

Ecological site F095XB005WI Moist Loamy or Clayey Lowland

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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): 095X–Eastern Wisconsin, Northern Illinois, and Upper Michigan Drift Plain

This MLRA is characterized by nearly level to rolling till plains, outwash plains, drumlin fields, and glacial lake plains. It is used to produce cash crops, feed grain, and livestock. It includes the shorelines of Lake Winnebago and Lake Michigan. This area is in Wisconsin (85 percent), Illinois (10 percent), and Michigan (5 percent). It makes up about 17,255 square miles (44,690 square kilometers). This area is in the Central Lowland province of the Interior Plains. Most of the area is in the Eastern Lake section. A narrow strip along the southwestern edge of the area is in the Wisconsin Driftless section. The southwestern quarter is in the Till Plains section. The nearly level to rolling till plains, glacial lake plains, and outwash plains are mixed with drumlin fields, ground moraines, end moraines, flood plains, lake terraces, beaches, dunes, swamps, and marshes. Most of the southern part of this area has belts of morainic hills and ridges and nearly level outwash terraces. Drumlins are prominent features in the central part of the area. Glaciokarst topography occurs in the east-central parts of the area influenced by underlying Niagara Dolomite. Lakes and streams are numerous, and streams generally form a dendritic drainage pattern. Elevation ranges from 530 to 1,580 feet (160 to 480 meters). Local relief is mainly 25 feet (8 meters), but the moraines, drumlins, and bedrock escarpments rise 80 to 330 feet (25 to 100 meters) above the adjacent valleys.

The annual precipitation ranges from 28 to 37 inches (700 to 950 millimeters) with a mean of 33 inches (840 millimeters). The annual temperature ranges from 41 to 48 degrees F (5.1 to 9.2 degrees C) with a mean of 46 degrees F (7.7 degrees C). The freeze-free period ranges from 115 to 185 days with a mean of 155 days. It decreases in length from south to north and from the shore of Lake Michigan inland. Lake Michigan helps to moderate the climate of the area.

This MLRA is mostly covered with glacial drift of Wisconsin age. Some of the higher areas are moraines that appear as arc-shaped ridges representing the retreat of the ice from south to north. Most of the bedrock in the area consists of Silurian, Ordovician, and Cambrian sandstone, limestone, and dolomite. Some igneous and metamorphic rocks underlie the northwestern edge of the area. Devonian limestone and shale occur at the far eastern edge in the Milwaukee area.

The dominant soil orders in this MLRA are Alfisols, Entisols, Histosols, Mollisols, and Spodosols. The soils in the area dominantly have a mesic or frigid temperature regime, an aquic or udic moisture regime, and mixed mineralogy. They are very deep, excessively drained to very poorly drained, and sandy to clayey. Areas of Spodosols and soils with a frigid soil temperature regime occur in the northern part of the MLRA.

The northern part of this MLRA supports natural stands of mixed northern hardwoods and pine. Sugar maple, oak, white ash, elm, yellow birch, white pine, red pine, and American beech are the principal species. Low-lying areas support both mixed hardwoods and conifers. Elm, soft maple, black ash, and northern white cedar are the major species. Brush and sedge meadows also occur in the low-lying areas.

The southern part of this MLRA supports hardwoods and prairie vegetation. Uplands support natural stands of oak, sugar maple, and hickory, and natural prairie vegetation is characterized by little bluestem and big bluestem. Many of the prairies have scattered oak and hickory trees. Low-lying areas support sedge and grass meadows and mixed

stands of hardwoods and conifers. Elm, ash, eastern cottonwood, soft maple, and white cedar are the major species in the low-lying areas. (USDA-NRCS, 2022)

LRU notes

The Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois Drift Plain LRU (Land Resource Unit) (95XB) corresponds closely to the Central Sand Hills and Southeast Glacial Plains Ecological Landscapes. Some of the following brief overview is borrowed from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Ecological Landscape publication (2015).

The Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois Drift Plain MLRA is found in southeast Wisconsin and extends into northern Illinois. The Wisconsin portion of this LRU is approximately 6.3 million acres (9,900 square miles). This LRU was entirely glaciated – mostly formed by the Green Bay and Lake Michigan Lobes of the Wisconsin Glaciation except the southern part, which was covered by an earlier glaciation. The landscape is dominated by till plains with drumlins, but also has large areas of outwash, pitted outwash, and glaciolacustrine deposits. The LRU contains the Kettle Interlobate Moraine—the end moraine system formed where the Green Bay and Lake Michigan lobes met. The thickness of glacial deposits is typically less than 15 meters deep throughout the LRU, but the eastern portion can reach up to 60 meters thick. Nearly all the LRU is covered in a loess cap ranging from 1.2 meters (in the west) to 15 centimeters (in the east).

