

Ecological site F108XB020IL Loamy Floodplain Forest

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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): 108X—Illinois and Iowa Deep Loess and Drift

The Illinois and Iowa Deep Loess and Drift, East-Central Part (MLRA 108B) includes the Rock River Hill Country, Grand Prairie, and Western Forest-Prairie physiographic divisions (Schewman et al. 1973). It falls entirely in one state (Illinois), encompassing approximately 7,450 square miles (Figure 1). The elevation ranges from approximately 985 feet above sea level (ASL) in the northern and western parts to 660 feet ASL in south and west. Local relief is mainly 3 to 10 feet on the broad, upland flats and about 160 feet along the major streams and dissected drainageways. Wisconsin-aged loess forms a moderately thin to thick layer across the entire area with Illinoian glacial drift below. Bedrock lies beneath the glacial material with Pennsylvania shales, siltstones, and limestones in the south and west and Ordovician and Silurian limestone in the extreme north. This bedrock can be exposed on bluffs along the major rivers (USDA-NRCS 2006).

The vegetation in the MLRA has undergone drastic changes over time. At the end of the last glacial episode – the Wisconsin glacial episode – the evolution of vegetation began with the development of tundra habitats, followed by a phase of spruce and fir forests, and eventually spruce-pine forests. Not until approximately 9,000 years ago did the climate undergo a warming trend which prompted the development of deciduous forests dominated by oak and hickory. As the climate continued to warm and dry, prairies began to develop approximately 8,300 years ago. Another shift in climate that resulted in an increase in moisture prompted the emergence of savanna-like habitats from 8,000 to 5,000 years before present. Moisture continued to increase in the southernmost region 5,000 years ago, resulting in an increase of forested systems (Taft et al. 2009). Fire, droughts, and grazing by native mammals helped to maintain the prairies and savannas until the arrival of European settlers, and the forests were maintained by droughts, wind, lightning, and occasional fire (Taft et al. 2009; NatureServe 2018).

Classification relationships

USFS Subregions: Southwestern Great Lakes Morainal (222K), Central Till Plains-Oak Hickory Section (223G), Central Dissected Till Plains (251C), and Central Till Plains and Grand Prairies (251D) Sections; Rock River Old Drift Country (222Kh), Effingham Plain (222Ga), Mississippi River and Illinois Alluvial Plains (251 Cf), East Mississippi River Hills (251Ci), Galesburg Dissected Till Plain (251Cj), Carlinville Dissected Till Plain (251Ck), Green River Lowland (251Da), Western Grand Prairie (251Db), Northern Grand Prairie (251Dc), Southern Grand Prairie (251De), and Springfield Plains (251Df) Subsections (Cleland et al. 2007)

U.S. EPA Level IV Ecoregion: Illinois/Indiana Prairies (54a), Sand Area (54d), Rock River Hills (54g), and Western Dissected Illinoian Till Plain (72i) (USEPA 2013)

National Vegetation Classification – Ecological Systems: North-Central Interior Floodplain (CES202.694) (NatureServe 2018)

National Vegetation Classification – Plant Associations: *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* – *Ulmus* spp. – *Celtis occidentalis* Floodplain Forest (CEGL002014) (Nature Serve 2018)

Ecological site concept

Loamy Floodplain Forests are located within the blue areas on the map (Figure 1). They occur on floodplains. The soils are Mollisols that are somewhat poorly-drained and deep, formed in alluvium. The site experiences rare to occasional flooding that can last up to seven days.

The historic pre-European settlement vegetation on this ecological site was dominated by a dense, closed canopy of deciduous trees and an understory of flood-tolerant, hydrophytic herbaceous plants. Green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica* Marshall) and common hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis* L.) are common tree species present on the site. Other co-dominant tree species include silver maple (*Acer saccharinum* L.), bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa* Michx.), and American elm (*Ulmus americana* L.) (White and Madany 1978). The shrub layer supports woody shrubs, such as roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii* C.A. Mey.), and vines, such as riverbank grape (*Vitis riparia* Michx.) (NatureServe 2018). The understory is comprised of species tolerant of occasional flood disturbances such as Virginia wildrye (*Elymus virginicus* L.) and Canadian woodnettle (*Laportea canadensis* (L.) Weddell). Brief, seasonal flooding is the primary disturbance factor that maintains this site, while damage from storms and periodic pest outbreaks are secondary disturbances (LANDFIRE 2009).

