USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ecological site R107XA210IA
Wet Upland Drainageway Prairie

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General information

Provisional. A provisional ecological site description has undergone quality control and quality assurance review. It contains a working state and transition model and enough information to identify the ecological site.

Figure 1. Mapped extent

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

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 107X–Iowa and Missouri Deep Loess Hills

The Iowa and Minnesota Loess Hills (MLRA 107A) includes the Northwest Iowa Plains, Inner Coteau, and Coteau Moraines landforms (Prior 1991; MDNR 2005). It spans two states (Iowa, 89 percent; Minnesota, 11 percent), encompassing approximately 4,470 square miles (Figure 1). The elevation ranges from approximately 1,700 feet above sea level (ASL) on the highest ridges to about 1,115 feet ASL in the lowest valleys. Local relief is mainly 10 to 100 feet. However, some valley floors can range from 80 to 200 feet, while some upland flats only range between 3 and 6 feet. The eastern half of the MLRA is underlain by Wisconsin-age till, deposited between 20,000 and 30,000 years ago and is known as the Sheldon Creek Formation. The western half is underlain by Pre-Illinoian glacial till, deposited more than 500,000 years ago and has since undergone extensive erosion and dissection. Both surfaces are covered by approximately 4 to 20 feet of loess on the hillslopes, and Holocene alluvium covers the till in the drainageways. Cretaceous bedrock, comprised of sandstone and shale, lies beneath the glacial material (USDA-NRCS 2006).

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

Classification relationships

U.S. Forest Service Ecological Subregions: North Central Glaciated Plains (251B) Section, Outer Coteau des Prairies (251Bb), Northwest Iowa Plains (251Bd) Subsections (Cleland et al. 2007)

U.S. EPA Level IV Ecoregion: Loess Prairies (47a) (USEPA 2013)

National Vegetation Classification – Ecological Systems: Northern Tallgrass Prairie (CES205.686) (NatureServe 2015)

National Vegetation Classification - Plant Associations: *Andropogon gerardii* (Panicum virgatum) – Muhlenbergia richardsonis (CEGL002199) (NatureServe 2015)

Biophysical Settings: Northern Tallgrass Prairie (BpS 3914200) (LANDFIRE 2009)

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Iowa Plant Community Species List: Prairie, Northern Wet-Mesic Tallgrass (USDA-NRCS 2007)

Iowa Department of Natural Resources: Blacksoil Tallgrass Prairie (INAI 1984)

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: WMp73 Prairie Wet Meadow/Carr (MDNR 2005)

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Wet to Wet-Mesic Prairies (Eggers and Reed 2015)

Ecological site concept

Wet Upland Drainageway Prairies are located within the green areas on the map (Figure 1). They occur on drainageways in uplands, and the soils are Mollisols and Entisols that are poorly to moderately well-drained and deep, formed in colluvium and alluvium. The site is associated with occasional flooding from precipitation, overland flow, and groundwater return flow. As a result, the native plant community is comprised of wet-mesic herbaceous vegetation.

The historic pre-European settlement vegetation on this site was dominated by tallgrass prairie species adapted to temporarily flooded and saturated conditions. Bluejoint (Calamagrostis canadensis (Michx.) P. Beauv.) and northern reedgrass (Calamagrostis stricta (Timm) Koeler ssp. inexpansa (A. Gray) C.W. Greene) are the dominant grasses for this ecological site. Other common and characteristic grasses and grass-likes include prairie cordgrass (Spartina pectinata Bosc ex Link), woolly sedge (Carex pellita Muhl. ex Willd.), and hairyfruit sedge (Carex trichocarpa Muhl. ex Willd.). Forbs typical of an undisturbed plant community associated with this ecological site include bog willowherb (Epilobium leptophyllum Raf.), Riddell's goldenrod (Solidago riddellii (Frank ex Riddell) Rydb.), and marsh bellflower (Campanula aparinoides Pursh) (Drobney et al. 2001; MDNR 2005). Very brief to brief flooding, fire, and large mammal grazing are the primary disturbance factors that maintain this site, while drought is a secondary factor (MDNR 2005; LANDFIRE 2009).