The northwest portion of LRU 95XB is part of the Central Sand Hills Ecological Landscape. The area from Portage County south through Marquette is dominated by till plains covered in outwash. The Green Bay Lobe deposited the till and created a morainal system along the west margin. The Johnstown moraine is the terminal moraine, but smaller, lateral moraines are also prominent on the landscape. As the glacier receded, meltwaters covered the intermorainal till plain with sand and gravel outwash sediments, sometimes covering blocks of ice. As the temperatures rose, the ice melted and collapsed the surface, creating an extensive area of pitted outwash. Till in this area is sandy and lacks dolomite found in other tills of this LRU. It may be hard to distinguish from the sandy outwash of the area. The rest of the northwest portion is dominated by till plains and glacial lake sediments. Glacial Lake Wisconsin covered a portion of this LRU, but the Lewiston Basin is the most significant glacial lake in this region. The Lewiston Basin formed when glacial meltwaters were impounded behind the Johnstown Moraine. Most of the lake drained after a catastrophic breach of an ice dam that supported it. The rest of this region is a till plain covered in a thin layer of loess. This till is a sandy loam with dolomite from the Niagara Escarpment. The till plain is covered with drumlins and bedrock-cored knolls and hills where the overlying till has been eroded. Wetlands are common in the low-lying outwash and the fine-textured lake sediments.

The central portion of this LRU is dominated by a rolling till plain covered in drumlins. Terminal and recessional moraines show the extent of the Green Bay Lobe. The topography of the moraines is hummocky because the supraglacial till was deposited unevenly along the ice margin and the surface collapsed after buried ice melted. Glacial lakes formed on the ice margin from ice dams, bedrock ridges, and moraines. Glacial Lakes Scuppernon and Yahara were two significant lakes that deposited clay and silty clay in deep basins. Meltwater streams deposited outwash sediments over some areas of the till plain, creating pockets of outwash and pitted outwash. The till deposited here is gravelly, clayey, and silty sand with dolomite pebbles.

The Kettle Interlobate Moraine is a unique and significant feature along the eastern border this LRU. The Kettle Moraine is a complex range of ridges and hills that formed by the end moraine systems where the Green Bay and Lake Michigan lobes met. The area ranges from 1 to 30 miles wide and landforms up to 300 feet in elevation. The area experienced massive volumes of meltwater from the two glacial lobes, which deposited primarily sand and gravel, but morainal till is also present. There are two distinct portions for the Kettle Moraine. The south portion formed as the lobes receded and deposited a series of level outwash fans between the lobes. Buried ice melted and parts of the fan collapsed to form kettles—round depressions on the surface that often fill with water to become lakes when the water table is near the surface. In the northern section, debris collected in the ice where the two lobes flowed together. As the glaciers receded, meltwaters deposited outwash materials on top of ice. As the ice melted, the surface collapsed and created a mixture of collapsed outwash and till materials. The till was in and beneath the buried ice.

West of the Kettle Moraine lies a landscape dominated by till plains with drumlins and areas of outwash formed by the Lake Michigan Lobe. Braided proglacial streams deposited outwash and pitted outwash plains. A small extent of lake plains is present. Wetlands are abundant because of impeded drainage from the underlying till and lake sediments.

The southern portion of this LRU is comprised of older glacial sediment deposited before the Wisconsin Glaciation. In the east lie broad, flat to rolling till plains. In the west, an eroded and dissected, hilly bedrock-controlled landscape is present; this area is similar in appearance to the Driftless region. Some low areas have outwash deposited by proglacial streams from Green Bay Lobe meltwater. In some areas in the west, dissolution of bedrock has created karst topography. There is a small extent of lake plain sediments.

Historically, the vegetation in this LRU was dominated in the northwest by oak forest and opening with interspersed marsh and sedge wetlands. The southern portion was dominated by oak and mesic forests with abundant wetlands. Black oak (*Quercus velutina*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), and bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) were significant tree species in all of the LRU. There were also many areas of prairie, maple-basswood upland forest, and small areas of tamarack (*Larix laricina*), northern white-cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), and black spruce (*Picea mariana*) in the lowlands. Conifers were not significant in this LRU. Wetlands covered up to 17% of land area.