Associated sites

F108XB021IL	Wet Loamy Floodplain Forest Very poorly to poorly-drained alluvial parent material that experiences flooding including Calco, Cohoctah, Fella, Normandy, and Sawmill soils
R108XB019IL	Mucky Sedge Meadow Organic parent material that experiences flooding and ponding including Adrian, Muskego, and Palms soils

Similar sites

F108XB021IL	Wet Loamy Floodplain Forest Wet Loamy Floodplain Forests are in a similar landscape position, but the site is poorly to very poorly-drained
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) <i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i> (2) <i>Celtis occidentalis</i>
Shrub	(1) <i>Cornus drummondii</i> (2) <i>Vitis riparia</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Elymus virginicus</i> (2) <i>Laportea canadensis</i>

Physiographic features

Loamy Floodplain Forests occur on floodplains in river valleys (Figure 2). They are situated on elevations ranging from approximately 590 to 980 feet. The site can experience rare to occasional flooding that can last up to seven days (Table 1).

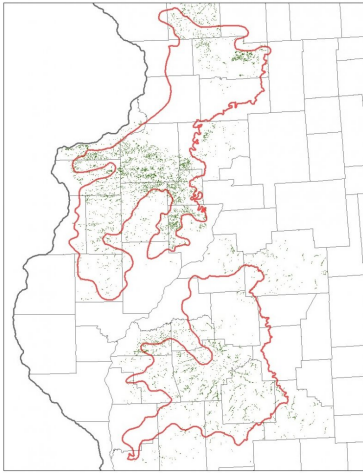


Figure 1. Figure 1. Location of Loamy Floodplain Forest ecological site within MLRA 108B.

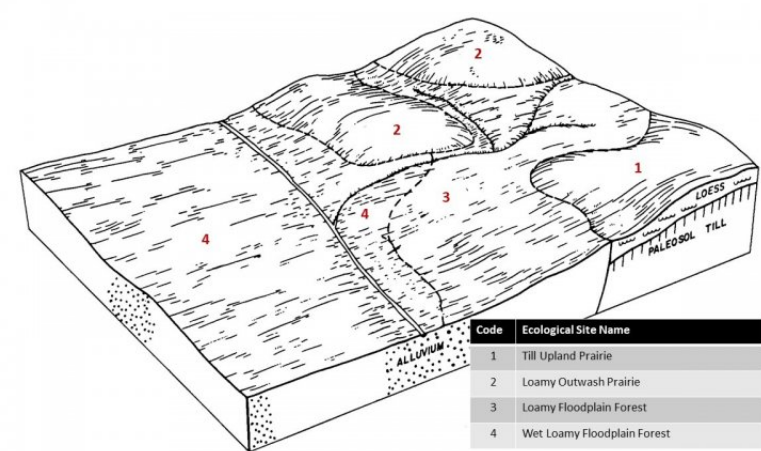


Figure 2. Figure 2. Representative block diagram of Loamy Floodplain Forest and associated ecological sites.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) River valley > Flood plain
Runoff class	Negligible to very high
Flooding duration	Brief (2 to 7 days)
Flooding frequency	None to occasional
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	590–980 ft
Slope	0–2%
Water table depth	12–24 in
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The Illinois and Iowa Deep Loess and Drift, East-Central Part falls into the hot-summer humid continental climate (Dfa) and the humid subtropical continental climate (Cfa) Köppen-Geiger climate classifications (Peel et al. 2007). The two main factors that drive the climate of the MLRA are latitude and weather systems. Latitude, and the subsequent reflection of solar input, determines air temperatures and seasonal variations. Solar energy varies across the seasons, with summer receiving three to four times as much energy as opposed to winter. Weather systems (air masses and cyclonic storms) are responsible for daily fluctuations of weather conditions. High-pressure systems are responsible for settled weather patterns where sun and clear skies dominate. In fall, winter, and spring, the polar jet stream is responsible for the creation and movement of low-pressure systems. The clouds,

winds, and precipitation associated with a low-pressure system regularly follow high-pressure systems every few days (Angel n.d.).

