

Ecological site R110XY013IL Dry Sand Prairie

Last updated: 4/22/2020
Accessed: 05/11/2025

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): 110X–Northern Illinois and Indiana Heavy Till Plain

The Northern Illinois and Indiana Heavy Till Plain (MLRA 110) encompasses the Northeastern Morainal, Grand Prairie, and Southern Lake Michigan Coastal landscapes (Schwegman et al. 1973, WDNR 2015). It spans three states – Illinois (79 percent), Indiana (10 percent), and Wisconsin (11 percent) – comprising about 7,535 square miles (Figure 1). The elevation is about 650 feet above sea level (ASL) and increases gradually from Lake Michigan south. Local relief varies from 10 to 25 feet. Silurian age fractured dolomite and limestone bedrock underlie the region. Glacial drift covers the surface area of the MLRA, and till, outwash, lacustrine deposits, loess or other silty material, and organic deposits are common (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 (Taft et al. 2009). Forests maintained footholds on steep valley sides, morainal ridges, and wet floodplains. 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) and Central Till Plains and Grand Prairies (251D) Sections; Kenosha-Lake Michigan Plain and Moraines (222Kg), Valparaiso Moraine (Kj), and Eastern Grand Prairie (251Dd) Subsections (Cleland et al. 2007)

U.S. EPA Level IV Ecoregion: Kettle Moraines (53b), Illinois/Indiana Prairies (54a), and Valparaiso-Wheaton Morainal Complex (54f) (USEPA 2013)

National Vegetation Classification – Ecological Systems: North-Central Interior Sand and Gravel Tallgrass Prairie (CES202.695) (NatureServe 2018)

National Vegetation Classification – Plant Associations: *Schizachyrium scoparium* – *Sorghastrum nutans* – *Andropogon gerardii* – *Lespedeza capitata* Sand Grassland (CEGL002210); *Andropogon gerardii* – *Sorghastrum nutans* – *Schizachyrium scoparium* – *Aletris farinosa* Grassland (CEGL005096) (Nature Serve 2018)

Biophysical Settings: North-Central Interior Sand and Gravel Tallgrass Prairie (BpS 4214120) (LANDFIRE 2009)

Illinois Natural Areas Inventory: Dry-mesic sand prairie (White and Madany 1978)

Ecological site concept

Dry Sand Prairies are located within the green areas on the map. They occur on uplands. The soils are Mollisols that are well to excessively drained and very deep, formed in eolian deposits and outwash. These coarse soils are droughty and low in nutrients and organic matter.

The historic pre-European settlement vegetation on this ecological site was dominated by drought-adapted herbaceous species. Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium* (Michx.) Nash) and tall blazing star (*Liatris aspera* Michx.) are the dominant and diagnostic species on the site, respectively (White and Madany 1978). Other grasses present can include Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans* (L.) Nash), porcupinegrass (*Hesperostipa spartea* (Trin.) Barkworth), and big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii* Vitman) (White and Madany 1978; NatureServe 2018). Forbs typical of an undisturbed plant community associated with this ecological site include flaxleaf whitetop aster (*Ionactis linariifolius* (L.)), showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa* Nutt.), and birdfoot violet (*Viola pedata* L.) (Taft et al. 1997). Fire is the primary disturbance factor that maintains this ecological site, while sand blow outs, periodic drought and large mammal grazing are secondary factors (LANDFIRE 2009; Taft et al. 2009; NatureServe 2018).

Associated sites

R110XY014IL	Moist Sand Prairie Eolian deposits or outwash parent material that has a seasonal water table within 15-18 inches including Bonfield, Hoopeston, Ridgeville, Watseka, and Wesley soils
F110XY016IL	Sand Woodland Eolian deposits or outwash parent material on fire-protected landscapes including Alvin, Boyer, Chelsea, Oakville, Plainfield, Roby, Ruark, Udipsamments, and Wasepi soils

Similar sites

R110XY006IL	Dry Glacial Drift Upland Prairie Dry Glacial Drift Upland Prairies have a similar vegetation structure, but the parent material is loess or other silty or loamy material or loamy outwash
-------------	--

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i> (2) <i>Liatris aspera</i>

Physiographic features

Dry Sand Prairies occur on uplands. They are situated on elevations ranging from approximately 512 to 1299 feet ASL. The site does not experience flooding but rather generates runoff to adjacent, downslope ecological sites

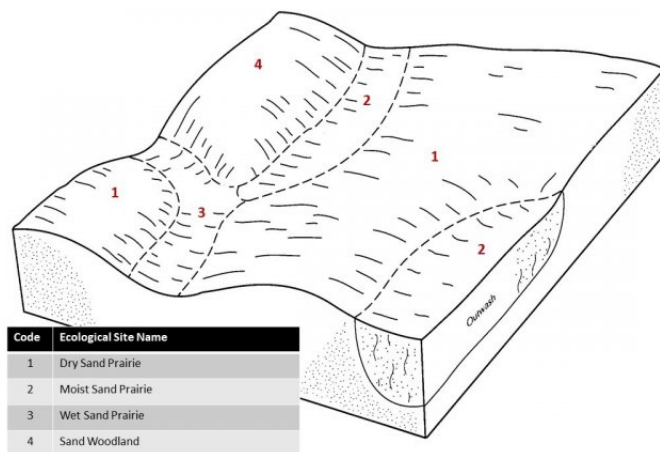


Figure 1. Representative block diagram of Dry Sand Prairie and associated ecological sites.