Classification relationships

Relationship to Established Framework and Classification Systems:

Biophysical Settings (Landfire, 2014): This ES is largely mapped as North-Central Interior Maple-Basswood Forest, Eastern Cool Temperate Row Crop, Developed-Medium Intensity, and Developed-Low Intensity

Habitat Types of N. & S. Wisconsin (Kotar, 2002, 1996): The sites of this ES keyed out to *Acer saccharum*-*Tilia*-*Fraxinus*/*Caulophyllum* [ATiFrCa], *Acer saccharum*-*Tilia*-*Fraxinus*/*Viburnum*(*Cornus racemose*) [ATiFrVb(Cr)], and *Acer saccharum*-*Tilia*-*Fraxinus*/*Viburnum* [ATiFrVb].

WDNR Natural Communities (WDNR, 2015): This ES is most similar to the Southern Mesic Forest described by the WDNR.

Hierarchical Framework Relationships:

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 095X–Eastern Wisconsin, Northern Illinois, and Upper Michigan Drift Plain

USFS Subregions: Central Wisconsin Moraines and Outwash (222Kb), South Central Wisconsin Prairie and Savannah (222Kd), Southern Green Bay Lobe (222Ke), Geneva-Darien Moraines and Till Plains (222Kf), Rock River Old Drift Country (222Kh), Kickapoo-Wisconsin River Ravines (222Ld)

DNR Ecological Landscapes: Southeast Glacial Plains

Ecological site concept

The Moist Loamy or Clayey Lowlands occurs throughout LRU 95XB. Moist Loamy or Clayey Lowlands are typically in lower landscape positions on till plains, ground moraines, lake plains, outwash plains, and terraces. These sites are represented by a variety of loamy to clayey textured soils in the somewhat poorly drained drainage class. These soils are not hydric and represent a variety of parent materials from lacustrine to till to outwash. These sites receive water primarily through precipitation, runoff from adjacent uplands, and groundwater discharge. Water levels are greatly influenced by precipitation rates and runoff from upland sites. These soils are strongly acid to moderately alkaline. Secondary carbonates are often present and may occupy up to 40 percent volume. Typical vegetation includes *Acer saccharum*, *Fraxinus americana*, *Tilia americana*, and *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*.

Associated sites

F095XB004WI	Wet Loamy or Clayey Lowland These sites occur on depressions within loamy glacial landscapes including till plains and lake plains. They form in very deep, loamy alluvium, till, outwash, or lacustrine materials. They are sometimes underlain by clayey lacustrine deposits or sandy outwash. They are very poorly to poorly drained.
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F095XB006WI	Shallow Upland These sites consist of shallow to deep, sandy to clayey deposits of various origin. All have bedrock contact within 60 inches (150 cm). They are moderately well to excessively drained. They sometimes share their particle size classes with Moist Loamy or Clayey Lowlands are sometimes adjacent to them on the same landforms but occupy higher positions on the landscape where drainage is improved.
F095XB007WI	Loamy Upland with Carbonates These sites consist of very deep, loamy materials deposited by flowing water, glacial ice, or ancient glacial lakes. Many are underlain by clayey lacustrine materials or sandy outwash. They have secondary carbonates, generally occupying at least 10% by volume, within the upper 40 inches (100 cm). They are moderately well to somewhat excessively drained. They sometimes share their particle size classes with Moist Loamy or Clayey Lowlands are sometimes adjacent to them on the same landforms but occupy higher positions on the landscape where drainage is improved.
F095XB008WI	Clayey Upland with Carbonates These sites consist of very deep, clayey till or lacustrine deposits, sometimes mantled with sandy outwash. Secondary carbonates usually occupy at least 10% volume in the upper 40 inches (100 cm). They are moderately well to well drained. They sometimes share their particle size classes with Moist Loamy or Clayey Lowlands are sometimes adjacent to them on the same landforms but occupy higher positions on the landscape where drainage is improved.
F095XB010WI	Loamy and Clayey Upland These sites consist of very deep, sandy to clayey deposits of till, outwash, alluvium, colluvium, and lacustrine materials. They are moderately well to somewhat excessively drained. They sometimes share their particle size classes with Moist Loamy or Clayey Lowlands are sometimes adjacent to them on the same landforms but occupy higher positions on the landscape where drainage is improved.

Similar sites

F095XB003WI	Wet and Moist Sandy Lowland These sites consist of very deep, sandy eolian or outwash deposits. They are primarily found in the Central Sand Hills in the northwestern portion of the MLRA. They are very poorly to somewhat poorly drained. They sometimes occupy similar position on the landscape and have similar drainage capabilities as Moist Loamy or Clayey Lowlands but have coarser particle size classes.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) <i>Acer saccharum</i> (2) <i>Fraxinus americana</i>
Shrub	(1) <i>Ribes oxycanthoides</i> (2) <i>Prunus virginiana</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>

Physiographic features

This site occurs primarily in lower landscape positions on till plains, moraines, lake plains, outwash plains, stream terraces, and lake terraces. They're often found on the back or foot of drumlins but may be sometimes be found higher on the landform. Landform shape in concave, linear, or convex. Slope ranges from 0 to 6 percent.

