

## **Ecological site F134XY204AL Western Alluvial Flat - PROVISIONAL**

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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): 134X–Southern Mississippi Valley Loess

The Southern Mississippi Valley Loess (MLRA 134) extends some 500 miles from the southern tip of Illinois to southern Louisiana. This MLRA occurs in Mississippi (39 percent), Tennessee (23 percent), Louisiana (15 percent), Arkansas (11 percent), Kentucky (9 percent), Missouri (2 percent), and Illinois (1 percent). It makes up about 26,520 square miles. Landscapes consist of highly dissected uplands, level to undulating plains, and broad terraces that are covered with a mantle of loess. Underlying the loess are Tertiary deposits of unconsolidated sand, silt, clay, gravel, and lignite. The soils, mainly Alfisols, formed in the loess mantle. Stream systems of the MLRA typically originate as low-gradient drainageways in the upper reaches that broaden rapidly downstream to wide, level floodplains with highly meandering channels. Alluvial soils, mostly Entisols and Inceptisols, are predominantly silty where loess thickness of the uplands are deepest but grade to loamy textures in watersheds covered by thin loess. Crowley's Ridge, Macon Ridge, and Lafayette Loess Plains are discontinuous, erosional remnants that run north to south in southeastern Missouri - eastern Arkansas, northeastern Louisiana, and south-central Louisiana, respectively. Elevations range from around 100 feet on terraces in southern Louisiana to over 600 feet on uplands in western Kentucky. The steep, dissected uplands are mainly in hardwood forests while less sloping areas are used for crop, pasture, and forage production (USDA-NRCS, 2006).

This site occurs on floodplains of small drainageways to large streams that mainly drain upland areas of Crowley's Ridge from about Forrest City, Arkansas northward through Stoddard County, Missouri.

### **Classification relationships**

All or portions of the geographic range of this site falls within a number of ecological/land classifications including:

- NRCS Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 134 – Southern Mississippi Valley Loess (USDA-NRCS, 2006)
- Environmental Protection Agency's Level IV Ecoregion: Bluff Hills, 74a (Chapman et al., 2002; Woods et al., 2004)
- 231H - Coastal Plains-Loess section of the USDA Forest Service Ecological Subregion (McNab et al., 2005)
- LANDFIRE Biophysical Setting 4514730 Gulf and Atlantic Coastal Plain Floodplain Systems (LANDFIRE, 2008)
- East Gulf Coastal Plain Small Stream and River Floodplain Forest CES203.559 (NatureServe, 2012)
- Mesic Bottomland Forest (Nelson, 2005)
- Western Mesophytic Forest Region - Mississippi Embayment Section - Loess Hills (Braun, 1950)

### **Ecological site concept**

The Western Alluvial Flat is characterized by deep, well drained to moderately well drained soils that formed in silty to loamy alluvium. Soil reactions range from very strongly acid to strongly acid in all horizons. This site occurs primarily on better drained portions (higher positions) of narrow to broad floodplains and secondarily on alluvial fans. Within stream and floodplain environments, specific landforms associated with the site include natural levees, rises, and the better drained flats that often border the stream-front or levee position. Flooding ranges from rare to frequent during winter and spring, and duration is brief to very long depending on stream and drainage basin size and flood event. Slopes are variable and dependent on floodplain position; dominant slopes of the flats are 0 to 2 percent but range to 5 percent on natural levees. The native vegetation of this site is the fabled, southern

bottomland hardwood forest. The better drainage capabilities of the soil provide an incredible medium for supporting exemplary examples of upland and lowland species co-occurring within single stands. Overstory components often include cherrybark oak, white oak, willow oak, water oak, Shumard's oak, swamp chestnut oak, tuliptree, American beech, American sycamore, sweetgum, maple, eastern cottonwood, hickories, elm, river birch, and green ash.

## Associated sites

F134XY205AL	<b>Western Moderately Wet Alluvial Flat - PROVISIONAL</b> This site occurs in close association with the Western Alluvial Flat and is characterized primarily by somewhat poorly drained soils.
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## Similar sites

F134XY102MS	<b>Southern Rolling Plains Loess Stream Terrace - PROVISIONAL</b> This site occurs in the southeastern extent of MLRA 134 and supports similar soils and landform characteristics as the Western Alluvial Flat.
F134XY018AL	<b>Northern Alluvial Flat - PROVISIONAL</b> This site is the eastern counterpart to the Western Alluvial Flat and includes similar soils.