Figure 2.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Slope shape across	(1) Convex (2) Convex
Landforms	(1) Upland
Runoff class	Negligible to medium
Elevation	512–1,299 ft
Slope	0–12%
Water table depth	80 in
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The Northern Illinois and Indiana Heavy Till Plain falls into the hot-summer humid continental climate (Dfa) and warm-summer humid continental climate (Dfb) 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 110 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 176 days, while the frost-free period is about 142 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 38 inches, which includes rainfall plus the water equivalent from snowfall (Table 3). The average annual low and high temperatures are 40.5 and 60.3°F, respectively.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	138-146 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	167-185 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	38-39 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	134-149 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	160-193 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	37-39 in
Frost-free period (average)	142 days
Freeze-free period (average)	176 days
Precipitation total (average)	38 in

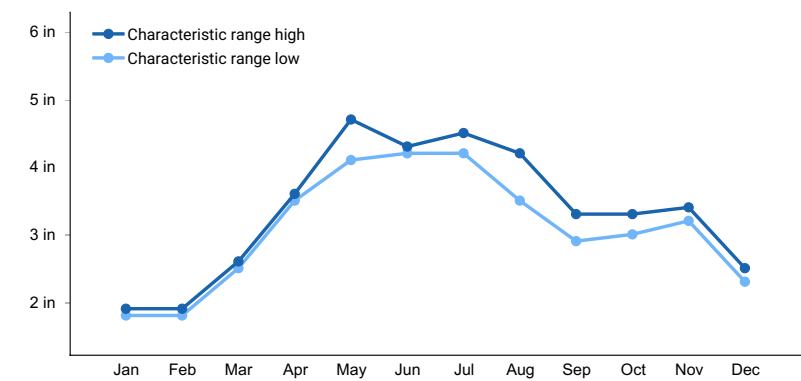


Figure 3. Monthly precipitation range

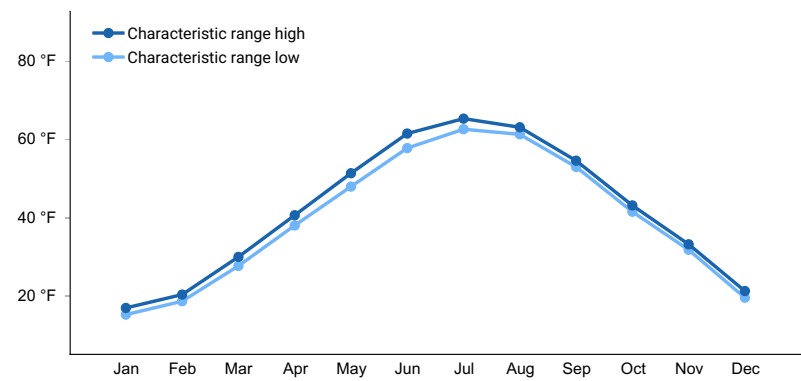


Figure 4. Monthly minimum temperature range

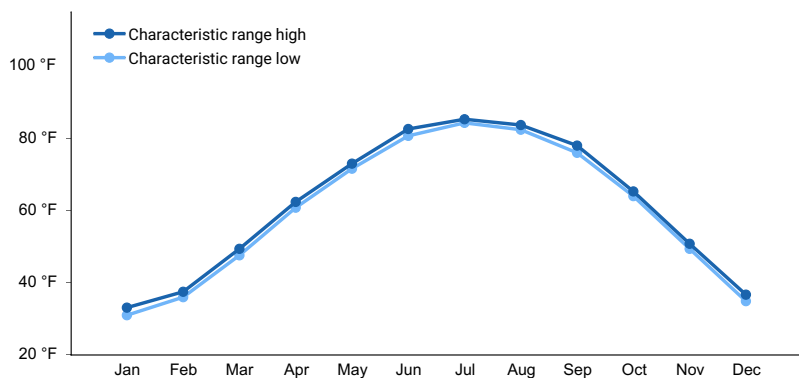


Figure 5. Monthly maximum temperature range

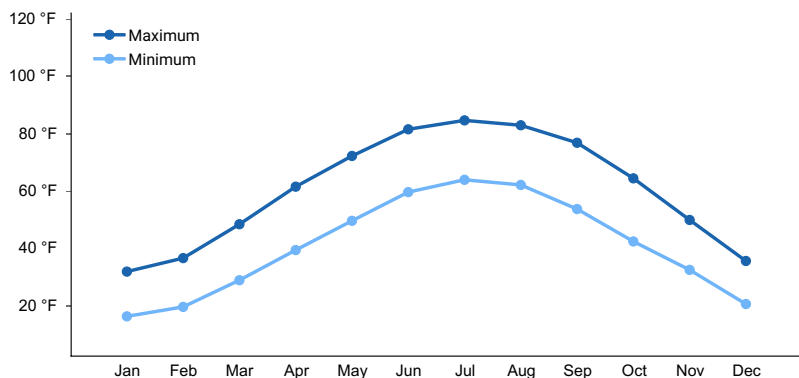


Figure 6. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

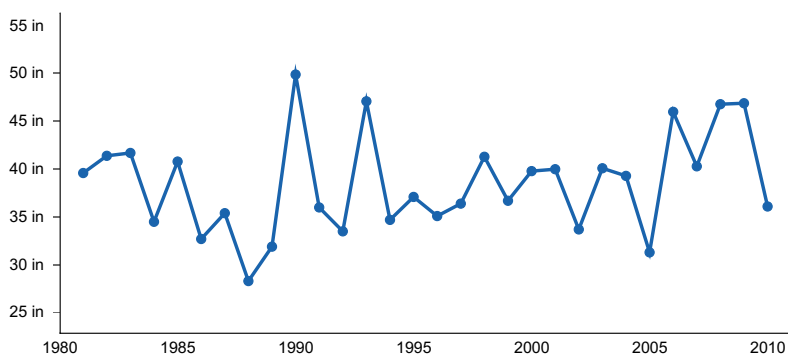


Figure 7. Annual precipitation pattern

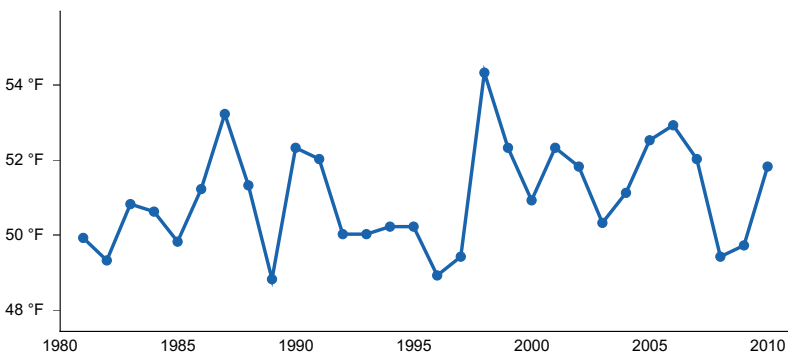


Figure 8. Annual average temperature pattern

Climate stations used

- (1) HOOPESTON 1NE [USC00114198], Hoopeston, IL
- (2) KANKAKEE WASTEWATER [USC00114603], Kankakee, IL
- (3) CHANNAHON DRESDEN ISL DAM [USC0011420], Morris, IL

- (4) WHEATON 3 SE [USC00119221], Lisle, IL

Influencing water features

Dry Sand Prairies are not influenced by wetland or riparian water features. Precipitation is the main source of water for this ecological site. Infiltration is high (Hydrologic Group A), and surface runoff is negligible to medium. Surface runoff contributes some water to downslope ecological sites.

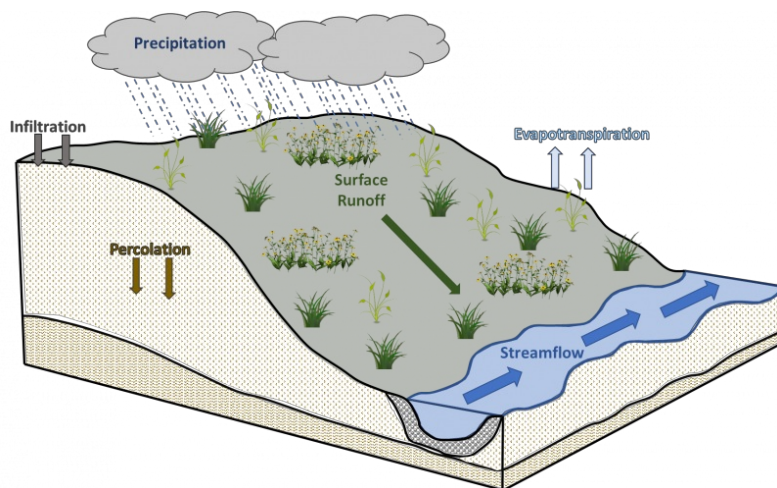


Figure 9. Hydrologic cycling in Dry Sand Prairie ecological site.