Some sites are subject to ponding and few sites are subject to flooding. Inundation by water may last between four hours and seven days. The soil has an apparent seasonally high water table (endosaturation) that is most often found within a 3 feet (1 meter) of the surface but may be deeper on sites with sandy substratum. Some sites underlain by clayey substratum have a perched water table (episaturation). Runoff is negligible to high.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Hillslope profile	(1) Toeslope (2) Footslope
Slope shape across	(1) Linear (2) Convex (3) Convex

Slope shape up-down	(1) Linear
Landforms	(1) Depression (2) Drainageway (3) Lake plain (4) Outwash plain (5) Till plain (6) Moraine (7) Stream terrace (8) Lake terrace
Runoff class	Negligible to high
Flooding duration	Very brief (4 to 48 hours) to brief (2 to 7 days)
Flooding frequency	None to occasional
Ponding duration	Brief (2 to 7 days)
Ponding frequency	None to occasional
Elevation	558–1,050 ft
Slope	0–6%
Ponding depth	0–6 in
Water table depth	6–80 in
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The continental climate of MLRA 95B is typical of southern Wisconsin – cold winters and warm summers. The MLRA spans over 2 degrees of latitude, or about 150 miles. The lowest latitudes have warmer summers, warmer winters, and high precipitation rates. The growing season decreases from south to north and from the shores of the thermal mass of Lake Michigan inland.

The average annual precipitation for this site is 35 inches. The average annual snowfall is 40 inches. The average annual maximum and minimum temperatures are 56oF and 36oF, respectively.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	116-135 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	143-167 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	34-36 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	114-136 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	140-171 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	33-37 in
Frost-free period (average)	126 days
Freeze-free period (average)	156 days
Precipitation total (average)	35 in