**Table 1. Dominant plant species**

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

## Physiographic features

The distribution of the Western Alluvial Flat is primarily associated with streams that drain upland areas of a distinct physiographic subsection of the Southern Mississippi Valley Loess (MLRA 134): Crowley's Ridge. However, there are a few instances where the soils of this site have been mapped on the adjoining Western Lowlands (EPA Level IV Ecoregion: 73g; Woods et al., 2004) and/or the Southern Mississippi River Alluvium (MLRA 131A).

Physiographic features of the site include narrow flats along stream drainageways, moderately broad to broad floodplain flats of larger stream systems, and alluvial fans. Of the varying geomorphologic characteristics, the narrow to slightly larger stream systems within the topographically varied landscape of Crowley's Ridge best define the site. Here, the silty to loamy alluvial soils within moist ravines and broader valleys create prime conditions for supporting a varied and productive forest community. Landform position of the most incised ravines is probably best referred to as toe slopes. The soils of this site also extend onto the adjoining Southern Mississippi River Alluvium to the east and west of Crowley's Ridge as streams flow to join the larger receiving systems of the St. Francis and Cache Rivers.

The alluvial fans of this site are fairly broad with gentle to moderate slopes, ranging from approximately 2 to 8 percent. This distinct feature mostly occurs along the west slope of Crowley's Ridge where it transitions to the broad, subtle relief of the Western Lowlands. Formation of this landform is generally the result of "water reworked" loess and/or loamy materials that have been deposited onto the adjoining bottoms and terraces.

**Table 2. Representative physiographic features**

Landforms	(1) Natural levee (2) Alluvial flat (3) Alluvial fan
Flooding duration	Brief (2 to 7 days)
Flooding frequency	None to frequent
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	250–370 ft

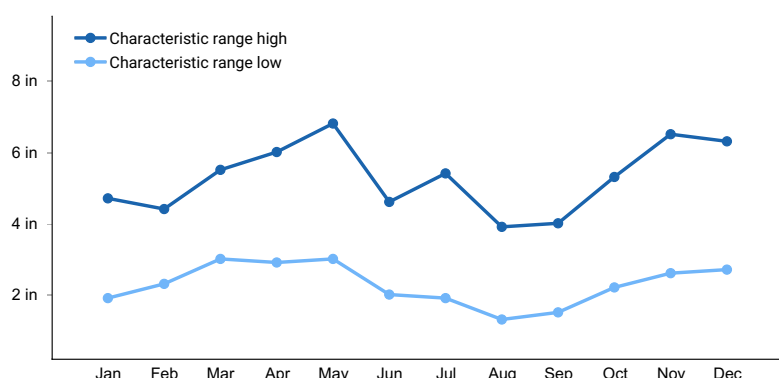
Slope	0–8%
Ponding depth	0 in
Water table depth	24–48 in
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

## Climatic features

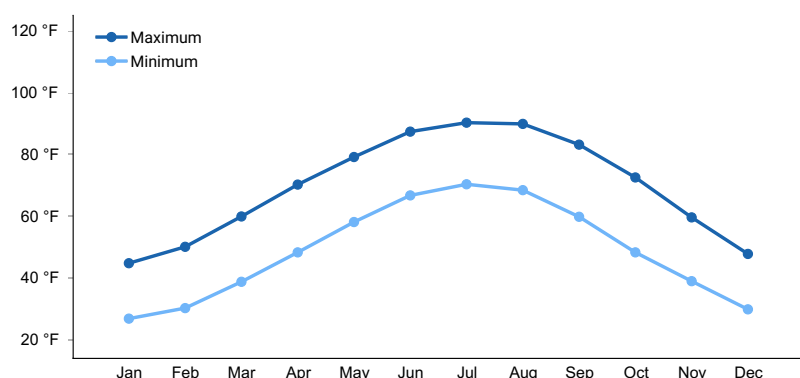
This site falls under the Humid Subtropical Climate Classification (Koppen System). The mean annual precipitation for this site from 1980 through 2010 was approximately 50 inches with a range from 37 to roughly 65 inches. Maximum precipitation occurs in spring (April and May) and late fall (November and December) and typically decreases throughout the summer. Rainfall often occurs as high-intensity, convective thunderstorms during warmer periods but moderate-intensity frontal systems can produce large amounts of rainfall during winter. Snowfall generally occurs in most years, and the average annual snowfall in the northern portions of this site in Stoddard County, Missouri is 11 inches (USDA-NRCS, 2006). The average annual maximum and minimum air temperature is 69 (range 45 to 90) and 49 (range 27 to 70) degrees F, respectively. The average frost free and freeze free periods are 197 and 224 days, respectively.