Associated sites

R107XA209IA	**Wet Upland Sedge Meadow** Loess or loamy sediments on uplands (slopes less than two percent) that are shallow to the water table including Gillett Grove, Letri, Marcus, Rushmore, and Spicer
R107XA201IA	**Loess Upland Prairie** Loess on upland summits and shoulders that are not associated with flooding including Annieville, Galva, McCreath, Primghar, Primghar variant, Ransom, Sac, Sac variant, and Wilmonton.

Similar sites

R107XA208IA	**Ponded Upland Depression Sedge Meadow** Ponded Upland Depression Sedge Meadows are similar in landscape position, but site is a DEPRESSIONAL wetland
R107XA209IA	**Wet Upland Sedge Meadow** Wet Upland Sedge Meadows are derived from loess or loamy sediments and occur on uplands with slopes less than two percent and are shallow to the water table
R107XA214IA	**Loamy Floodplain Prairie** Loamy Floodplain Prairies have a similar plant community, but site is a RIVERINE wetland

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified

Herbaceous	(1) *Calamagrostis canadensis* (2) *Calamagrostis stricta ssp. inexpansa*

Physiographic features

Wet Upland Drainageway Prairies occur on upland drainageways on ephemeral headwater drains (Figure 2). They are situated on elevations ranging from approximately 499 to 1801 feet ASL. The site is occasionally flooded, and flooding generally lasts for up to seven days.

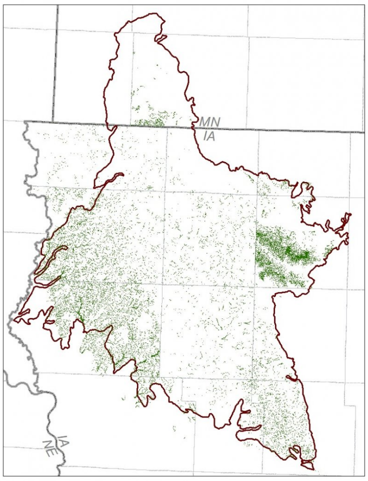


Figure 2. Figure 1. Location of Wet Upland Drainageway Prairie ecological site within MLRA 107A.

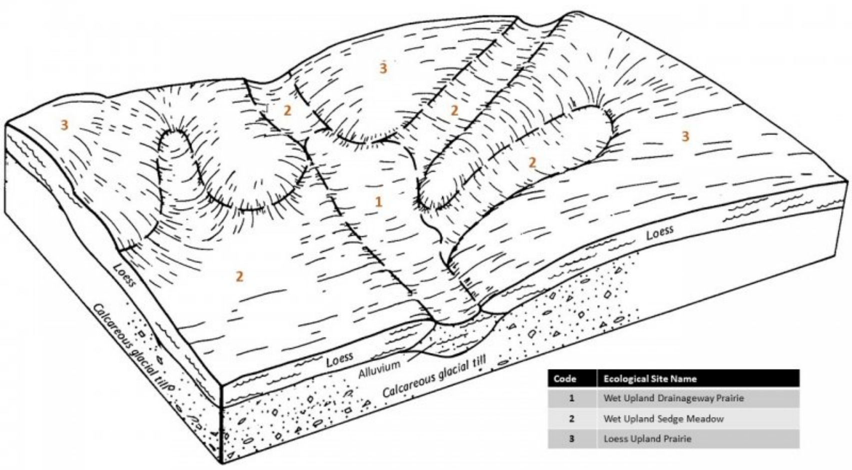


Figure 3. Figure 2. Representative block diagram of Wet Upland Drainageway Prairie and associated ecological sites.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Slope shape across	(1) Concave
Slope shape up-down	(1) Linear
Landforms	(1) Upland > Drainageway
Runoff class	Low to medium
Flooding duration	Very brief (4 to 48 hours) to brief (2 to 7 days)
Flooding frequency	Occasional
Elevation	152–549 m
Slope	0–5%
Water table depth	0–122 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

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

The soil temperature regime of MLRA 107A is classified as mesic, where the mean annual soil temperature is between 46 and 59°F (USDA-NRCS 2006). Temperature and precipitation occur along a north-south gradient, where temperature and precipitation increase the further south one travels. The average freeze-free period of this ecological site is about 160 days, while the frost-free period is about 141 days (Table 2). The majority of the precipitation occurs as rainfall in the form of convective thunderstorms during the growing season. Average annual precipitation is approximately 31 inches, which includes rainfall plus the water equivalent from snowfall. The average annual low and high temperatures are 36 and 58°F, respectively (Table 3).