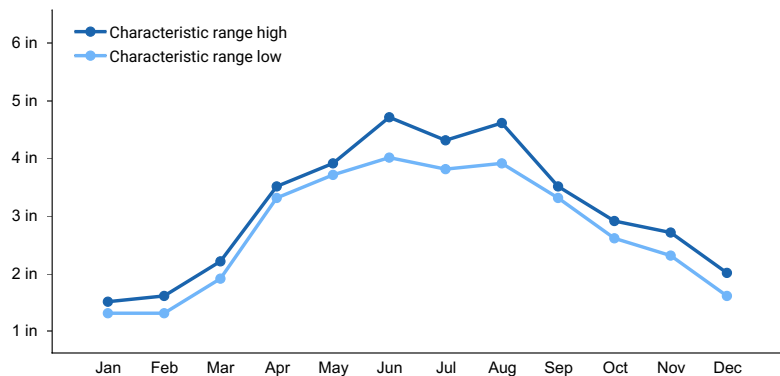


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

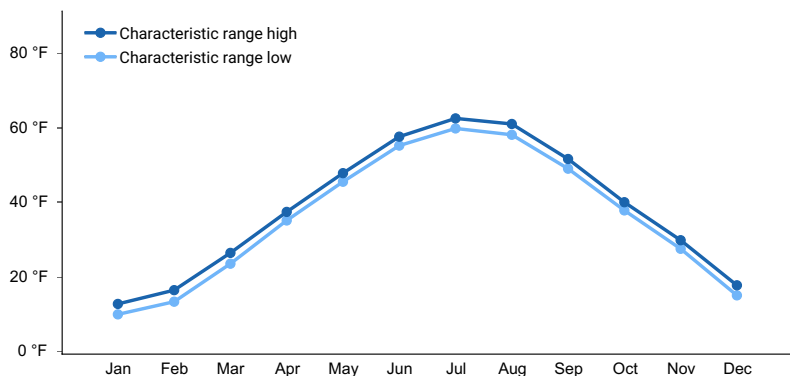


Figure 2. Monthly minimum temperature range

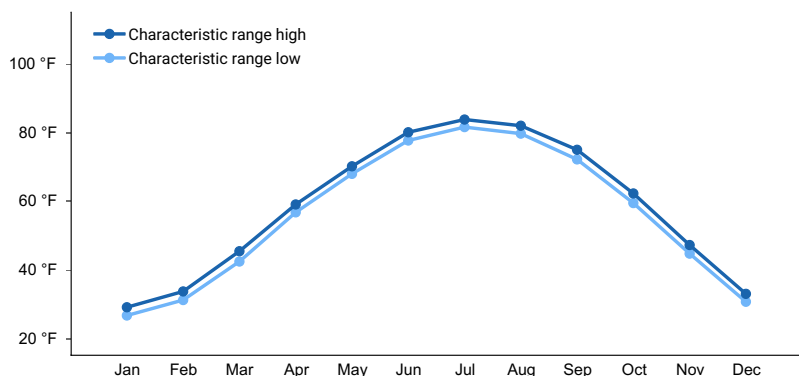


Figure 3. Monthly maximum temperature range

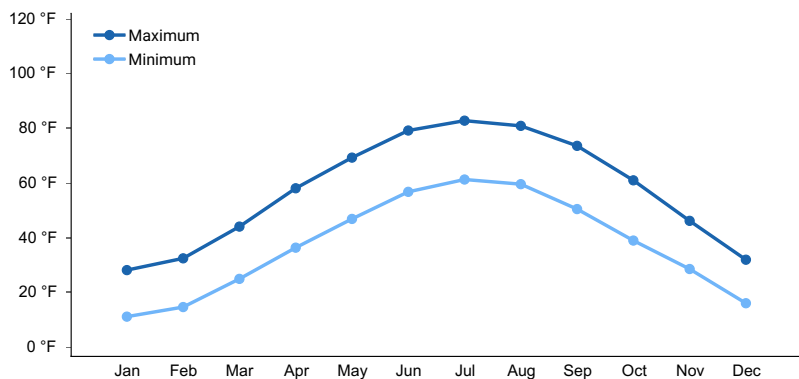


Figure 4. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

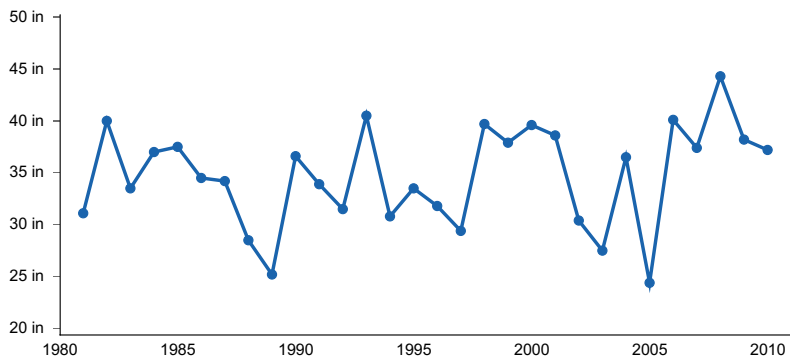


Figure 5. Annual precipitation pattern

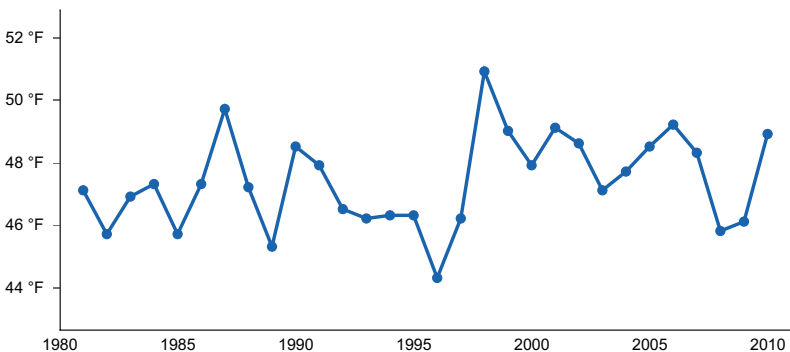


Figure 6. Annual average temperature pattern

Climate stations used

- (1) ELGIN [USC00112736], Elgin, IL
- (2) ROCKFORD GTR ROCKFORD AP [USW00094822], Rockford, IL
- (3) WATERLOO [USC00478910], Waterloo, WI
- (4) MONTELLO [USC00475581], Montello, WI
- (5) HARTFORD 2 W [USC00473453], Hartford, WI
- (6) BURLINGTON [USC00471205], Burlington, WI
- (7) FT ATKINSON [USC00472869], Fort Atkinson, WI
- (8) AFTON [USC00470045], Janesville, WI

Influencing water features

Water is received through precipitation, runoff from adjacent uplands, and groundwater discharge. Water levels are greatly influenced by precipitation rates and runoff from upland sites. Water is lost from the site primarily through runoff, evapotranspiration, and groundwater recharge.