**Table 3. Representative climatic features**

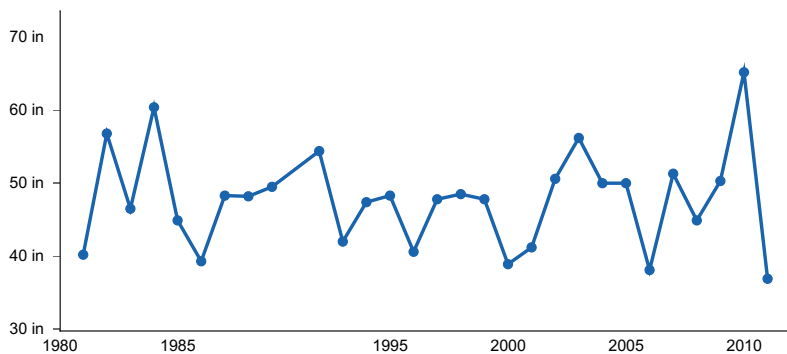
Frost-free period (average)	197 days
Freeze-free period (average)	224 days
Precipitation total (average)	50 in



**Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range**



**Figure 2. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature**



**Figure 3. Annual precipitation pattern**

## Climate stations used

- (1) MADISON 1 NW [USC00034528], Forrest City, AR
- (2) WYNNE [USC00038052], Wynne, AR
- (3) MALDEN MUNI AP [USC00235207], Malden, MO
- (4) JONESBORO 2 NE [USC00033734], Jonesboro, AR
- (5) PARAGOULD 1 S [USC00035563], Paragould, AR
- (6) ADVANCE 1 S [USW00093825], Advance, MO

## Influencing water features

This site occurs within floodplains of small to large stream systems. Overland flooding occurs over a large percentage of the site's distribution. Flood duration is highly variable and directly dependent upon stream size and watershed position. Narrow floodplains of small streams are typically "flashy" and may flood occasionally to frequently but flood duration is generally brief. Sites associated with larger streams and large drainage basins may flood frequently with much longer flood durations. Regardless of flood frequency and duration, the soils of this site are well drained to moderately well drained and are not hydric. On floodplains of larger stream systems, the water table may fluctuate between 1.5 to 2.5 feet of the surface for much of the time during winter and early in spring in most years. Of note, very few if any plant species occurring on these soils classify as wetland obligates. Although this site receives surface flooding, most of the vegetation would be categorized as facultative wetland and/or have no wetland status.

## Soil features

Please note that the soils listed in this section of the description may not be all inclusive. There may be additional soils that fit the site's concepts. Additionally, the soils that provisionally form the concepts of this site may occur elsewhere, either within or outside of the MLRA and may or "may not" have the same geomorphic characteristics or support similar vegetation. Some soil map units and soil series included in this "provisional" ecological site were used as a "best fit" for a particular soil – landform catena during a specific era of soil mapping, regardless of the origin of parent material or the location of MLRA boundaries. Therefore, the listed soils may not be typical for MLRA 134 or a specific location, and the associated soil map units may warrant further investigation in a joint ecological site inventory – soil survey project. When utilizing this provisional description, the user is encouraged to verify that the area of interest meets the appropriate ecological site concepts by reviewing the soils, landform, vegetation, and physical location. If the site concepts do not match the attributes of the area of interest, please review the Similar or Associated Sites listed in the Supporting Information section of this description to determine if another site may be a better fit for your area of interest.

The soils of this site are very deep, well drained to moderately well drained that formed in silty and/or loamy alluvium. These level to nearly level soils are on flood plains along streams and on alluvial fans, particularly along the western slope of Crowley's Ridge and its interface with the Pleistocene terraces of the Western Lowlands. They are subject to flooding during winter and spring, have slow runoff, and are moderately permeable. Flood duration ranges from brief to very long depending on stream and drainage basin size and flood event. In floodplain environments, slopes range from 0 to 2 percent but may extend slightly higher on natural levees. On alluvial fans, slopes may range upwards to 8 percent, locally. Soil reactions generally range from strongly acid to very strongly acid.

Principal soils associated with this site include Collins (Coarse-silty, mixed, active, acid, thermic Aquic Udifluvents), luka (Coarse-loamy, siliceous, active, acid, thermic Aquic Udifluvents), Oaklimeter (Coarse-silty, mixed, active, thermic Fluvaquentic Dystrudepts), and Ochlockonee (Coarse-loamy, siliceous, active, acid, thermic Typic Udifluvents) series.

Collins soils are moderately well drained and formed in silty alluvium. The 10- to 40-inch control section has from 5 to 18 percent clay. Sand content is as much as 30 percent but less than 15 percent is coarser than very fine sand. The soil is saturated in the layers below 18 to 36 inches deep during the winter months in normal years. It is saturated within a depth of 20 inches for more than 30 days in normal years.

luka soils are moderately well drained and formed in stratified loamy and sandy alluvium. Clay content of the 10 to 40-inch control section is 10 to 18 percent. Some pedons have thin gravelly or sandy strata and some pedons have textures of sandy clay loam or clay loam at depths below 40 inches. Thin bedding planes of contrasting textures are common throughout in most pedons.