The soil temperature regime of MLRA 108B 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 169 days, while the frost-free period is about 144 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 38 inches, which includes rainfall plus the water equivalent from snowfall (Table 3). The average annual low and high temperatures are 40 and 61°F, respectively.

Climate data and analyses are derived from 30-year averages gathered from five 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)	141-146 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	164-175 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	37-40 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	140-148 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	162-176 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	36-40 in
Frost-free period (average)	144 days
Freeze-free period (average)	169 days
Precipitation total (average)	38 in

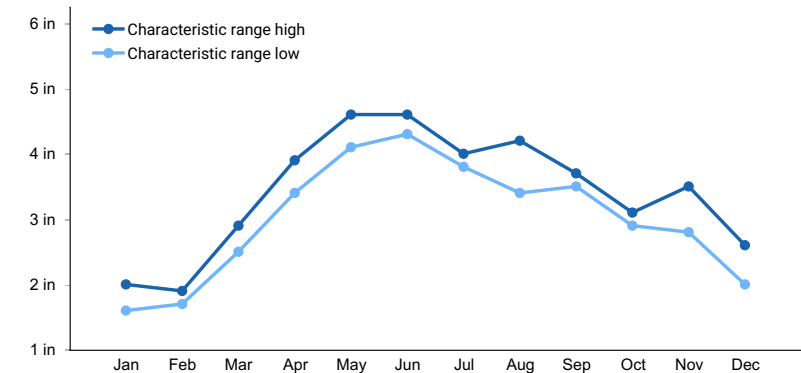


Figure 3. Monthly precipitation range

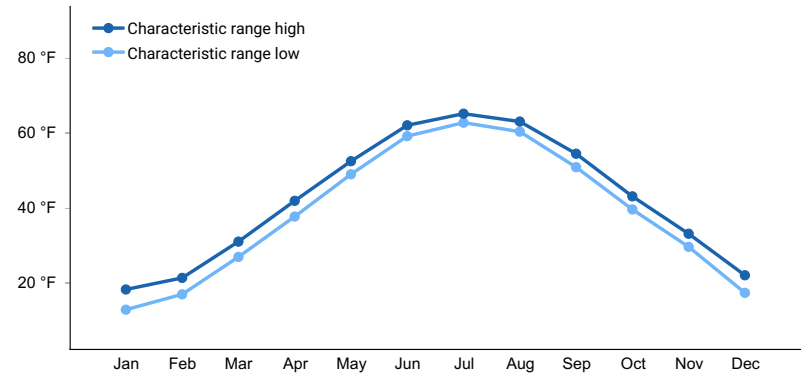


Figure 4. Monthly minimum temperature range

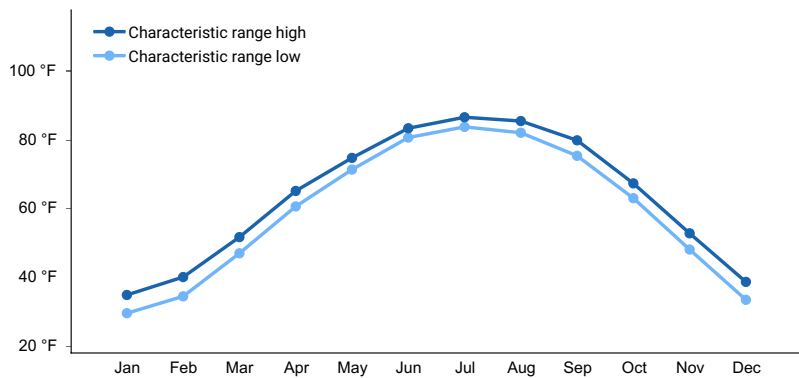


Figure 5. Monthly maximum temperature range

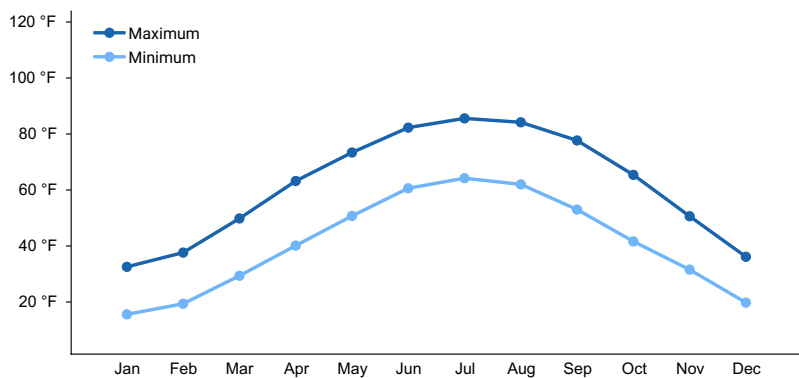


Figure 6. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

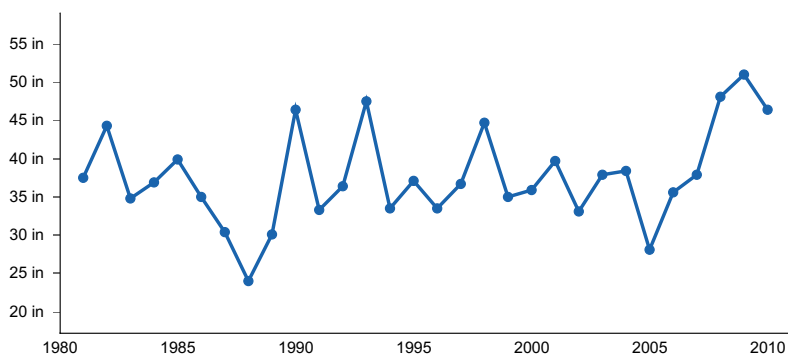