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

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	126-133 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	145-148 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	737-787 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	126-137 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	143-149 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	711-813 mm
Frost-free period (average)	130 days
Freeze-free period (average)	147 days
Precipitation total (average)	762 mm

Climate stations used

- (1) PRIMGHAR [USC00136800], Primghar, IA
- (2) SIOUX CTR 2 SE [USC00137700], Sioux Center, IA
- (3) CHEROKEE [USC00131442], Cherokee, IA
- (4) SIBLEY 3 NE [USC00137664], Sibley, IA
- (5) LE MARS [USC00134735], Le Mars, IA
- (6) HOLSTEIN [USC00133909], Holstein, IA
- (7) SPENCER 1 N [USC00137844], Spencer, IA

Influencing water features

Wet Upland Drainageway Prairies are classified as a SLOPE: Drainageway, Occasionally flooded; herbaceous wetland under the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) classification system (Smith et al. 1995; USDA-NRCS 2008) and as a Palustrine, Persistent, Emergent, Temporarily Flooded Wetland under the National Wetlands Inventory (FGDC 2013). Precipitation, overland flow, and groundwater return flow are the main sources of water for this ecological site (Smith et al. 1995). Infiltration is slow (Hydrologic Group C) for undrained soils, and surface runoff is low to medium (Figure 5).

Primary wetland hydrology indicators for an intact Wet Upland Drainageway Prairie may include: A1 Surface water, A2 High water table, and A3 Saturation. Secondary wetland hydrology indicators may include: C2 Dry-season water table, D2 Geomorphic position, and D5 FAC-neutral test (USACE 2010).

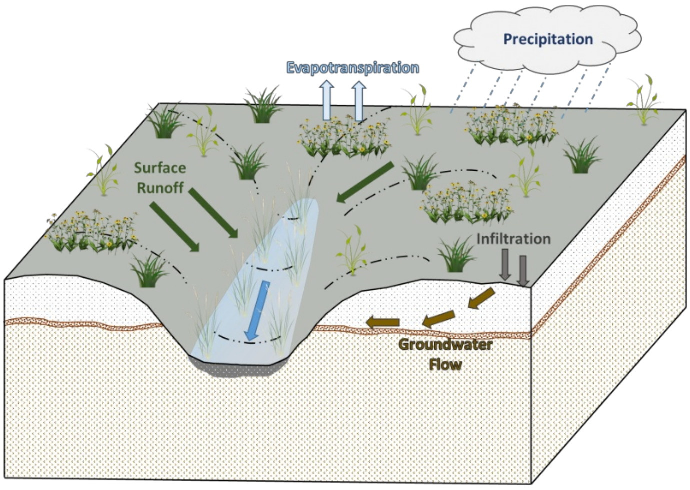


Figure 8. Figure 5. Hydrologic cycling in Wet Upland Drainageway Prairie ecological site.

Soil features

Soils of Wet Upland Drainageway Prairies are in the Mollisols and Entisols orders, further classified as Aquic Cumulic Hapludolls, Cumulic Endoaquolls, Cumulic Hapludolls, Fluvaquentic Hapludolls, and Mollic Fluvaquents with slow infiltration and low to medium runoff potential. The soil series associated with this site includes Ackmore, Afton, Colo, Ely, Judson, Radford, and Terril (Figure 6). The parent materials are alluvium and colluvium, and the soils are poorly to moderately well-drained and deep with seasonal high-water tables. Soil pH classes are moderately acid to moderately alkaline. No rooting restrictions are noted for the soils of this ecological site (Table 5).

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

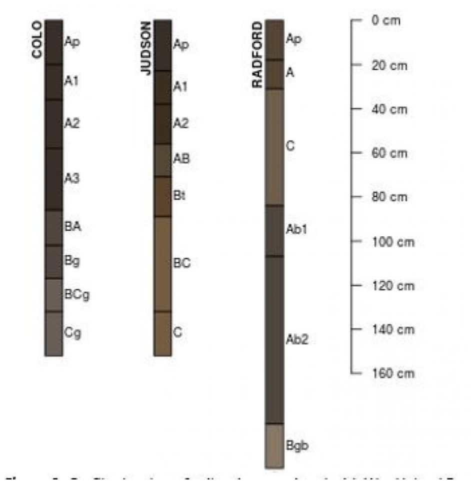


Figure 9. Figure 6. Profile sketches of soil series associated with Wet Upland Drainageway Prairie.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Loess
Family particle size	(1) Fine-silty
Drainage class	Poorly drained to moderately well drained
Permeability class	Slow to moderately slow
Soil depth	203 cm