Soil features

Soils of Dry Sand Prairies are in the Mollisols order, further classified as Lamellic Argiudolls, Typic Argiudolls, Typic Hapludolls, and Entic Hapludolls with high infiltration and negligible to medium runoff potential. The soil series associated with this site includes Ade, Dickinson, Hononegah, Kankakee, Onarga, and Sparta. The parent material is eolian deposits and outwash and the soils are well to excessively drained and very deep. Soil pH classes are very strongly acid to moderately alkaline. No rooting restrictions are noted for the soils of this ecological site.

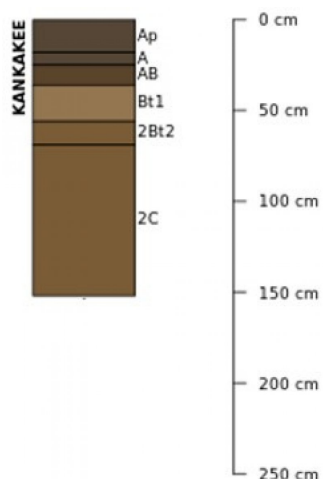


Figure 10. Profile sketches of soil series associated with Dry Sand Prairie.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Eolian deposits (2) Outwash
Family particle size	(1) Coarse-loamy (2) Loamy-skeletal (3) Sandy
Drainage class	Well drained to excessively drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to rapid

Depth to restrictive layer	80 in
Soil depth	80 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (Depth not specified)	2–6 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (Depth not specified)	0–40%
Electrical conductivity (Depth not specified)	0 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (Depth not specified)	0–2
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (Depth not specified)	4.5–8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	2–14%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	1–40%

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, but a variety of environmental and edaphic factors resulted in landscape that historically supported prairies, savannas, forests, and various wetlands. Sand Prairies form an aspect of this vegetative continuum. This ecological site occurs on uplands on well to excessively drained soils. Species characteristic of this ecological site consist of drought-adapted herbaceous vegetation.

Fire is a critical disturbance factor that maintains Dry Sand Prairies. Fire intensity typically consisted of periodic, low-intensity surface fires occurring every 1 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).

Sand blowouts are another disturbance factor that shape this ecological site. The high sand content coupled with increasing slopes allows for localized erosion and shifting from high wind events or following a recent fire. The resulting substrate exposures results in a temporarily reduced vegetative canopy cover, leaving a plant community that resembles a sand barren. Over time site stability increases and the community will shift back to sand prairie (NatureServe 2018).

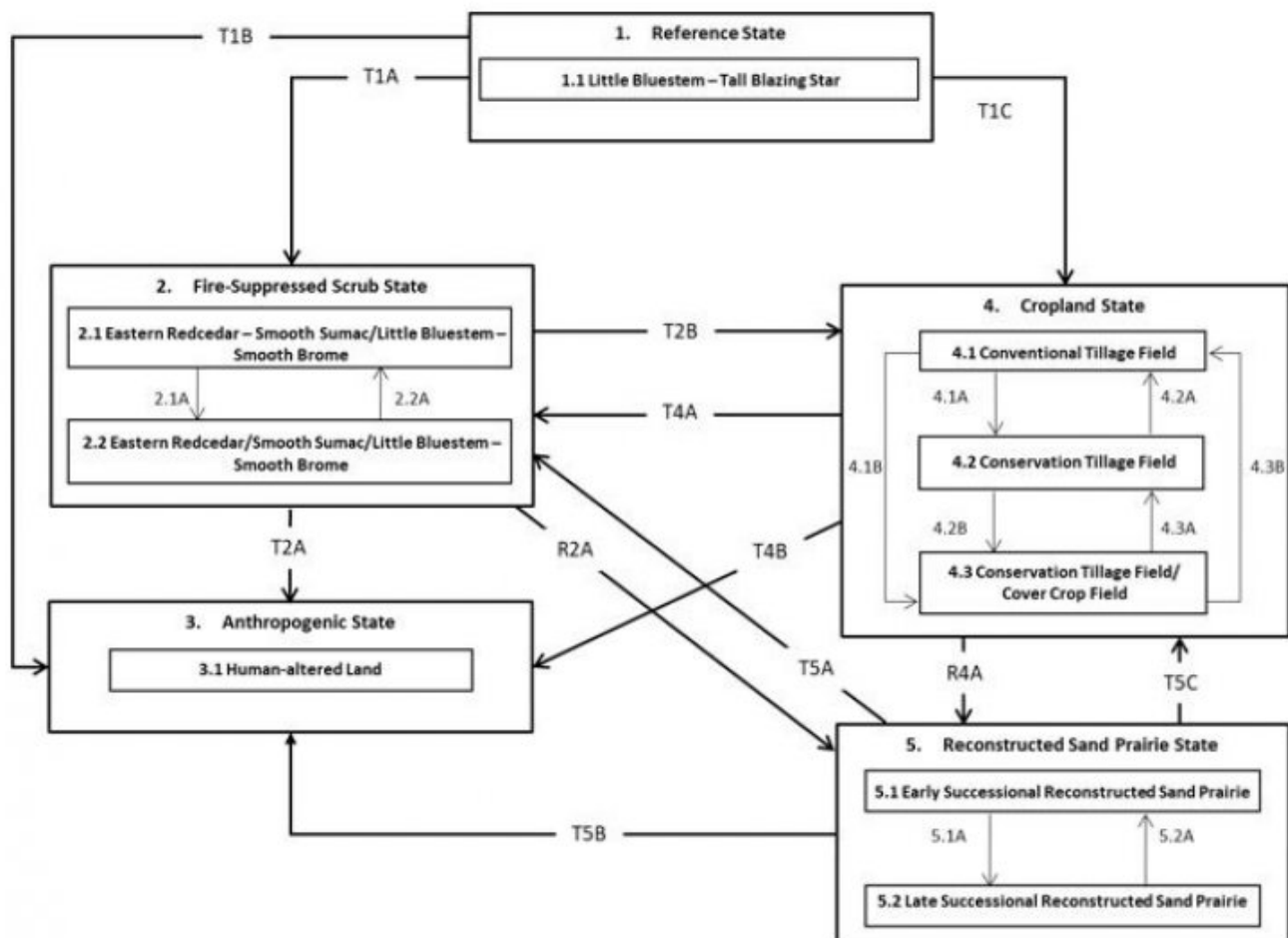
Drought and grazing by native ungulates have also played a role in shaping this ecological site. The periodic episodes of reduced soil moisture in conjunction with the well to excessively drained soils have favored the proliferation of plant species tolerant of such conditions. Drought can also slow the growth of plants and result in dieback of certain species. Large mammals, specifically prairie elk (*Cervus elaphus*), bison (*Bos bison*), and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), likely occurred in low densities resulting in limited impacts to plant composition and dominance (LANDFIRE 2009). When coupled with fire, periods of drought and herbivory can greatly delay the establishment of woody vegetation (Pyne et al. 1996).

