

# **Ecological site R003XN641WA**

## **Southern Washington Cascades High Cryic Bog or Fen**

Last updated: 1/29/2025  
Accessed: 05/12/2025

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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): 003X—Olympic and Cascade Mountains

Steep mountains and narrow to broad, gently sloping valleys characterize this MLRA. A triple junction of two oceanic plates and one continental plate is directly offshore from Puget Sound. Subduction of the oceanic plates under the westerly and northwesterly moving continental plate contributes to volcanic activity in the Cascade Mountains. Movement among these plates has resulted in major earthquakes and the formation of large stratovolcanoes. The Cascade Mountains consist primarily of volcanic crystalline rock with some associated metasedimentary rock. The mean annual precipitation is dominantly 60 to 100 inches, but it is 30 to 60 inches on the east side of the Cascade Mountains.

The soil orders in this MLRA are dominantly Andisols, Spodosols, and Inceptisols and minor areas of Entisols and Histosols. The soils are dominantly in the frigid or cryic temperature regime and the udic moisture regime. The soils generally are shallow to very deep, well drained, ashy to medial, and loamy or sandy. They are on mountain slopes and ridges.

### **Ecological site concept**

This ecological site is in the nonforested bogs and fens at middle and high elevations (3,600 to 6,500 feet) of the Southern Washington Cascade Mountains. Because of the scale of mapping, the site concept includes bogs and fens and they are not distinguished differently. The site is influenced by the pH of the soils, availability of nutrients, and hydrologic dynamics. The summers are cool and dry, and the winters are cold and wet.

The soils that support this ecological site are in the cryic soil temperature regime and the aquic soil moisture regime. The site typically is in poorly drained areas that are subject to residual ponding from overbank flooding, groundwater discharge from nearby slopes, or a seasonal high water table associated with meltwater. The water table commonly is at or near the surface much of the growing season, and the rate of organic material decomposition is slow because of the anaerobic and acidic conditions. These conditions result in a nutrient-poor environment. The soils are mucky and formed in organic material and bands of volcanic ash. The cooler temperatures at the higher elevations result in a shorter growing season than that of similar sites at lower elevations or surrounded by a protective canopy of trees.

The site supports vegetation that is tolerant of frequent periods of ponding and periodic saturation. Common plants include tufted bulrush (*Trichophorum cespitosum*), American skunkcabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*), water sedge (*Carex aquatilis*), bluejoint reedgrass (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), white marsh marigold (*Caltha leptosepala*), black alpine sedge (*Carex nigricans*), rush (*Juncus*), bog Labrador tea (*Ledum groenlandicum*), and water parsley (*Oenanthe sarmentosa*).

### **Associated sites**

R003XN640WA	<b>Southern Washington Cascades Low Cryic Bog or Fen</b> Ecological site R003XN641WA, Southern Washington Cascades High Cryic Bog or Fen, has features that are associated to those of site R003XN640WA, Southern Washington Cascades Low Cryic Bog or Fen. Both ecological sites are influenced by ponding and similar disturbance patterns; however, the elevation and duration of ponding distinguish the ecosystems. Ecological R003XN640WA is at an elevation of 2,100 to 4,500 feet, and site R003XN641WA is at an elevation of 3,600 to 6,500 feet. Both sites have similar plant species; however, site R003XN640WA has a longer growing season and higher plant production.
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## Similar sites

R003XN640WA	<b>Southern Washington Cascades Low Cryic Bog or Fen</b> Ecological site R003XN641WA, Southern Washington Cascades High Cryic Bog or Fen, has features that are associated to those of site R003XN640WA, Southern Washington Cascades Low Cryic Bog or Fen. Both ecological sites are influenced by ponding and similar disturbance patterns; however, the elevation and duration of ponding distinguish the ecosystems. Ecological R003XN640WA is at an elevation of 2,100 to 4,500 feet, and site R003XN641WA is at an elevation of 3,600 to 6,500 feet. Both sites have similar plant species; however, site R003XN640WA has a longer growing season and higher plant production.
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**Table 1. Dominant plant species**

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Carex aquatilis</i> (2) <i>Juncus</i>

## Physiographic features

This ecological site is in depressions and swales of terraces and cirques in the Cascade Mountains (elevation 3,600 to 6,500 feet) of Mount Rainier National Park. The bogs dominantly are in depressions within closed hydrologic basins. The fens are in swales that have hydrologic movement. The bogs and fens typically are small because of adjacent physiographic features. The steeper slopes impact the hydrology of the watershed (Chimner, 2010). Slope dominantly is 0 to 10 percent.