Ecological dynamics

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

MLRA 107A is defined by a relatively low relief landscape that experiences lower rainfall amounts and available moisture compared to other MLRAs occurring to the south and east. As a result, prairie vegetation communities dominate the uplands, while forested communities are restricted to medium and large streams (Prior 1991; Eilers and Roosa 1994; MDNR 2017a, b). Wet Upland Drainageway Prairies form an aspect of this vegetative continuum. This ecological site occurs on upland drainageways on poorly to moderately well-drained soils. Species characteristic of this ecological site consist of wet-mesic herbaceous vegetation.

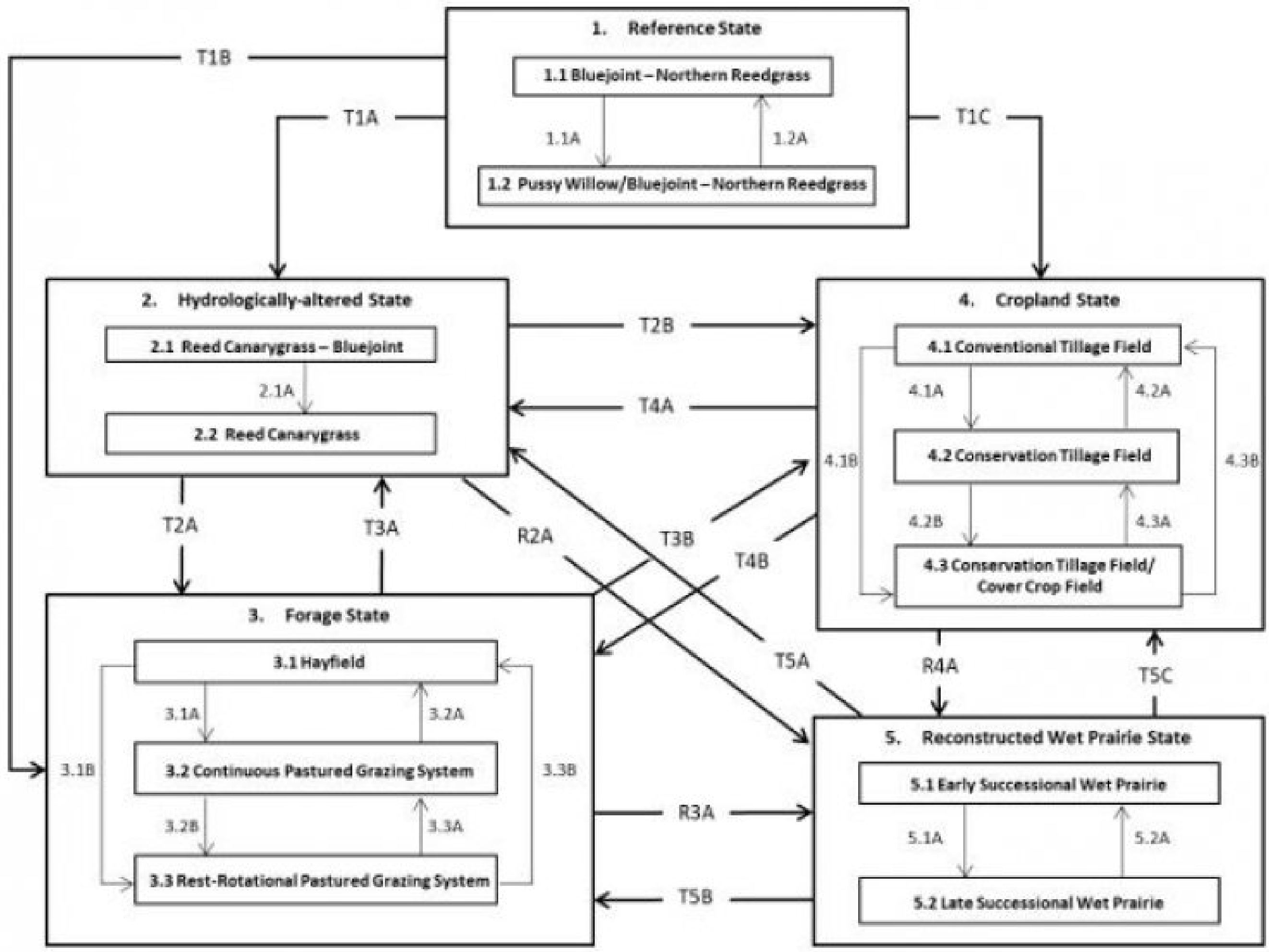
Flooding, fire, and native large mammal grazing are the primary disturbance factors of this ecological site. Periods of brief flooding occur following snowmelt and heavy rains. The water table remains below the rooting zone, but areas of groundwater seepage maintains moist soil conditions (MDNR 2005). Fire intensity typically consisted of periodic, high severity surface fires occurring every 3 to 5 years (LANDFIRE 2009). Ignition sources included summertime lightning strikes from convective storms and bimodal, human ignitions during the spring and fall seasons. Native Americans regularly set fires to improve sight lines for hunting, driving large game, improving grazing and browsing habitat, agricultural clearing, and enhancing vital ethnobotanical plants (Barrett 1980). Bison (Bos bison) and prairie elk (Cervus elaphus) were the main herbivores in northern tallgrass prairies, favoring recently burned patches. Herbivory occurred via mob grazing with large herds of animals rapidly moving across the prairie as they grazed (LANDFIRE 2009). These continuous disturbances provided critical conditions for perpetuating the native prairie ecosystem (MDNR 2005).