Today, Dry Sand Prairies are limited in their extent, having been type-converted to agricultural production land or other human-modified landscapes. Remnants that do exist show evidence of indirect anthropogenic influences from

fire suppression and non-native species invasion. A return to the historic plant community may not be possible following extensive land modification, 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

R110XY013IL DRY SAND PRAIRIE



Code	Process
T1A, T4A, T5A	Long-term fire suppression and/or land abandonment
2.1A	Continued fire suppression in excess of 20 years
2.2A	Single large disturbance event
T1B, T2A, T4B, T5B	Vegetation removal and human alterations/transportation of soils
T1C, T2B, 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, R4A	Site preparation, non-native species control, and native seeding
5.1A	Invasive species control and implementation of disturbance regimes
5.2A	Drought or improper timing/use of management actions

State 1 Reference State

The reference plant community is categorized as a prairie community, dominated by herbaceous vegetation. The

one community phase within the reference state is dependent on fire and sand blowouts. Short fire return intervals and occasional slope failures alter species composition, cover, and extent, while regular fire intervals keep woody species from dominating. Drought and grazing have more localized impacts on the reference phase, but do contribute to overall species composition, diversity, cover, and productivity.

Community 1.1

Little Bluestem - Tall Blazing Star

Sites in this reference community phase are dominated by a mix of grasses and forbs. Vegetative cover is patchy to continuous (61 to 100 percent) and plants can reach heights greater than 3 feet tall (LANDFIRE 2009). Little bluestem, Indiangrass, porcupinegrass, and big bluestem are the dominant grasses. Characteristic forbs include tall blazing star, flaxleaf whitetop aster, showy goldenrod, birdfoot violet, roundhead lespedeza (*Lespedeza capitata* Michx), and Carolina puccoon (*Lithospermum caroliniense* (Walter ex J.G. Gmel.) MacMill.) (NatureServe 2018). Replacement fires every 3 to 4 years or periodic sand blowouts will maintain this phase (LANDFIRE 2009).

Dominant plant species

- little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), grass
- tall blazing star (*Liatris aspera*), other herbaceous

State 2

Fire-Suppressed Scrub State

Long-term fire suppression can transition the reference sand prairie community into a woody-invaded shrub-prairie. This state is evidenced by a well-developed shrub layer and sparse trees (LANDFIRE 2009). Proximity to lands that have been altered provide opportunities for non-native species to readily colonize this state, thereby reducing the native biodiversity and changing the vegetative community.

Community 2.1

Eastern Redcedar - Smooth Sumac/Little Bluestem - Smooth Brome

This community phase represents the early stages of long-term fire suppression. In the absence of fire, woody species encroach into the native sand prairie. Shrubs are less than 6 feet tall and can exceed 30 percent cover. Common shrubs likely to be encountered include eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana* L.) and smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra* L.). These tall shrubs shade out the understory, reducing the biodiversity. The shade also promotes a moister soil environment, providing suitable condition for invasion by non-native species, such as smooth brome (*Bromus inermis* L.) (Howard 1996).