Oaklimeter soils are moderately well drained and formed in silty alluvium. Clay content in the particle size control section is 7 to 18 percent. The saturated hydraulic conductivity is moderately high. A water table is within 20 to 40 inches of the surface for during seasons of high rainfall.

Ochlockonee series often occur on natural levees, are well drained, and formed in loamy and sandy alluvium. Buried soil horizons are present in most pedons below a depth of 25 inches. Some pedons have gravelly strata below a depth of 40 inches. A seasonally high water table is within a depth of 36 to 60 inches in some season of most years (USDA-NRCS, 2016).

**Table 4. Representative soil features**

Surface texture	(1) Silt loam (2) Loam (3) Fine sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Moderately well drained to well drained
Permeability class	Moderate to moderately rapid
Soil depth	80 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (0-40in)	5.6–8.5 in
Electrical conductivity (0-40in)	0–1 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-40in)	0
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-40in)	5–6.1
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	2–5%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0%

## Ecological dynamics

The core concepts of this ecological site are best expressed and defined by the site's primary location in floodplain environments, although the soils associated with this site have been mapped on alluvial fans. Within floodplains, this site consists of natural levees, the first alluvial flat landward of levees and stream fronts, and the higher mounds

or rises within wetter flats. The moderately well to well drain soils of this site create an incredible medium for supporting a rich association of deciduous broad-leaved hardwoods. Where disturbances have been minimal (e.g., gap-scale or single tree senescence), a continuous, overlapping canopy typically develops.

The better drainage capabilities of the soil generally supports exemplary examples of both upland and lowland species that co-occur within single stands. Overstory components often include oaks, hickories, elm, beech, sycamore, cottonwood and a number of additional hardwoods. Canopy height ranges from 80 to 150 feet and basal area is typically within 100 to 210 square feet per acre (LANDFIRE, 2008). Unlike the wetter, lower portions of the floodplain, water moves off this site first, which can contribute to a dense understory layer of shrubs, saplings, midstory components, and vines. Herbaceous cover ranges from sparse to dense depending on canopy cover.

The dominant ecological processes associated with this site include periodic flooding, stand disturbances at varying scales, and natural, stream migration. Given the site's landform position, periodic flooding is a common and important process of the system. Flooding can enhance fertility of the soil environment via deposition of new alluvium but can also impact the site by scouring and/or depositing excessive materials. Flood duration is highly variable and directly dependent upon stream size and magnitude of the flood event. Flood durations of small streams are typically brief and "flashy", while those of larger systems may range from brief to very long depending on drainage basin size and flood event. The collective effects of the hydrodynamics within this system naturally lead to migration or movement of the stream across its connected landscape, the floodplain. Low-gradient streams generally meander and frequently change course leading to the erosion of a portion of the floodplain with the concomitant deposition and creation of new point bars, levees, and alluvial flats.

Forest stand disturbances vary in both size and type. Disturbances range from gap-scale (single tree to small group) to stand-initiating events that are greater than one acre (per Johnson et al., 2009). Smaller gaps or forest openings may result in the release of suppressed understory components, but the greatest response is often ingrowth or expansion of the surrounding canopy (Oliver and Larson, 1990). Understories of long-term, non-disturbed portions of the stand (i.e., complete canopy closure) are typically comprised of shade-tolerant woody and herbaceous species. Larger gaps often consist of heavy, downed woody debris and a dense concentration of shrubs, forbs, vines, and released saplings and young trees. Types of disturbances may include wind, severe ice storms, and beaver. The influence of the latter is perhaps the most dynamic as local hydrologic regimes are dramatically altered leading to wetter soils, different vegetation communities, and a different suite of ecological processes.

An additional disturbance factor that rarely occurs on this site today but is thought to have been an important historical influence is fire. This supposition is drawn from the presence of a single species: cane. Cane grows readily on this site and historically, extended across many floodplains of the Southeast (Gagnon, 2009). The sheer presence of this species in the historic community suggests disturbance beyond flooding alone. Fire may have been an important disturbance factor in the pre-settlement bottomland community (see Gagnon and Platt, 2008; Gagnon, 2009), which suggests that the structure of this site may have been more open where dense canebrakes existed. However, any vestige of that system is long past. Those areas that have been allowed to revert naturally are now best characterized as closed-canopied, bottomland hardwoods.