Drought has also played a role in shaping this ecological site. The periodic episodes of reduced soil moisture in conjunction with the poorly to moderately well-drained soils have favored the proliferation of plant species tolerant of such conditions. Drought can also slow the growth of plants and result in dieback of certain species. When coupled with fire and herbivory, periods of drought can greatly delay the establishment of woody vegetation (Pyne et al. 1996).

Today, Wet Upland Drainageway Prairies are limited in their extent, having been converted to agricultural production land. Corn (*Zea mays* L.) and soybeans (*Glycine max* (L.) Merr.) are the dominant crops grown on this ecological site, but small patches of forage land are present. A return to the historic plant community may not be possible following extensive land modification and significant hydrologic and water quality changes in the watershed, but long-term conservation agriculture or prairie reconstruction efforts can help to restore some biotic diversity and ecological function. The state-and-transition model that follows provides a detailed description of each state, community phase, pathway, and transition. This model is based on available experimental research, field observations, literature reviews, professional consensus, and interpretations.

State and transition model

R107AY210IA Wet Upland Drainageway Prairie



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

State 1
Reference State

The reference plant community is categorized as a wet-mesic to wet tallgrass community, dominated by herbaceous vegetation. The two community phases within the reference state are dependent on flooding, fire, and grazing. The inundation and soil saturation associated with brief flooding alter species composition, cover, and extent, while regular fire intervals and native large mammal grazing keep woody species from dominating. Drought has a more localized impact in the reference phases, but does contribute to overall species composition, diversity, cover, and productivity.

Dominant plant species

- pussy willow (*Salix discolor*), shrub
- bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), other herbaceous
- northern reedgrass (*Calamagrostis stricta ssp. inexpansa*), other herbaceous

Community 1.1
Bluejoint-Northern Reedgrass

Bluejoint – Northern Reedgrass – Sites in this reference community phase represent a fire return interval of approximately every 3 to 5 years. Vegetative cover is continuous (75 to 100 percent) and the tallest plants reach heights greater than 3 feet tall (MDNR 2005; LANDFIRE 2009). Bluejoint, northern reedgrass, prairie cordgrass, and various sedges form the dominant community composition in the lowest portions of the drainageway, but big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii* Vitman) and Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans* (L.) Nash) become important components on the higher portions. Characteristic forbs include Virginia mountainmint (*Pycnanthemum virginianum* (L.) T. Dur. & B.D. Jacks. ex B.L. Rob. & Fernald), giant goldenrod (*Solidago gigantea* Aiton), sawtooth sunflower (*Helianthus grosseserratus* M. Martens), marsh pea (*Lathyrus palustris* L.), and white panicle aster (*Symphyotrichum lanceolatum* (Willd.) G.L. Nesom ssp. lanceolatum var. lanceolatum).