Figure 7. Annual precipitation pattern

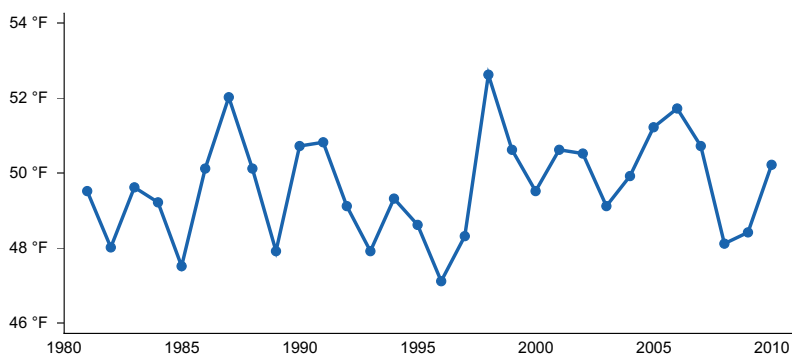


Figure 8. Annual average temperature pattern

Climate stations used

- (1) FREEPORT WASTE WTP [USC00113262], Freeport, IL
- (2) KEWANEE 1 E [USC00114710], Kewanee, IL
- (3) MONMOUTH [USC00115768], Monmouth, IL

- (4) JACKSONVILLE 2 [USC00114447], Jacksonville, IL
- (5) MORRISONVILLE [USC00115841], Morrisonville, IL

Influencing water features

Loamy Floodplain Forests are classified as a RIVERINE: Occasionally Flooded; forested wetland under the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) classification system (Smith et al. 1995; USDA-NRCS 2008) and as a Palustrine, Forested, Broad-leaved Deciduous, Temporarily Flooded wetland under the National Wetlands Inventory (FGDC 2013). Overbank flow from the channel and subsurface hydraulic connections are the main sources of water for this ecological site (Smith et al. 1995). Infiltration is very slow (Hydrologic Group D) for undrained soils, and surface runoff is negligible to very high (Figure 5).

Primary wetland hydrology indicators for an intact Loamy Floodplain Forest may include: A1 Surface water, B1 Water marks, B2 Sediment deposits, B3 Drift deposits, and B9 Water-stained leaves. Secondary wetland hydrology indicators may include: D5 FAC-neutral test (USACE 2010).