Dominant plant species

- eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), shrub
- smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*), shrub
- little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), grass
- smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), grass

Community 2.2

Eastern Redcedar/Smooth Sumac/Little Bluestem - Smooth Brome

Sites falling into this community phase have a well-developed shrub layer, and scattered trees begin to mature as a result of the continued lack of fire. Eastern redcedar continues to grow readily on the dry, nutrient-poor sandy soils, becoming the dominant tree on the site while the clonal smooth sumac continues to expand in the shrub layer (Anderson 2003).

Dominant plant species

- eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), tree
- smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*), shrub
- little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), grass
- smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), grass

Pathway 2.1A

Community 2.1 to 2.2

Continued fire suppression in excess of 20 years.

Pathway 2.2A

Community 2.2 to 2.1

Single fire event with enough intensity to top-kill trees.

State 3

Anthropogenic State

The anthropogenic state occurs when the reference state is cleared and developed for human use and inhabitation, such as for commercial and housing developments, landfills, parks, golf courses, cemeteries, earthen spoils, etc. The native vegetation has been removed and soils have either been altered in place (e.g. cemeteries) or transported from one location to another (e.g. housing developments). Most of the soils in this state have 50 to 100 cm of overburden on top of the natural soil. This natural material can be determined by observing a buried surface horizon or the unaltered subsoil, till, or lacustrine parent materials. This state is generally considered permanent.

Community 3.1

Human-altered land

Sites in this community phase have had the native plant community removed and soils heavily re-worked in support of human development projects.

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 common wheat (*Triticum aestivum* 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

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

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

Tillage operations are greatly reduced, crop rotation occurs on a regular interval, and crop residue remains on the soil surface.

Pathway 4.1B

Community 4.1 to 4.3

Tillage operations are greatly reduced or eliminated, crop rotation occurs on a regular interval, crop residue remains on the soil surface, and cover crops are planted following crop harvest.

Pathway 4.2A

Community 4.2 to 4.1

Intensive tillage is utilized, and monoculture row-cropping is established.

Pathway 4.2B

Community 4.2 to 4.3

Cover crops are implemented to minimize soil erosion.

Pathway 4.3B

Community 4.3 to 4.1

Intensive tillage is utilized, cover crop practices are abandoned, monoculture row-cropping is established, and crop rotation is reduced or eliminated.

Pathway 4.3A

Community 4.3 to 4.2

Cover crop practices are abandoned.

State 5

Reconstructed Sand Prairie State

Prairie reconstructions have become an important tool for repairing natural ecological functions and providing habitat protection for numerous grassland dependent species. Because the historic plant and soil biota communities of the tallgrass prairie were highly diverse with complex interrelationships, historic prairie replication cannot be guaranteed on landscapes that have been so extensively manipulated for extended timeframes (Kardol and Wardle

2010; Fierer et al. 2013). 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 natural ranges of stress and disturbance, and create and maintain positive biotic and abiotic interactions (SER 2002). The reconstructed prairie state is the result of a long-term commitment involving a multi-step, adaptive management process. Diverse, species-rich seed mixes are important to utilize as they allow the site to undergo successional stages that exhibit changing composition and dominance over time (Smith et al. 2010). On-going management via prescribed fire and/or light grazing can help the site progress from an early successional community dominated by annuals and some weeds to a later seral stage composed of native, perennial grasses, forbs, and a few shrubs. Establishing a prescribed fire regimen that mimics natural disturbance patterns can increase native species cover and diversity while reducing cover of non-native forbs and grasses. Light grazing alone can help promote species richness, while grazing accompanied with fire can control the encroachment of woody vegetation (Brudvig et al. 2007).

Community 5.1

Early Successional Reconstructed Sand Prairie

This community phase represents the early community assembly from prairie reconstruction and is highly dependent on the seed mix utilized and the timing and priority of planting operations. The seed mix should look to include a diverse mix of cool-season and warm-season annual and perennial grasses and forbs typical of the reference state (e.g., little bluestem, porcupinegrass, roundhead lespedeza). Cool-season annuals can help provide litter that promotes cool, moist soil conditions to the benefit of the other species in the seed mix. The first season following site preparation and seeding will typically result in annuals and other volunteer species forming a majority of the vegetative cover. Control of non-native species, particularly perennial species, is crucial at this point to ensure they do not establish before the native vegetation (Martin and Wilsey 2012). After the first season, native warm-season grasses should begin to become more prominent on the landscape.

Community 5.2

Late Successional Reconstructed Sand Prairie

Appropriately timed disturbance regimes (e.g., prescribed fire) applied to the early successional community phase can help increase the beta diversity, pushing the site into a late successional community phase over time. While prairie communities are dominated by grasses, these species can suppress forb establishment and reduce overall diversity and ecological function (Martin and Wilsey 2006; Williams et al. 2007). Reducing accumulated plant litter from perennial bunchgrasses allows more nutrients and light to become available for forb recruitment, allowing greater ecosystem complexity (Wilsey 2008).