Dominant plant species

- bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), other herbaceous
- northern reedgrass (*Calamagrostis stricta ssp. inexpansa*), other herbaceous

Community 1.2
Pussy Wilow/Bluejoint-Northern Reedgrass

Pussy Willow/Bluejoint – Northern Reedgrass – This reference community phase represents the natural plant community succession when fire return intervals extend beyond 5 years. Vegetative cover is still continuous, but the prolonged absence of fire allows sparse shrubs to inhabit the site including pussy willow (*Salix discolor* Muhl.) and redosier dogwood (*Cornus sericea* L.) (MDNR 2005).

Dominant plant species

- pussy willow (*Salix discolor*), shrub
- bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), other herbaceous
- northern reedgrass (*Calamagrostis stricta ssp. inexpansa*), other herbaceous

Pathway 1.1A
Community 1.1 to 1.2

Depth to water table and associated soil saturation is reduced

Pathway 1.2A
Community 1.2 to 1.1

Depth to water table and associated soil saturation is increased

State 2
Hydrologically-altered State

Hydrology is the most important determinant of wetlands and wetland processes. Hydrology modifies and determines the physiochemical environment (i.e., sediments, soil chemistry, water chemistry) which in turn directly affects the vegetation, animals, and microbes (Mitsch and Gosselink 2007). Human activities on landscape hydrology have greatly altered Wet Upland Drainageway Prairies. Alterations such as agricultural tile draining and conversion to cropland on adjacent lands have changed the natural hydroperiod and rate of sedimentation as well as increased nutrient pollution (Mitsch and Gosselink 2007; Eggers and Reed 2015).

Dominant plant species

- reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), other herbaceous
- bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), other herbaceous

Community 2.1
Reed Canarygrass-Bluejoint

Reed Canarygrass – Bluejoint – This community phase represents the early changes to the natural wetland hydroperiod, increasing sedimentation, and unabated nutrient runoff. Native grasses, such as bluejoint, northern reedgrass, and prairie cordgrass, continue to form a component of the herbaceous layer, but the highly invasive reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea* L.) co-dominates (Waggy 2010). As reed canarygrass invades, it can not only alter species composition, but vegetation structure as well (Annen et al. 2008).

Dominant plant species

- reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), other herbaceous
- bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), other herbaceous

Community 2.2
Reed Canarygrass

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

Dominant plant species

- reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), other herbaceous

Pathway 2.1A
Community 2.1 to 2.2

Increasing changes to hydrology and increasing sedimentation

State 3
Forage State

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

Community 3.1
Hayfield

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

Community 3.2
Continuous Pastured Grazing System

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

Community 3.3
Rest-Rotation Pastured Grazing System

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

Pathway 3.1A
Community 3.1 to 3.2

Mechanical harvesting is replaced with domestic livestock and continuous grazing

Pathway 3.1B
Community 3.1 to 3.3

Mechanical harvesting is replaced with domestic livestock and rest-rotational grazing

Pathway 3.2A
Community 3.2 to 3.1

Tillage, forage crop planting and mechanical harvesting replace grazing

Pathway 3.2B
Community 3.2 to 3.3

Implementation of rest-rotational grazing

Pathway 3.3B
Community 3.3 to 3.1

Tillage, forage crop planting and mechanical harvesting replace grazing

Pathway 3.3A
Community 3.3 to 3.2

Implementation of continuous grazing

State 4
Cropland State

The low topographic relief across the MLRA has resulted in nearly the entire area being converted to agriculture (Eilers and Roosa 1994). Agricultural tile drains used to lower the water table and the continuous use of tillage, row-crop planting, and chemicals (i.e., herbicides, fertilizers, etc.) have effectively eliminated the reference community and many of its natural ecological functions in favor of crop production. Corn and soybeans are the dominant crops for the site, and oats (Avena L.) and alfalfa (*Medicago sativa* L.) may be rotated periodically. These areas are likely to remain in crop production for the foreseeable future.