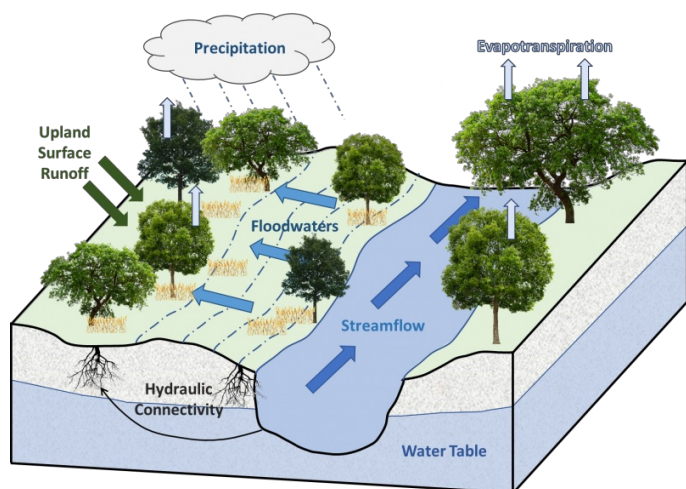


Figure 9. Figure 5. Hydrologic cycling in Loamy Floodplain Forest ecological site.

Soil features

Soils of Loamy Floodplain Forests are in the Mollisols order, further classified as Fluvaquentic Hapludolls with very slow infiltration and negligible to very high runoff potential. While these soils are classified as Mollisols, their dark surfaces and increased thickness of the epipedon are not the result of prairie vegetation but rather alluvial deposition and slope wash. The soil series associated with this site includes Radford. The parent material is alluvium, and the soils are somewhat poorly-drained and deep. Soil pH classes are moderately acid to slightly alkaline. No rooting restrictions are noted for the soils of this ecological site (Table 5).

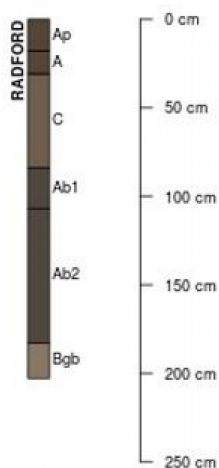


Figure 10. Figure 6. Profile sketch of soil series associated with Loamy Floodplain Forest.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium
Surface texture	(1) Silt loam
Family particle size	(1) Fine-silty
Drainage class	Somewhat poorly drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow
Soil depth	80 in
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (Depth not specified)	6.6–9 in
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (Depth not specified)	5.6–7.8
Subsurface fragment volume ≤3" (Depth not specified)	0–1%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0%

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.