The principal land use, today, is agriculture production with some areas in pasture and/or forage production. The fertile soils of the broader floodplains and alluvial fans are almost exclusively cropland. Timber production is mostly restricted to the narrower drainageways. Perhaps the largest and most significant alteration to this site has been channelization and levee (or spoil bank) construction. Such hydrologic alterations are probably more commonplace on streams that extend onto the Western Lowlands than those occurring within Crowley's Ridge physiographic area. Still, this action results in a disconnection between the stream - floodplain environment, which interrupts and alters the ecological processes and functions of the system as a whole.

There are a few areas that have been set aside in the public and/or private interest (e.g., parks, refuges, natural areas, and forest preserves), and those areas are now heavily forested. With no example of the pre-settlement plant community remaining intact, reference conditions of this site have been arbitrarily chosen to reflect the native plant species that most frequently occur and that influence the overall structure and characteristics of maturing stands. Locations that offer an opportunity to examine these "surrogate" reference conditions are relegated to those public and private land holdings.

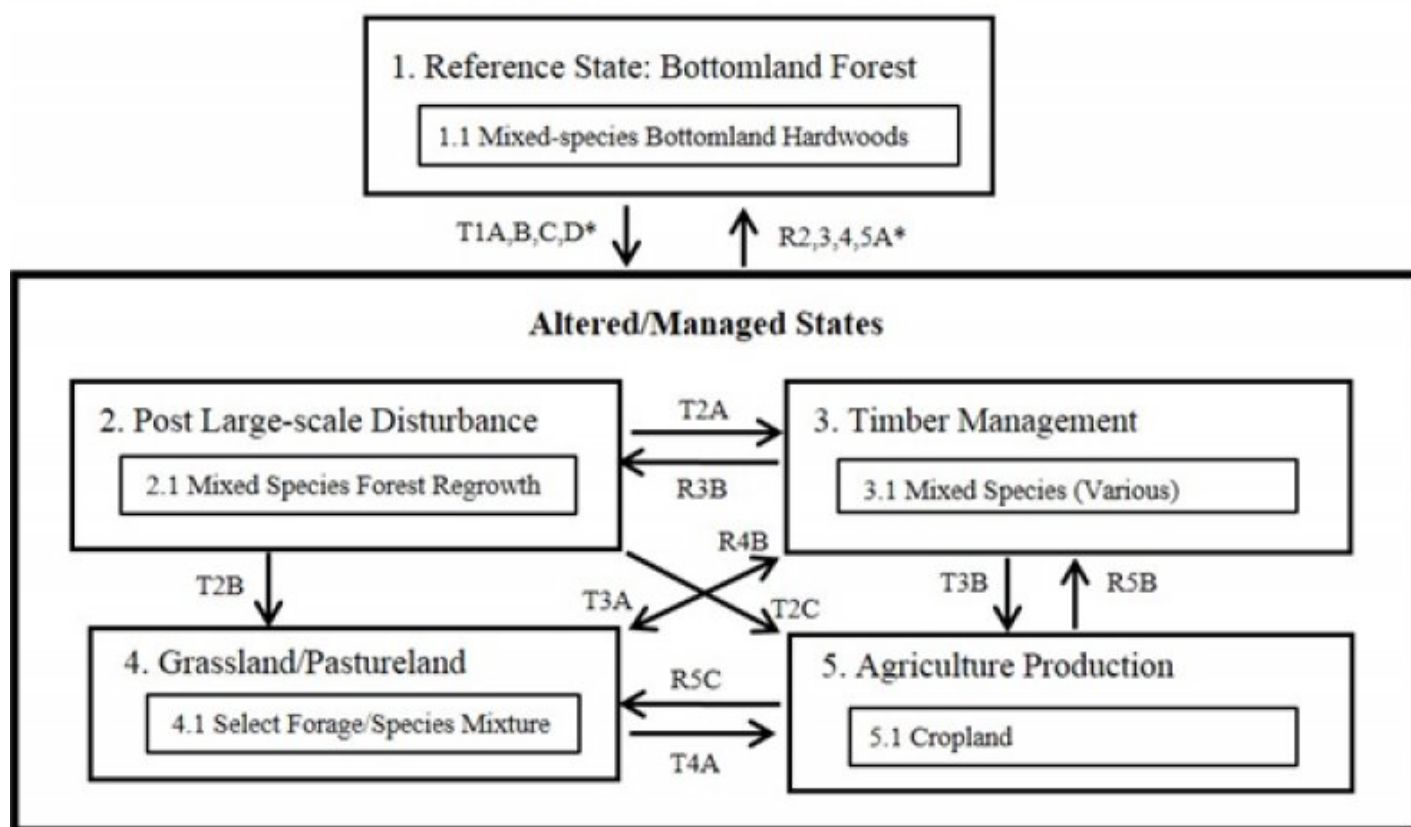
Following this narrative, a "provisional" state and transition model is provided that includes the "perceived" reference

state and several alternative (or altered) vegetation states that have been observed and/or projected for this ecological site. This model is based on limited inventories, literature, expert knowledge, and interpretations. Plant communities will differ across MLRA 134 due to natural variability in climate, soils, and physiography. Depending on objectives, the reference plant community may not necessarily be the management goal.