Permeability of the soil is impermeable to moderately rapid. The hydrologic group of this site is B, C, A/D, B/D, and C/D.

Wetland description

Hydrogeomorphic Wetland Classification: None
 Cowardin Wetland Classification: None

Soil features

The soils of this site are represented by the Ashippun, Atterberry, Aztalan, Beecher, Conover, Darroch, Del Rey, Dells, Elburn, Elliot, Fabius, Hayfield, Joy, Kane, Kendall, Kibbie, Lamartime, Lawler, Locke, Manawa, Marcellon, Martinton, Matherton, Meehan, Mequon, Mosel, Mundelein, Muscatine, Nenno, Shiffer, Stronghurst, Virgil, Wasepi, Wauconda, and Yahara series. These are classified as Argiudolls, Argiaquolls, Hapludolls, Udipsamments, Endoaqualfs, Epiaqualfs, and Hapludalfs.

These soils generally form in very deep, loamy or clayey materials deposited by flowing water, glacial ice, or ancient glacial lakes. Some sites are underlain by fine lacustrine deposits, loamy till, or sandy outwash. Lacustrine deposits are sometimes stratified with coarser-textured materials. Many sites have a loess mantle. Some have a mantle of sandy outwash.

These soils are strongly acid to moderately alkaline. Secondary carbonates are often present and may occupy up to 40 percent volume. Small fragments are generally present in the substratum and may occupy up to 45 percent volume. Higher volumes of fragments are generally seen in outwash soils. Fragments may be stratified (in the case of outwash and lacustrine deposits) or unstratified (in the case of till). Some of these fragments may be pieces of limestone and dolomite plucked from the bedrock by glacial ice and mixed in with the mineral glacial deposits, and others may be rounded, mixed rocks deposited by flowing water. These soils are somewhat poorly drained and do not meet hydric soil requirements.



Figure 7. Del Rey Soil Series sampled on 05/29/20 in Dane County, Wisconsin.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Till (2) Outwash (3) Lacustrine deposits (4) Alluvium (5) Residuum (6) Loess
Surface texture	(1) Loamy sand (2) Sandy loam (3) Loam (4) Silt loam
Drainage class	Somewhat poorly drained
Permeability class	Moderately rapid
Soil depth	79 in
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (0-59.1in)	1.6–5.05 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-39.4in)	0–40%
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-39.4in)	5.1–8.2

Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (0-39.4in)	0–45%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (0-39.4in)	0–5%

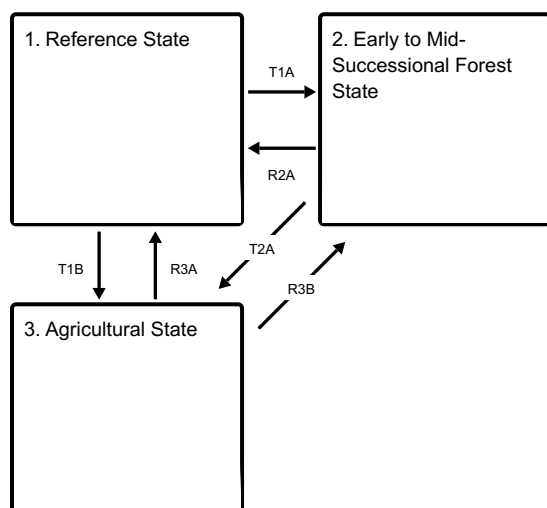
Ecological dynamics

Historically, mature forests on this ecological site were dominated by shade tolerant sugar maple and White ash, often with an admixture of Basswood and a few Red oaks. This association was self-maintained with new cohorts of advance regeneration gaining canopy status through gaps formed by small-scale disturbances and natural mortality in the dominant canopy.

Current stands on this Ecological Site represent the entire array of potential successional stages from pure aspen, or aspen-white birch stands to sugar maple dominated mixed northern hardwoods stands. Succession to sugar maple dominance is evident everywhere that seed sources are present.

State and transition model

Ecosystem states



T1A - Stand replacing disturbance that includes fire.

T1B - Removal of forest cover and tilling for agricultural crop production.

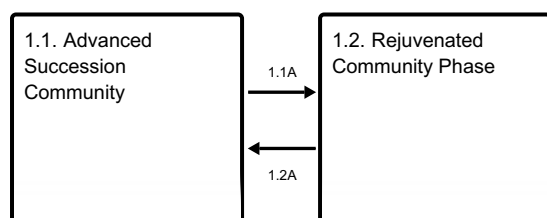
R2A - Deciduous forest community is slowly taken over by shade tolerant maples and other species.