**Table 2. Representative physiographic features**

Landforms	(1) Swale (2) Depression
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding duration	Long (7 to 30 days)
Ponding frequency	None to frequent
Elevation	1,097–1,981 m
Slope	0–10%
Water table depth	0–15 cm
Aspect	W, NW, N, NE, E, SE, S, SW

## Climatic features

Most of the annual precipitation is received in October through March. The mean annual precipitation is 58 to 123 inches, and the mean annual air temperature is 32 to 47 degrees F. Generally, the summers are cool and dry and the winters are cold and wet.

**Table 3. Representative climatic features**

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	30-90 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	1,473-3,124 mm

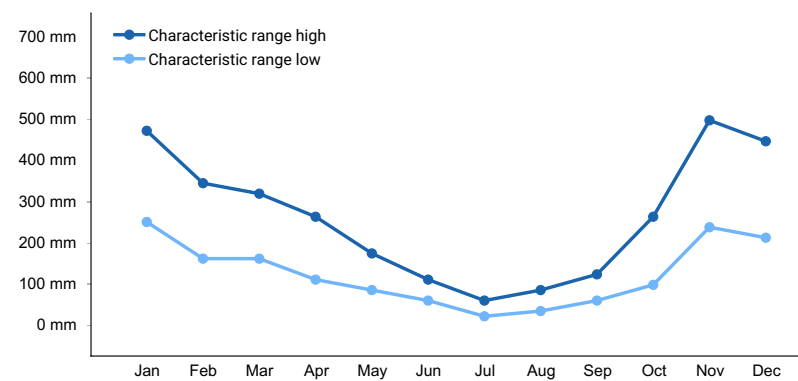


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

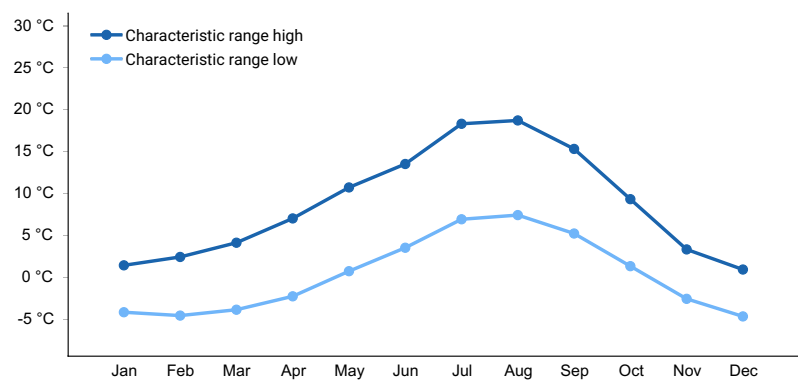


Figure 2. Monthly minimum temperature range

Influencing water features

This site is at middle and high elevations in depressions and swales of terraces and cirques in Mount Rainier National Park. The site is subject to frequent, long periods of ponding in spring, which directly influences the plant community. The fens are continuously fed and filtered by hydrologic movement, but the bogs are restricted to closed basins. The water table typically rises in spring and recedes in fall.

Soil features

Applicable soils: Ghost

Applicable soil map units in Mount Rainier National Park: 8110, 8150

The Ghost soils are in the cryic soil temperature regime and the aquic soil moisture regime. They are very poorly drained and very deep. They are in depressions and swales of terraces and cirques and formed in organic material and volcanic ash. The soils have a seasonal high water table at the surface some time during the growing season. They are subject to frequent periods of ponding in April, May, and June. The soils have less than 35 percent rock fragments in the particle-size control section. They are dominantly organic material, primarily muck. The dominant pedogenic process is the accumulation of organic matter because of the slow rate of decomposition in the saturated environment. Sapric soil material is in all of the organic horizons, and andic soil properties are in all of the mineral horizons.