The environmental and biological characteristics of this site are complex and dynamic. As such, the following diagram suggests pathways that the vegetation on this site might take, given that the modal concepts of climate and soils are met within an area of interest. Specific locations with unique soils and disturbance histories may have alternate pathways that are not represented in the model. This information is intended to show the possibilities within a given set of circumstances and represents the initial steps toward developing a defensible description and model. The model and associated information are subject to change as knowledge increases and new information is garnered. This is an iterative process. Most importantly, local and/or state professional guidance should always be sought before pursuing a treatment scenario.

## State and transition model

### Western Alluvial Flat, 134XY204



\* = To reduce clutter and confusion, transition and restoration pathways (arrows) to and from the reference state and certain altered states are not indicated. Those particular pathways are addressed in the respective state and community sections.

Figure 5. STM - Western Alluvial Flat



Pathway	Practice
T1A, R3B,	large-scale stand initiating disturbance (wind, ice, clearcut; State 2)
T1B	beginning point uneven-aged stand; goal of timber management; timber stand improvements; group selection; single tree harvest (State 3)
T1C, T2B, T3A, R5C	mechanical removal of vegetation; herbicide application; seedbed preparation; planting desired species at appropriate rate (State 4)
T1D, T2C, T3B, T4A	removal of vegetation (mechanical/chemical); preparation for cultivation (State 5)
T2A, R4B, R5B	beginning point even-aged stand; potential planting; competitor control – herbicide/mechanical; TSI (State 3)
R2A, R3A, R4A, R5A	natural succession over time; may require exotic plant control and reestablishment of missing species (State 1)

Figure 6. Legend - Western Alluvial Flat

## State 1 Bottomland Forest

The pre-settlement plant community of this ecological site was largely removed more than 150 years ago, and the fertile, moist alluvial fans, natural levees, and alluvial flats of this site were among the first to have been converted. There are no extant examples of that community. Following decades of land-use impacts, the plant community that returned in areas initially set aside for protection include a wide range of broad-leaved trees commonly referred to as bottomland hardwoods. The higher positions of this site coupled with better soil drainage provide excellent site potential.

### Community 1.1 Mixed Species Bottomland Hardwoods

This community phase represents the successional stage, composition, and structural complexity of stands supporting perceived reference conditions. Today, this community is representative of maturing stands that mainly occur within public and/or private preserves. Overstory composition of the natural levees and better drained alluvial flats include cherrybark, willow oak, water oak, swamp chestnut oak, Shumard's oak, sweetgum, American sycamore, green ash, various hickories, eastern cottonwood, river birch, red maple, silver maple, boxelder, black walnut, pecan, along with occasional occurrences of American beech, tuliptree, and white oak. In addition to smaller individuals of the preceding canopy trees, the subcanopy or mid-story stratum is often represented by American hornbeam, hophornbeam, and pawpaw. Components of the small to tall shrub strata typically include spicebush, pawpaw, and giant cane.

## State 2 Post Large-scale Disturbance Forest

This state is characterized by the regeneration or regrowth of a pre-existing forest stand following a major, stand-replacing disturbance. Scale of the disturbance is at the stand level, which is considered to be greater than one acre (per Johnson et al., 2009). Potential types of disturbances include catastrophic windstorms, wildfire, silvicultural clearcuts, and particularly destructive ice storms. The resulting, even-aged stand (or single-cohort) is set on a new course of development, which is highly dependent upon several critical factors including: the composition and structure of the stand prior to the disturbance; the degree or intensity of the disturbance; size and configuration of the disturbed area; and distance to seed sources. Composition and condition of the forest stand prior to a major disturbance may dictate, in large part, future composition of the regenerating stand. Although colonization by new species is expected soon after the disturbance, many of the pre-existing overstory components are anticipated to occupy position in the new, developing stand – their presence arising mainly from stump or root sprouts, advance regeneration, and germination from the seed bank (Oliver and Larson, 1990).