T2A - Removal of forest cover and tilling for agricultural crop production.

R3A - Cessation of agricultural practices leads to natural reforestation, or site is replanted.

R3B - Cessation of agricultural practices leads to natural reforestation, or site is replanted.

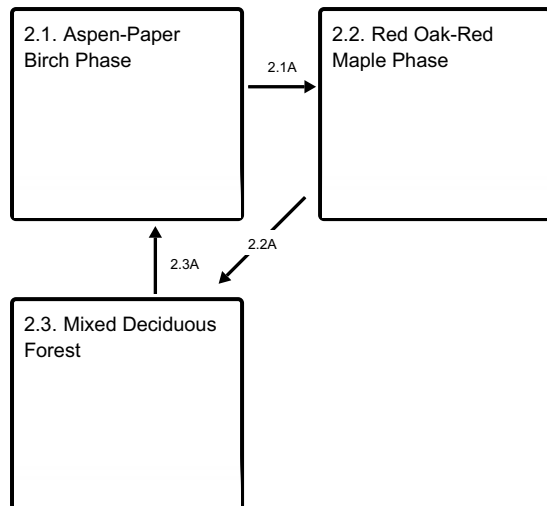
State 1 submodel, plant communities



1.1A - Light to moderate intensity fires, blow-downs, ice storms.

1.2A - Disturbance-free period for 30+ years.

State 2 submodel, plant communities



2.1A - Immigration and establishment of red oak and red maple.

2.2A - Immigration and establishment of red oak and red maple.

2.3A - Clear cutting or stand-replacing fire.

State 1 Reference State

The reference plant community is categorized as mesic forest community dominated by mixed deciduous species, primarily sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) and White ash (*Fraxinus americana*), and sporadic occurrence of Basswood (*Tilia americana*), Red oak (*Quercus rubra*), and Bitternut hickory (*Carya cordiformis*). Although forest communities can vary greatly in terms of species composition and stand structure, depending on type, degree, and frequency of disturbance, two common phases predominate:

Community 1.1 Advanced Succession Community

Advanced Succession Community – In the absence of major, stand-replacing disturbance this community is dominated by Sugar maple and White ash. This was the most common condition in pre-European settlement forests, but no longer predominates. Though not dominant community members Basswood and Red oak may be present. Bitternut Hickory and Shagbark Hickory may be occasionally present. The tree sapling and shrub layer in this community is not well developed due to dense shade created by the tree canopy. Sugar maple saplings dominate the shrub layer, but other shrubs Gooseberry and Choke cherry are likely to be present. The herb layer in this phase varies greatly, but is likely to include Virginia creeper. Various rich site indicator plants could be present (Blue cohosh, Virginia waterleaf, Sweet cicely). No herb layer species seems to be particularly dominant.

Dominant plant species

- sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), tree
- white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), tree
- Canadian gooseberry (*Ribes oxycanthoides*), shrub
- chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), shrub
- Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), other herbaceous

Community 1.2 Rejuvenated Community Phase



Figure 8. Image courtesy of UWSP taken on 05/27/2020 in Jefferson County, Wisconsin.

Disturbances described in Pathway 1.1A lead to increased species and structural diversity of the forest community. Depending on seed source, red oak, white oak, and red maple regenerate in the canopy openings and in time join sugar maple and White ash in the dominant canopy. Basswood is also commonly present along with Green ash. The sparse shrub and herb layers also increase during this stage. Species composition remains relatively unchanged, but abundance changes can be significant. Many other herb species that were present with very low abundance in the advanced-succession community typically form much larger population clusters as there is more light penetrating the canopy.

Dominant plant species

- sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), tree
- white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), tree
- northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*), tree
- white oak (*Quercus alba*), tree
- red maple (*Acer rubrum*), tree
- Canadian gooseberry (*Ribes oxycanthoides*), shrub
- chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), shrub
- Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), other herbaceous

Pathway 1.1A

Community 1.1 to 1.2

Natural mortality in the oldest age classes—sporadic small-scale blow-downs and ice storms—create openings for entry of shade mid-tolerant species such as red oak.

Pathway 1.2A

Community 1.2 to 1.1

In the absence of canopy reducing disturbances natural succession leads to community dominance by the most shade-tolerant species resulting in return to community phase 1.1.

State 2

Early to Mid-Successional Forest State

Post disturbance pioneer community of aspen and paper birch with mixtures of other species from available seed sources. This state can have broad variation depending on what seed sources are available as these sites readily supply water and nutrients in quantities that many species can thrive with. The mid-successional phase of this state can represent an alternate stable state when seed sources for reference state dominant species are missing (particularly sugar maple).