Soil moisture is a limiting factor to plant growth because of the frequent ponding and the abundance of precipitation and snowmelt. The organic horizons consist of decomposing litter. These horizons help to protect the soils from wind and water erosion.

**Table 4. Representative soil features**

Parent material	(1) Organic material (2) Volcanic ash
Surface texture	(1) Muck (2) Woody
Drainage class	Very poorly drained
Soil depth	152 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–20%
Available water capacity (Depth not specified)	40.64–83.82 cm
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (Depth not specified)	4.5–6
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0–20%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0–20%

## Ecological dynamics

This ecological site is strongly influenced by elevation and hydrology. Mountain bogs and fens are unique ecosystems that impact carbon and hydrologic cycles. They host rare and unique plant and animal species that commonly are restricted to boreal and arctic regions (Chimner, 2010). The bogs dominantly are in depressions of closed hydrologic basins and are influenced primarily by snowpack and rainfall. They do not have an outlet for waterflow, which creates an acidic environment. The fens are on debris aprons that are influenced by groundwater and aquifer recharge and discharge (Patterson, 2007).

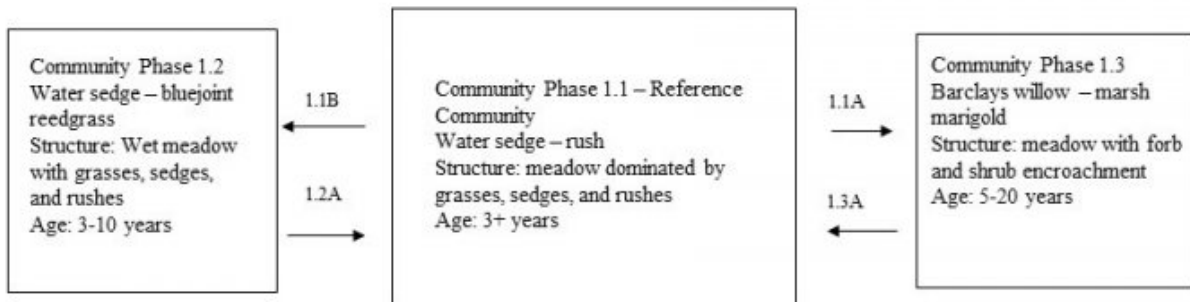
This site is at the middle to high elevation range for bogs and fens in Mount Rainier National Park. The growing season is shorter on this site than it is on other bog and fen sites at lower elevations. The site commonly is shaded for at least part of the day because of the landscape position. Snow remains on the ground into midsummer, which shortens the growing season.

This site typically is in very poorly drained areas that are subject to residual ponding from overbank flooding, groundwater discharge from nearby slopes, or a seasonal high water table associated with meltwater. The water table commonly is at or near the surface for much of the growing season, and the rate of organic material decomposition is slow because of the anaerobic and acidic conditions. These conditions result in a nutrient-poor environment. The soils are mucky, and they formed in organic material and bands of volcanic ash.

The duration and frequency of ponding directly influences the plant community. The vegetation is adapted to excessive soil moisture, ponding, a short growing season, and an acidic soil environment. Common plants include tufted bulrush (*Trichophorum cespitosum*), American skunkcabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*), water sedge (*Carex aquatilis*), bluejoint reedgrass (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), white marsh marigold (*Caltha leptosepala*), black alpine sedge (*Carex nigricans*), rush (*Juncus*), bog Labrador tea (*Ledum groenlandicum*), and water parsley (*Oenanthe sarmentosa*). If the hydrological system is altered or restricted, the site will dry out over time and mature into a meadow ecosystem.

## State and transition model

## 1. Reference State (Site ID: F003XN641WA)



*Carex aquatilis*– *Juncus*  
Water sedge - rush

Community Phase Pathway    1.X = Community Phase    X#Y = Transition Pathway  
1.XY = Pathway (ecological response to natural processes)

### State 1 Reference

#### Community 1.1 Water Sedge and Rush



Structure: Wet meadow consisting dominantly of grasses, sedges, and rushes The reference community is a meadow that consists dominantly of grasses, sedges, and rushes that are influenced by a water table near or above the soil surface much of the growing season. The snow melts in midsummer, which restricts the growing season. Water sedge and black alpine sedge are abundant. Water sedge is a sod-forming species that creates dense thickets as a result of the rhizomatous root system. It is intolerant of shade, but it is present at multiple stages of

succession (Hauser, 2006). Shrubs such as Barclay's willow typically are near the edges of the site. These areas are drier and at higher elevations, and they have a contrasting ecotone.