Community 4.1
Conventional Tillage Field

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

Community 4.2
Conservation Tillage Field

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

Community 4.3
Conservation Tillage with Cover Crop Field

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

Pathway 4.1A
Community 4.1 to 4.2

Less tillage, residue management

Pathway 4.1B
Community 4.1 to 4.3

Less tillage, residue management and implementation of cover cropping

Pathway 4.2A
Community 4.2 to 4.1

Intensive tillage, remove residue and reinitialize monoculture row cropping

Pathway 4.2B
Community 4.2 to 4.3

Implementation of cover cropping

Pathway 4.3B
Community 4.3 to 4.1

Intensive tillage, remove residue and reinitialize monoculture row cropping

Pathway 4.3A
Community 4.3 to 4.2

Remove cover cropping

State 5
Reconstructed Wet Prairie State

Wet prairie habitats provide multiple ecosystem services including flood abatement, water quality improvement, and biodiversity support (Mitsch and Gosselink 2007). However, many wet prairie communities have been eliminated as a result of type conversions to agricultural production, wildfire suppression, changes to the natural hydrologic regime, and invasion of non-native species, thereby significantly reducing these services (Annen et al. 2008). The extensive alterations of lands adjacent to Wet Upland Drainageway Prairies may not allow for restoration back to the historic reference condition. But ecological reconstruction can aim to aid the recovery of degraded, damaged, or destroyed functions. A successful reconstruction will have the ability to structurally and functionally sustain itself, demonstrate resilience to the natural ranges of stress and disturbance, and create and maintain positive biotic and abiotic interactions (SER 2002; Mitsch and Jørgensen 2004).

Community 5.1
Early Successional Wet Prairie

Early Successional Wet Prairie – This community phase represents the early community assembly from wet prairie reconstruction and is highly dependent on invasive species control, hydroperiod repair, planting, and properly timed prescribed fire activities (Adams and Galatowitsch 2006). In addition, adaptive restoration tactics that incorporate multiple restoration methods should be implemented in order to more clearly identify cause-effect relationships of vegetative development (Zedler 2005).

Community 5.2
Late Successional Wet Prairie

Late Successional Wet Prairie – Appropriately timed disturbance regimes (e.g. hydroperiod, prescribed fire, invasive species control) and nutrient management applied to the early successional community phase can help increase the species richness and improve ecosystem function, pushing the site into a late successional community phase over time (Mitsch and Gosselink 2007).

Pathway 5.1A
Community 5.1 to 5.2

Maintenance of proper hydrology, fire, and nutrient balances

Pathway 5.2A
Community 5.2 to 5.1

Drought or improper timing/use of management actions

Transition T1A
State 1 to 2

Changes to natural hydroperiod and/or land abandonment

Transition T1B
State 1 to 3

Cultural treatments are implemented to increase forage quality and yield

Transition T1C
State 1 to 4

Agricultural conversion via tillage, seeding and non-selective herbicides

Transition T2A
State 2 to 3

Cultural treatments are implemented to increase forage quality and yield

Transition T2B
State 2 to 4

Agricultural conversion via tillage, seeding and non-selective herbicide

Transition R2A
State 2 to 5

Site preparation, non-native species control and native seeding

Restoration pathway T3A
State 3 to 2

Changes to natural hydroperiod and/or land abandonment

Transition T3B
State 3 to 4

Agricultural conversion via tillage, seeding and non-selective herbicide

Transition R3A
State 3 to 5

Site preparation, non-native species control and native seeding

Restoration pathway T4A

State 4 to 2

Changes to natural hydroperiod and/or land abandonment

Restoration pathway T4B
State 4 to 3

Cultural treatments are implemented to increase forage quality and yield

Transition R4A
State 4 to 5

Site preparation, non-native species control and native seeding

Restoration pathway T5A
State 5 to 2

Changes to natural hydroperiod and/or land abandonment

Restoration pathway T5B
State 5 to 3

Cultural treatments are implemented to increase forage quality and yield

Restoration pathway T5C
State 5 to 4

Agricultural conversion via tillage, seeding and non-selective herbicide

Additional community tables

Inventory data references

Tier 3 Sampling Plot used to develop the reference state, community phase 1.1:
State County Ownership Legal Description Easting Northing
Iowa Clay Mori Prairie – The Nature Conservancy T97N R38W S2 312652 4790411
Iowa Cherokee Steele Prairie State Preserve – Iowa Department of Natural Resources T93N R40W S15 290768 4749638

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Approval

Chris Tecklenburg, 5/21/2020

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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	05/13/2025
Approved by	Chris Tecklenburg
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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:

---

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):**

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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:**