Dominant plant species

- quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), tree
- paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), tree
- red maple (*Acer rubrum*), tree

Community 2.1

Aspen-Paper Birch Phase

These two species have a very narrow window of environmental and ecological conditions for successful establishment. Main requirements are exposed mineral soil and elimination, most effectively by fire, of on-site seed sources of potential competing vegetation. In addition, adequate soil moisture must be available for initial seedling development. Once seedlings are firmly established, height growth of both species is relatively rapid and able to outgrow most competitive species. Paper birch seedlings and saplings tolerate partial shade and often become members of mixed species communities. This is not true for aspen which requires continuous full-sun exposure for survival. Aspen stands are initially very dense due to sprouting from extensive lateral roots, but rapid natural thinning ensues as stems compete for available light.

Dominant plant species

- quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), tree
- paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), tree

Community 2.2

Red Oak-Red Maple Phase

This community phase occurs by invading and succeeding a pioneer aspen-birch community.

Dominant plant species

- northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*), tree
- red maple (*Acer rubrum*), tree

Community 2.3

Mixed Deciduous Forest



Figure 9. Image courtesy of UWSP taken on 05/29/2020 in Dane County, Wisconsin.

Stand structure consists of dominant red oak and white oak in combination with a modest, or strong presence of mature, or decaying, aspen and/or paper birch. A wide variety of tree species may be present with red oak and white oak in the canopy (Sugar maple, Red maple, Black cherry, Ashes). The shrub layer typically reaches its best development in this community phase. Depending on seed source, sugar maple has become established and a young cohort exists in the subcanopy. If sugar maple seeds are not present the site may persist in this state/phase for a long time. Potential variants of this phase may exist with other species such as black walnut.

Dominant plant species

- northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*), tree
- white oak (*Quercus alba*), tree
- quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), tree
- paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), tree

Pathway 2.1A

Community 2.1 to 2.2

Immigration and establishment of red oak and red maple.

Pathway 2.2A

Community 2.2 to 2.3

Time and natural succession. Red oak and red maple have succeeded the aspen-birch community. Depending on seed source, sugar maple begins growth and establishment in the understory.

Pathway 2.3A

Community 2.3 to 2.1

Clear cutting or major fire disturbance allows for the reinvasion of the shade intolerant aspen-birch community.

State 3

Agricultural State

Indefinite period of applying agricultural practices. Crops likely include alfalfa, corn, soybeans, and hay or pasture.

Transition T1A

State 1 to 2

Transition T1A – Major stand-replacing disturbance. In pre-European settlement time, the event was most often a severe blow down, sometimes followed by fires. Such blow downs have been estimated to occur in this part of Wisconsin every 300 to 400 years (Schulte and Mladenoff, 2005). In post settlement virtually every acre has been logged either by clear cutting or successive cuts targeting species marketable at that time. Post logging slash fires also have been a significant factor in most areas. These disturbances created the environment suitable for natural regeneration of many shade-intolerant species and for commercial planting.

Transition T1B

State 1 to 3

Removal of forest cover, tilling and application of other agricultural techniques to grow agricultural crops.

Restoration pathway R2A

State 2 to 1

A period of some 70-100 years without major stand disturbance, especially fire, leads to decreased presence, through natural mortality, of early successional species and the dominance of shade tolerant sugar maple with less tolerant associates of red oak and white ash, returning the community to Reference State.

Transition T2A

State 2 to 3

Removal of forest cover, tilling and application of other agricultural techniques to grow agricultural crops.

Restoration pathway R3A

State 3 to 1

Abandonment of agricultural practices and allowing natural vegetation to colonize the site or apply artificial afforestation. The time required for forest community to reach the reference state conditions may exceed 100 years.

Restoration pathway R3B

State 3 to 2

Cessation of agricultural practices leads to natural reforestation, or site is replanted.

Additional community tables

Inventory data references

Plot and other supporting inventory data for site identification and community phases is located on a NRCS North Central Region shared and one drive folder. University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point described soils, took photographs, and inventoried vegetation data at community phases within the reference state. The data sources include WI ESD Plot Data Collection Form - Tier 2, Relevé Method, NASIS pedon description, NRCS SOI 036, photographs, and Kotar Habitat Types.

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Rangeland health reference sheet

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

Author(s)/participant(s)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	05/10/2025
Approved by	Suzanne Mayne-Kinney
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dominant:

Sub-dominant:

Other:

Additional:

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

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

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

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

-
17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:**
-