#### **Dominant plant species**

- tufted bulrush (*Trichophorum cespitosum*), grass
- bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), grass
- water sedge (*Carex aquatilis*), other herbaceous
- rush (*Juncus*), other herbaceous
- white marsh marigold (*Caltha leptosepala*), other herbaceous
- black alpine sedge (*Carex nigricans*), other herbaceous
- water parsely (*Oenanthe sarmentosa*), other herbaceous
- bog Labrador tea (*Ledum groenlandicum*), other herbaceous
- American skunkcabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*), other herbaceous

### **Community 1.2**

#### **Water Sedge and Bluejoint Reedgrass**

Structure: Wet meadow consisting of grasses, sedges, and rushes Community phase 1.2 represents a meadow consisting of grasses, sedges, and rushes that is influenced by a water table above the soil surface during the growing season. Late snowmelt and extended periods of ponding restrict the diversity of the plants to those that are adapted to water and peat, such as water sedge and bluejoint reedgrass. Because water sedge and bluejoint reedgrass are rhizomatous, they successfully colonize in disturbed environments (Hauser, 2006). Both species adapt to an increase in the depth to the water table. Early seral species are in excessively wet areas (Tesky, 1992).

#### **Dominant plant species**

- water sedge (*Carex aquatilis*), grass
- bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), grass

### **Community 1.3**

#### **Barclay's Willow and Marsh Marigold**

Structure: Dry meadow with forb and shrub encroachment Community phase 1.3 represents a meadow consisting of shrubs, forbs, grasses, and sedges that is influenced by a water table at or below the soil surface during the growing season. This plant community is impacted by below-average snowpack and precipitation over several consecutive years. The drier conditions restrict the regeneration of wetland species such as water sedge, black alpine sedge, and rushes. Species that are at the edges of the site and ecotone, such as Barclay's willow and marsh marigold, begin to encroach in the open meadow and become more dominant.

#### **Dominant plant species**

- Barclay's willow (*Salix barclayi*), shrub
- white marsh marigold (*Caltha leptosepala*), other herbaceous

### **Pathway 1.1B**

#### **Community 1.1 to 1.2**

This pathway represents a climatic change toward wetter conditions. If the site becomes wetter from increased snowpack or precipitation, the duration of the periods of ponding will increase. This will impact the length of the growing season and alter the plant community.

### **Pathway 1.1A**

#### **Community 1.1 to 1.3**

This pathway represents a climatic change toward drier conditions. If the site becomes drier from decreased snowpack or precipitation or from hydrologic restriction, the duration of the periods of ponding will decrease. This will increase the length of the growing season and alter the plant community.

## Pathway 1.2A

### Community 1.2 to 1.1

This pathway represents a climatic change toward wetter conditions. If the site becomes wetter from increased snowpack or precipitation, the duration of the periods of ponding will increase. This will impact the length of the growing season and alter the plant community.

## Pathway 1.3A

### Community 1.3 to 1.1

This pathway represents a climatic change toward drier conditions. If the site becomes drier from decreased snowpack or precipitation, the duration of the periods of ponding will decrease. This will increase the length of the growing season and alter the plant community.

## Additional community tables

### Inventory data references

Other Established Classifications

National vegetation classification group: Vancouverian-Rocky Mountain Subalpine Snowbed, Wet Meadow & Dwarf-Shrubland

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, plant association: CARAQU-(CARNIG)-CALLEP

### Type locality

Location 1: Pierce County, WA	
Township/Range/Section	T17N R07E S23
Latitude	46° 56' 32"
Longitude	121° 53' 23"

### Other references

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## Contributors

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## Approval

Kirt Walstad, 1/29/2025

## 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	05/10/2024
Approved by	Kirt Walstad



Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

## 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):**
- 

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:**
-