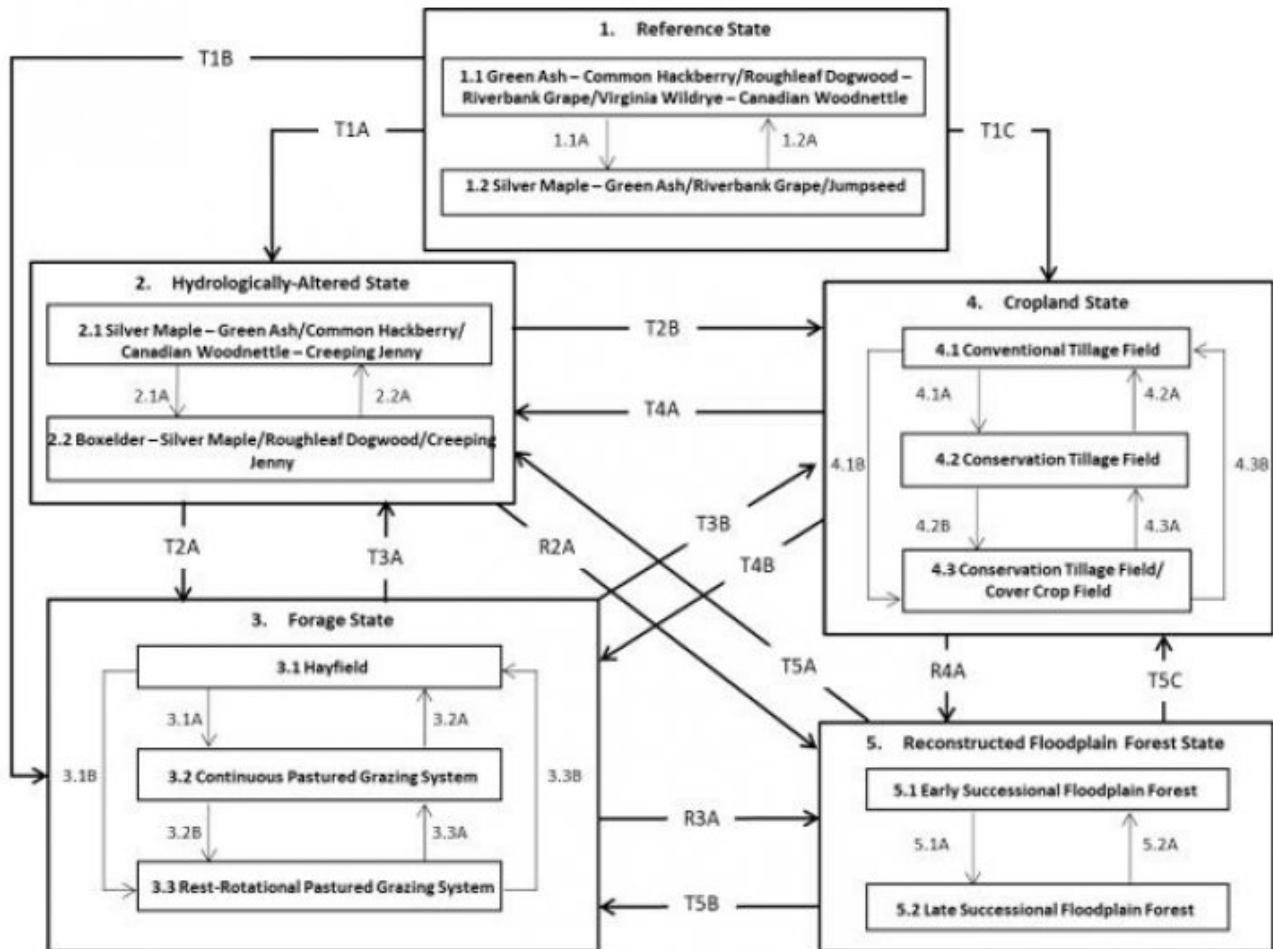
The MLRA lies within the tallgrass prairie ecosystem of the Midwest. The heterogeneous topography of the area results in variable microclimates and fuel matrices that in support prairies, savannas, and forests. Loamy Floodplain Forests form an aspect of this vegetative continuum. This ecological site occurs on floodplains on somewhat poorly-drained soils. Species characteristic of this ecological site consist of woody and herbaceous vegetation tolerant of periodic flooding.

Rare to occasional flooding is the dominant disturbance factor in Loamy Floodplain Forests, and storm damage and pests are secondary disturbances. Seasonal flooding occurs every two to twenty years, and flooding can persist for up to seven days at a time. Damage to trees from wind storms can vary from minor, patchy effects of individual trees to stand effects that temporarily affect community structure and species richness and diversity (Irland 2000; Peterson 2000). Trees are susceptible to a variety of pests (e.g., insects, fungi, cankers, wilts), therefore periodic insect and disease outbreaks play an important role in local canopy structure.

Today, many Loamy Floodplain Forests have been reduced as a result of conversion to pasture. A few sites have been cleared and drained for agricultural production. Remnant sites have been degraded due to significant changes to the natural hydrologic regime and diminished water quality in the watershed. 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

F108BY020IL LOAMY FLOODPLAIN FOREST



Code	Process
1.1A	Major flood event
1.2A	Natural succession as a result of no disturbances
T1A, T3A, T4A, T5A	Changes to natural hydroperiod and/or land abandonment
2.1A	Increasing frequency of disturbances
2.2A	Decreasing frequency of disturbances
T1B, T2A, T4B, T5B	Cultural treatments are implemented to increase forage quality and yield
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
T1C, T2B, T3B, T5C	Agricultural conversion via tillage, seeding, and non-selective herbicide
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
R2A, R3A, R4A	Site preparation, tree planting, repair hydrology, non-native species control
5.1A	Timber stand improvement practices implemented
5.2A	Setback from extreme weather event or improper timing of management actions

State 1 Reference State

The reference plant community is categorized as a floodplain forest community, dominated by woody and

herbaceous vegetation tolerant of periodic flooding. The two community phases within the reference state are dependent on a regular flood regime. The amount and duration of flooding alters species composition, cover, and extent. Periodic pest outbreaks and wind storms have more localized impacts in the reference phases, but do contribute to overall species composition, diversity, cover, and productivity.