### Community 2.1 Mixed Species Forest Regrowth

Large blowdowns such as straight-line winds and tornadoes may have a major influence on composition and successional patterns of hardwood stands (Hodges, 1998). Soon after overstory removal, numerous species may colonize large openings and influence the dynamics of the site. Initial colonizers are often forbs, graminoids, and



vines that may have existed in the seed bank, were forest floor components prior to disturbance, or transported into the site via flood waters, wind, and/or animals. Overstory species anticipated to occur during the stand-initiation stage include sweetgum, American sycamore, eastern cottonwood, ash, oaks, hickory, elm, walnut, hackberry, sugarberry, boxelder, tuliptree, along with the residual shade-tolerant species of maple, beech, and American hornbeam. For stands that were highly altered prior to the disturbance (e.g., high-graded), intensive management may be necessary in order to establish a desired composition. Management actions may include controlling undesirable species mechanically and chemically and planting the desired species.

### **State 3**

#### **Timber Management**

This state represents the breadth of forest management activities on this site. Various management or silvicultural methods can lead to very different structural and compositional results within a managed stand. The range of methods are diverse and include even-aged (e.g., clearcut and shelterwood) and uneven-aged (single tree, diameter-limit, basal area, group selection, etc.) approaches. Included within these approaches is an option to use disturbance mechanisms (e.g., timber stand improvement) to reduce competition and achieve maximum growth potential of the desired species. Inherently, these various approaches result in different community or “management phases” and possibly alternate states. The decision to represent these varying approaches and management results into a single state and phase at this time hinges on the need for additional information in order to formulate definitive pathways, management actions, and community responses. Forthcoming inventories and description iterations of this site will provide more detail on this state and associated management phases.

#### **Community 3.1**

##### **Mixed Species (Various)**

This phase represents the prevailing compositional diversity of hardwood species occurring on this site. Components of the system that are often in greatest demand are the oaks. Oaks that respond incredibly well on this site include cherrybark, Shumard’s, northern red, swamp chestnut, willow, water, and occasionally white oak. However, managing for oaks alone on this highly productive site may be time, labor, and cost prohibitive. Managing for a mixed diversity of hardwoods (including oaks) is the option representative of this management phase. In addition to oaks, species responding well on this site include tuliptree, sweetgum, ash, elm, walnut, sycamore, and cottonwood. There are a variety of silvicultural methods for achieving this management state including both uneven-aged approaches (e.g., group selection) and even-aged actions (e.g., clearcut). Finding the appropriate approach for a given stand and environment necessitates close consultation with trained, experienced, and knowledgeable forestry professionals. If there is a desire to proceed with this state, it is strongly urged and advised that professional guidance be secured and a well-designed silvicultural plan developed in advance of any work conducted.

### **State 4**

#### **Grassland/Pastureland**

This state is representative of sites that have been converted to and maintained in pasture and forage cropland, typically a grass – legume mixture. For pastureland, planning or prescribing the intensity, frequency, timing, and duration of grazing can help to maintain desirable forage mixtures at sufficient density and vigor (USDA-NRCS, 2010; Green et al., 2006). Overgrazed pastures can lead to soil compaction and numerous bare spots, which may then become focal points of accelerated erosion and colonization sites of undesirable plants or weeds. Establishing an effective pasture management program may help minimize the rate of weed establishment and assist in maintaining vigorous growth of desired forage. An effective pasture management program includes: selecting well-adapted grass and/or legume species that will grow and establish rapidly; maintaining proper soil pH and fertility levels; using controlled grazing practices; mowing at proper timing and stage of maturity; allowing new seedlings to become well established before use; and renovating pastures when needed (Rhodes et al., 2005; Green et al., 2006). It is strongly advised that consultation with State Grazing Land Specialists and District Conservationists at local NRCS Service Centers be sought when assistance is needed in developing management recommendations or prescribed grazing practices.

#### **Community 4.1**

##### **Select Forage/Species Mixture**

This community phase represents commonly planted forage species on pasturelands and haylands. The suite of plants established on any given site may vary considerably depending upon purpose, management goals, usage, and soils. Most systems include a mixture of grasses and legumes that provide forage throughout the growing season. Cool season forage may include tall fescue, orchardgrass, white clover, and red clover, and warm season forage often consists of bermudagrass, bahiagrass, and annual lespedeza. Several additional plants and/or species combinations may be desired depending on the objectives and management approaches and especially, local soils. The soils of this site generally have few limitations that restrict their use (Capability Class I). If active management (and grazing) of the pastureland is stopped, this phase will transition to “old field” conditions, which is the transitional period between a predominantly open, herbaceous field and the brushy stage of a newly initiated stand of trees.

## **State 5**

### **Crop Production**

Upon settlement, the fertility of the soils led to rapid land clearing and crop production. Today, crops that are often established include cotton, corn, soybean, and small grains.