Pathway 5.1A

Community 5.1 to 5.2

Selective herbicides are used to control non-native species, and prescribed fire and/or light grazing helps to increase the native species diversity and control woody vegetation.

Pathway 5.2A

Community 5.2 to 5.1

Reconstruction experiences a decrease in native species diversity from drought or improper timing of management actions (e.g., reduced fire frequency, use of non-selective herbicides).

Transition T1A

State 1 to 2

Long-term fire suppression transitions the site to the fire-suppressed scrub state (2).

Transition T1B

State 1 to 3

Vegetation removal and human alterations/transportation of soils transitions the site to the anthropogenic state (3).

Transition T1C**State 1 to 4**

Tillage, seeding of agricultural crops, and non-selective herbicide transition the site to the cropland state (4).

Transition T2A**State 2 to 3**

Vegetation removal and human alterations/transportation of soils transitions the site to the anthropogenic state (3).

Transition T2B**State 2 to 4**

Tillage, seeding of agricultural crops, and non-selective herbicide transition this site to the cropland state (4).

Restoration pathway R2A**State 2 to 5**

Site preparation, invasive species control, and seeding native species transition this site to the reconstructed sand prairie state (5).

Transition T4A**State 4 to 2**

Land abandonment transitions the site to the fire-suppressed scrub state (2).

Transition T4B**State 4 to 3**

Vegetation removal and human alterations/transportation of soils transitions the site to the anthropogenic state (3).

Restoration pathway R4A**State 4 to 5**

Site preparation, invasive species control, and seeding native species transition this site to the reconstructed sand prairie state (5).

Transition T5A**State 5 to 2**

Land abandonment transitions the site to the fire-suppressed scrub state (2).

Transition T5B**State 5 to 3**

Vegetation removal and human alterations/transportation of soils transitions the site to the anthropogenic state (3).

Transition T5C**State 5 to 4**

Tillage, seeding of agricultural crops, and non-selective herbicide transition this site to the cropland state (4).

Additional community tables**Inventory data references**

No field plots were available 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.

Other references

- Anderson, M.D. 2003. *Juniperus virginiana*. In: Fire Effects Information System [Online]. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory. Available at: <https://www.crs-feis.org/feis/>. (Accessed 16 March 2018).
- Angel, J. No date. Climate of Illinois Narrative. Illinois State Water Survey, Prairie Research Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Available at <https://www.isws.illinois.edu/statecli/General/Illinois-climate-narrative.htm>. Accessed 8 November 2018.
- Barrett, S.W. 1980. Indians and fire. *Western Wildlands* Spring: 17-20.
- Brudvig, L.A., C.M. Mabry, J.R. Miller, and T.A. Walker. 2007. Evaluation of central North American prairie management based on species diversity, life form, and individual species metrics. *Conservation Biology* 21:864-874.
- Cleland, D.T., J.A. Freeouf, J.E. Keys, G.J. Nowacki, C. Carpenter, and W.H. McNab. 2007. Ecological Subregions: Sections and Subsections of the Conterminous United States. USDA Forest Service, General Technical Report WO-76. Washington, DC. 92 pps.
- Fierer, N., J. Ladau, J.C. Clemente, J.W. Leff, S.M. Owens, K.S. Pollard, R. Knight, J.A. Gilbert, and R.L. McCulley. 2013. Reconstructing the microbial diversity and function of pre-agricultural tallgrass prairie soils in the United States. *Science* 342: 621-624.
- Howard, J.L. 1996. *Bromus inermis*. In: Fire Effects Information System [Online]. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory. Available at: <https://www.crs-feis.org/feis/>. (Accessed 16 March 2018).
- Kardol, P. and D.A. Wardle. 2010. How understanding aboveground-belowground linkages can assist restoration ecology. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 25: 670-679.
- LANDFIRE. 2009. Biophysical Setting 4214120 North-Central Interior Sand and Gravel Tallgrass Prairie. In: LANDFIRE National Vegetation Dynamics Models. USDA Forest Service and US Department of Interior. Washington, DC.
- Leake, J., D. Johnson, D. Donnelly, G. Muckle, L. Boddy, and D. Read. 2004. Networks of power and influence: the role of mycorrhizal mycelium in controlling plant communities and agroecosystem functioning. *Canadian Journal of Botany* 82: 1016-1045.
- Lesica, P. and S.V. Cooper. 1999. Succession and disturbance in sandhills vegetation: constructing models for managing biological diversity. *Conservation Biology* 13: 293-302.
- Martin, L.M. and B.J. Wilsey. 2006. Assessing grassland restoration success: relative roles of seed additions and native ungulate activities. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 43: 1098-1110.
- Martin, L.M. and B.J. Wilsey. 2012. Assembly history alters alpha and beta diversity, exotic-native proportions and functioning of restored prairie plant communities. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 49: 1436-1445.
- NatureServe. 2018. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1 NatureServe, Arlington, VA. Available at <http://explorer.natureserve.org>. (Accessed 13 January 2020).
- Peel, M.C., B.L. Finlayson, and T.A. McMahon. 2007. Updated world map of the Köppen-Geiger climate classification. *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences* 11: 1633-1644.