Dominant plant species

- green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), tree
- common hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), tree
- silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), tree
- roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*), shrub
- riverbank grape (*Vitis riparia*), shrub
- Virginia wildrye (*Elymus submuticus*), other herbaceous
- Canadian woodnettle (*Laportea canadensis*), other herbaceous
- jumpseed (*Antennaria neofiliforme*), other herbaceous

Community 1.1

Green Ash – Common Hackberry/Roughleaf Dogwood – Riverbank Grape/Virginia Wildrye

Green Ash – Common Hackberry/Roughleaf Dogwood – Riverbank Grape/Virginia Wildrye – Canadian Woodnettle – Sites in this reference community phase are a closed canopy forest (80 to 100 percent cover), defined by a mixture of trees with no clear dominant species. Green ash, common hackberry, bur oak, and American elm are common trees on the site (White and Madan 1978). Trees are large (21 to 33-inch DBH) and range in height from 30 to over 80 feet tall (LANDFIRE 2009). Virginia wildrye and Canadian woodnettle are characteristic species of the herbaceous layer, but other species can include nodding fescue (*Festuca subverticillata* (Pers.) Alexeev), stickywilly (*Galium aparine* L.), and white avens (*Geum canadense* Jacq.) (NatureServe 2018). Rare to occasional flooding every 2 to 20 years will maintain this phase, but a major flood event can shift the community to an earlier successional floodplain forest, phase 1.2 (Myers and Buchanan 1984).

Dominant plant species

- common hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), tree
- roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*), shrub
- riverbank grape (*Vitis riparia*), shrub
- Virginia wildrye (*Elymus submuticus*), other herbaceous
- Canadian woodnettle (*Laportea canadensis*), other herbaceous

Community 1.2

Silver Maple – Green Ash/Riverbank Grape/Jumpseed

Silver Maple – Green Ash/Riverbank Grape/Jumpseed – This reference community phase represents a plant community in recovery from a major flood event. Mature trees are still present, but the more disturbance-tolerant species becomes important in the canopy, including silver maple and green ash. Shrubs can be greatly reduced from the scouring and deposition event, leaving just woody vines. Immediately following the flood event, the herbaceous layer is likely to be comprised of mostly annuals such as jumpseed (*Polygonum virginianum* L.). Frequent flooding will maintain this community phase, but a lack of disturbances will eventually allow the site to shift back to phase 1.1 (Myers and Buchman 1984).

Dominant plant species

- silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), tree
- green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), tree
- riverbank grape (*Vitis riparia*), shrub
- jumpseed (*Antennaria neofiliforme*), other herbaceous

Pathway 1.1A

Community 1.1 to 1.2

Major flood event

Pathway 1.2A

Community 1.2 to 1.1

Natural succession as a result of no disturbance

State 2

Hydrologically Altered State

Agricultural tile drainage, stream channelization, and levee construction in hydrologically-connected waters have drastically changed the natural hydrologic regime of Loamy Floodplain Forests. In addition, increased amounts of precipitation and intensity have amplified flooding events (Pryor et al. 2014). This has resulted in a type conversion from the species-rich forest to a ruderal floodplain forest state. In addition, exotic species have encroached and continuously spread, reducing native diversity and ecosystem stability.

Dominant plant species

- silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), tree
- green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), tree
- common hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), tree
- boxelder (*Acer negundo*), tree
- roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*), shrub
- Canadian woodnettle (*Laportea canadensis*), other herbaceous
- creeping jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*), other herbaceous

Community 2.1

Silver Maple – Green Ash/Common Hackberry/Canadian Woodnettle – Creeping Jenny

Silver Maple – Green Ash/Common Hackberry/Canadian Woodnettle – Creeping Jenny – This community phase represents a transition in plant community composition as a result of an altered hydrologic regime. Silver maple, green ash, American elm, and slippery elm become the dominant tree canopy species. Common hackberry, honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos* L.), and boxelder (*Acer negundo* L.) are dominant subcanopy species, while roughleaf dogwood is a dominant shrub. The herbaceous layer is nearly continuous but lacking in diversity. Canadian woodnettle and Virginia wildrye are common native species, and creeping jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia* L.) can be a frequently encountered non-native species.

