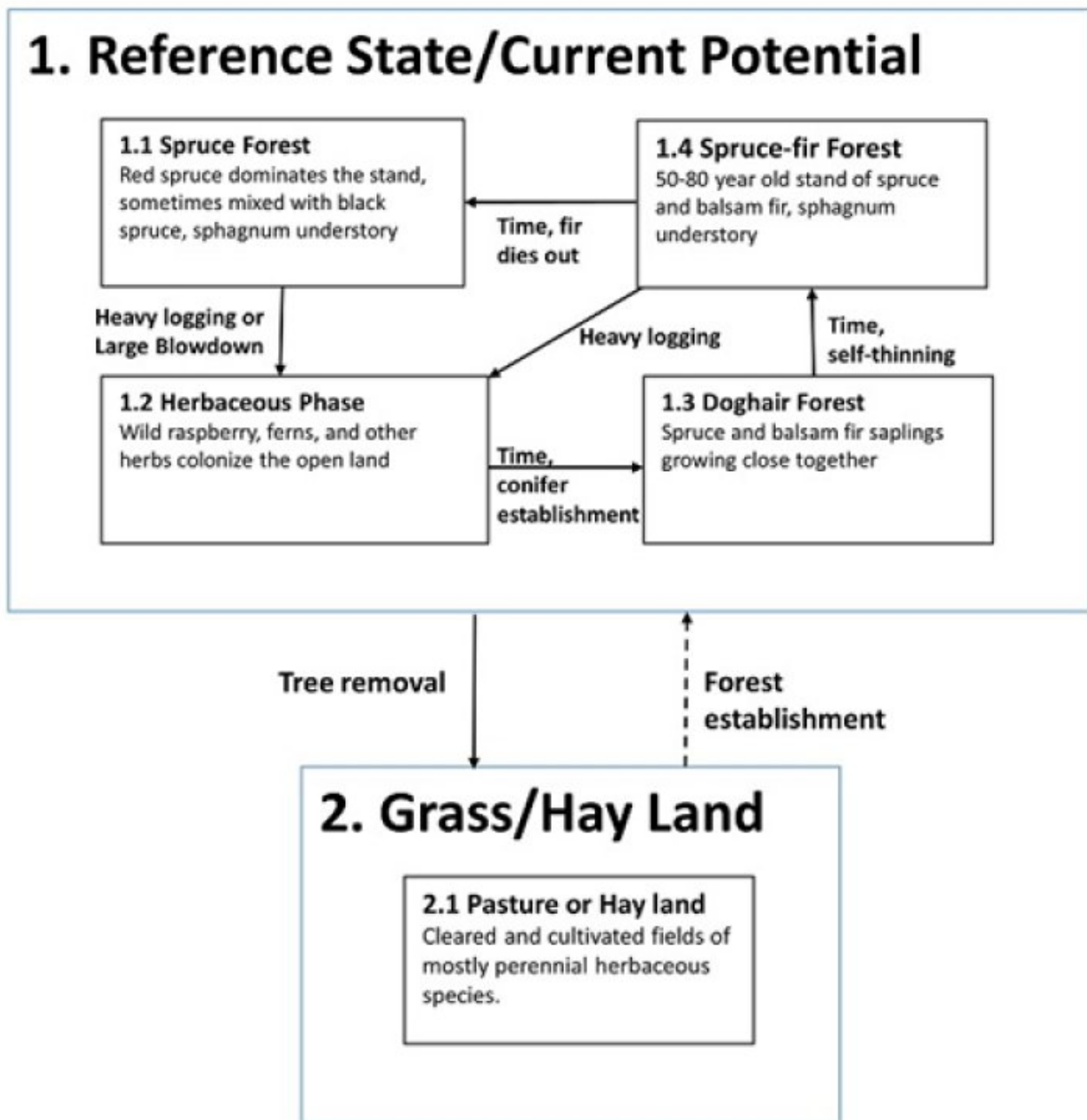


Figure 5. STM

Other references

Barton, A. M., A. S. White, and C. V. Cogbill. 2012. *The Changing Nature of the Maine Woods*. University Press of New England, Lebanon, NH.

Gawler, S. and A. Cutko. 2010. *Natural Landscapes of Maine: A Guide to Natural Communities and Ecosystems*. Maine Natural Areas Program, Maine Department of Conservation, Augusta, Maine.

Johanson, J. K., Butler, N. R. and C. Bickford. 2016. *Classifying Northern New England Landscapes for Improved Conservation*. *Rangelands* 38:6.

Sperduto, D. and B. Kimball. 2011. The Nature of New Hampshire: Natural Communities of the Granite State. The Nature Conservancy and The New Hampshire Heritage Bureau. University Press of New England, Lebanon, NH.

Thompson, E. H. and E. R. Sorenson. 2000. Wetland, Woodland, Wildland: A Guide to the Natural Communities of Vermont. The Nature Conservancy and the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. University Press of New England, Hanover, NH.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2006. Land Resource Regions and Major Land Resource Areas of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin. U.S. Department of Agriculture Handbook 296.

Contributors

Jamin Johanson

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	
Approved by	
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:**