- Schwegman, J.E., G.B. Fell, M. Hutchinson, G. Paulson, W.M. Shepherd, and J. White. 1973. Comprehensive Plan for the Illinois Nature Preserves System, Part 2 The Natural Divisions of Illinois. Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, Rockford, IL. 32 pps.
- Smith, D.D. 1998. Iowa prairie: original extent and loss, preservation, and recovery attempts. *The Journal of the Iowa Academy of Sciences* 105: 94-108.
- Smith, D.D., D. Williams, G. Houseal, and K. Henderson. 2010. *The Tallgrass Prairie Center Guide to Prairie Restoration in the Upper Midwest*. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, IA. 338 pps.
- Society for Ecological Restoration [SER]. Science & Policy Working Group. 2002. *The SER Primer on Ecological Restoration*. Available at: <http://www.ser.org/>. (Accessed 28 February 2017).
- Taft, J.B., G.S. Wilhelm, D.M. Ladd, and L.A. Masters. 1997. Floristic Quality Assessment for vegetation in Illinois, a method for assessing vegetation integrity. *Erigenia* 15: 3-95.
- Taft, J.B., R.C. Anderson, L.R. Iverson, and W.C. Handel. 2009. Chapter 4: Vegetation ecology and change in terrestrial ecosystems. In: C.A. Taylor, J.B. Taft, and C.E. Warwick (eds.). *Canaries in the Catbird Seat: The Past, Present, and Future of Biological Resources in a Changing Environment*. Illinois Natural Heritage Survey Special Publication 30, Prairie Research Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. 306 pps.
- Teague, W.R., S.L. Dowhower, S.A. Baker, N. Haile, P.B. DeLaune, and D.M. Conover. 2011. Grazing management impacts on vegetation, soil biota and soil chemical, physical and hydrological properties in tall grass prairie. *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment* 141: 310-322.
- Tomer, M.D., D.W. Meek, and L.A. Kramer. 2005. Agricultural practices influence flow regimes of headwater streams in western Iowa. *Journal of Environmental Quality* 34:1547-1558.
- United States Department of Agriculture – Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS). 2006. *Land Resource Regions and Major Land Resource Areas of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin*. U.S. Department of Agriculture Handbook 296. 682 pps.
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA]. 2013. *Level III and Level IV Ecoregions of the Continental United States*. Corvallis, OR, U.S. EPA, National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory, map scale 1:3,000,000. Available at <http://www.epa.gov/eco-research/level-iii-andiv-ecoregions-continental-united-states>. (Accessed 1 March 2017).
- White, J. and M.H. Madany. 1978. Classification of natural communities in Illinois. In: J. White. *Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Technical Report*. Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign. 426 pps.
- Williams, D.A., L.L. Jackson, and D.D. Smith. 2007. Effects of frequent mowing on survival and persistence of forbs seeded into a species-poor grassland. *Restoration Ecology* 15: 24-33.
- Wilsey, B.J. 2008. Productivity and subordinate species response to dominant grass species and seed source during restoration. *Restoration Ecology* 18: 628-637.
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources [WDNR]. 2015. *The Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin: An Assessment of Ecological Resources and a Guide to Planning Sustainable Management*. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, PUB-SS-1131 2015, Madison, WI. 293 pps.

Contributors

Lisa Kluesner
 Kristine Ryan
 Sarah Smith
 Tiffany Justus

Approval

Chris Tecklenburg, 4/22/2020

Acknowledgments

This project could not have been completed without the dedication and commitment from a variety of staff members. Team members supported the project by serving on the technical team, assisting with the development of state and community phases of the state-and-transition model, providing peer review and technical editing, and conducting quality control and quality assurance reviews.

List of primary contributors and reviewers.

Organization Name Title Location

Natural Resources Conservation Service Ron Collman State Soil Scientist Champaign, IL

Tonie Endres Senior Regional Soil Scientist Indianapolis, IN

Tiffany Justus Soil Scientist Aurora, IL

Lisa Kluesner Ecological Site Specialist Waverly, IA

Rick Neilson State Soil Scientist Indianapolis, IN

Jason Nemecek State Soil Scientist Madison, WI

Kevin Norwood Soil Survey Regional Director Indianapolis, IN

Kristine Ryan MLRA Soil Survey Leader Aurora, IL

Stanley Sipp Resource Inventory Specialist Champaign, IL

Sarah Smith Soil Scientist Aurora, IL

Chris Tecklenberg Acting Regional Ecological Site Specialist Hutchinson, KS

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	05/11/2025
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:**
-
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:**
-