Dominant plant species

- silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), tree
- green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), tree
- common hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), tree
- Canadian woodnettle (*Laportea canadensis*), other herbaceous
- creeping jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*), other herbaceous

Community 2.2

Boxelder – Silver Maple/Roughleaf Dogwood/Creeping Jenny

Boxelder – Silver Maple/Roughleaf Dogwood/Creeping Jenny – This community phase represents persisting changes to the natural hydrology of the watershed. The overstory canopy continues to shift, becoming dominated by boxelder due to frequent disturbances (Rosario 1988). Silver maple, green ash, and American elm can be co-dominant canopy species, and roughleaf dogwood remains in the shrub layer. The understory may continue to be invaded by more non-native species as a result of the frequent disturbances.

Dominant plant species

- boxelder (*Acer negundo*), tree
- silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), tree
- roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*), shrub
- creeping jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*), other herbaceous

Pathway 2.1A

Community 2.1 to 2.2

Increasing frequency of disturbances

Pathway 2.2A

Community 2.2 to 2.1

Decreasing frequency of disturbances

State 3

Forage State

The forage state occurs when the reference state 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, such as smooth brome (*Bromus inermis* Leyss.) and Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis* L.), to help extend the grazing season. Over time, as lands were continuously harvested or grazed by herds of cattle, the non-native species were able to spread and expand across the landscape, 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

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 pratense* 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 continuous use of tillage, row-crop planting, and chemicals (i.e., herbicides, fertilizers, etc.) has 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

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 Field/Alternative Crop Field

Conservation Tillage Field/Alternative 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 Floodplain Forest State

The combination of natural and anthropogenic disturbances occurring today has resulted in numerous ecosystem health issues, and restoration back to the historic reference state may not be possible. Many natural forest communities are being stressed by non-native diseases and pests, habitat fragmentation, permanent changes in hydrologic regimes, and overabundant deer populations on top of naturally-occurring disturbances (severe weather

and native pests) (IFDC 2018). However, these habitats provide multiple ecosystem services including carbon sequestration; clean air and water; soil conservation; biodiversity support; wildlife habitat; as well as a variety of cultural activities (e.g., hiking, hunting) (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005; IFDC 2018). Therefore, conservation of floodplain forests should still be pursued. Habitat reconstructions are an important tool for repairing natural ecological functioning and providing habitat protection for numerous species of Loamy Floodplain Forests. Therefore, ecological restoration should aim to aid the recovery of degraded, damaged, or destroyed ecosystems. A successful restoration will have the ability to structurally and functionally sustain itself, demonstrate resilience to the ranges of stress and disturbance, and create and maintain positive biotic and abiotic interactions (SER 2002). The reconstructed forest state is the result of a long-term commitment involving a multi-step, adaptive management process.

Community 5.1

Early Successional Reconstructed Forest

Early Successional Reconstructed Forest – This community phase represents the early community assembly from forest reconstruction. It is highly dependent on the current condition of the site based on past and current land management actions, invasive species, and proximity to land populated with non-native pests and diseases. Therefore, no two sites will have the same early successional composition. Technical forestry assistance should be sought to develop suitable conservation management plans.

Community 5.2

Late Successional Reconstructed Forest

Late Successional Reconstructed Forest – Appropriately timed management practices (e.g. forest stand improvement, continuing integrated pest management) applied to the early successional community phase can help increase the stand maturity, pushing the site into a late successional community phase over time. A late successional reconstructed forest will have an uneven-aged, closed canopy and a well-developed understory. Pathway 5.2A – Reconstruction experiences a setback from extreme weather event or improper timing of management actions.

Pathway 5.1A

Community 5.1 to 5.2

Timber stand improvement practices implemented

Pathway 5.2A

Community 5.2 to 5.1

Setback from extreme weather event or improper timing 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 herbicide

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, tree planting, repair hydrology and non-native species control

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, tree planting, repair hydrology and non-native species control

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, tree planting, repair hydrology and non-native species control

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

No field plots have been developed for this site. A review of the scientific literature and professional experience were used to approximate the plant communities for this provisional ecological site. Information for the state-and-transition model was obtained from the same sources. All community phases are considered provisional based on these plots and the sources identified in this ecological site description.

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Approval

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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	01/30/2023
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:**