## **Community 5.1**

### **Cropland**

Corn, soybean, small grains, and cotton.

## **Transition T1A**

### **State 1 to 2**

This pathway represents a large-scale, stand replacing disturbance, which may be caused by a catastrophic windstorm (e.g., straight-line winds, tornado), ice storm, severe fire, or a silvicultural clearcut. For this stressor to occur, most or all of the overstory must be removed or destroyed. A few residual trees may persist, but overall, the disturbance must be intensive enough, at least one acre or larger (Johnson et al., 2009), that a new, even-aged stand is created (State 2).

## **Transition T1B**

### **State 1 to 3**

This pathway consists of prescribed silvicultural activities specifically designed to meet stand compositional and production objectives. Activities may include release cuttings through a combination of low and high thinning, mechanical and chemical control of competition, and artificial regeneration (i.e., planting) of sites with low oak presence. A variety of silvicultural methods may be employed including group selection, single tree selection harvests (all classes/condition; avoid “high-grading”), or even-age management (clearcut).

## **Transition T1C**

### **State 1 to 4**

Actions required to convert forests to grassland or forage production include forest clearing, stump removal, herbicide application, seedbed preparation, and the establishment of desired plants.

## **Transition T1D**

### **State 1 to 5**

Actions include mechanical removal of vegetation and stumps; herbicide treatment of residual plants; and preparation for planting.

## **Restoration pathway R2A**

### **State 2 to 1**

This pathway represents a return to reference conditions through natural succession, if the disturbance occurred within a reference community. Depending upon objectives and stand condition, management activities to aide

recovery may include exotic species control and silvicultural treatment that benefits oak regeneration and establishment (e.g., TSI practices such as crop tree release, low thinning, and cull removal).

### **Transition T2A** **State 2 to 3**

This pathway represents the development of an even-aged stand that is prescribed to meet compositional and production objectives.

### **Transition T2B** **State 2 to 4**

Actions required to convert forests to pasture or forage production include forest clearing, stump removal, herbicide application, seedbed preparation, and the establishment of desired plants.

### **Transition T2C** **State 2 to 5**

Actions include mechanical removal of vegetation and stumps, herbicide treatment of residual plants, and preparation for planting.

### **Restoration pathway R3A** **State 3 to 1**

Natural succession over a period of time may transition a former timber-managed stand to one supporting reference conditions. Some question remains whether a return to reference conditions will occur in every situation, especially since some components may have been selectively culled from the stand. Management activities to aide recovery may include exotic species control and silvicultural treatment.

### **Restoration pathway R3B** **State 3 to 2**

This pathway represents a large-scale, stand-initiating disturbance, which effectively removes most or all of the pre-existing overstory. Disturbances may include a catastrophic windstorm, severe wildfire, and silvicultural management (even-aged).

### **Transition T3A** **State 3 to 4**

Actions required to convert forests to pasture or forage production include forest clearing, stump removal, herbicide application, seedbed preparation, and the establishment of desired plants.

### **Transition T3B** **State 3 to 5**

Actions include mechanical removal of vegetation and stumps, herbicide treatment of residual plants, and preparation for planting.

### **Restoration pathway R4A** **State 4 to 1**

This pathway represents natural succession back to perceived reference conditions. The period required for this transition to take place likely varies by location and is dependent upon local site conditions. LANDFIRE models (2008) suggest that over 80 years is required for a return to a late development community and this pathway is highly dependent upon species present in the developing stand in addition to the appropriate level and type of disturbance (e.g., periodic flood regime, presence/absence of catastrophic wind events, etc.). Significant efforts may be required before a return to reference conditions is achieved (e.g., exotic species control, appropriate connectivity

between stream and floodplain, potential artificial regeneration of community components, etc.).

### **Restoration pathway R4B**

#### **State 4 to 3**

This pathway represents prescribed management strategies for transitioning abandoned pastureland to managed woodland. Activities may include artificial regeneration of and management for desired species and exotic species control.

### **Transition T4A**

#### **State 4 to 5**

Actions include mechanical removal of vegetation and stumps; herbicide treatment of residual plants; and preparation for planting.

### **Restoration pathway R5A**

#### **State 5 to 1**

This pathway represents natural succession back to perceived reference conditions. The period required for this transition to take place likely varies by location and is dependent upon local site conditions. LANDFIRE models (2008) suggest that over 80 years is required for a return to a late development community and this pathway is highly dependent upon species present in the developing stand in addition to the appropriate level and type of disturbance (e.g., periodic flood regime, presence/absence of catastrophic wind events, etc.). Significant efforts may be required before a return to reference conditions is achieved and may never fully reach perceived reference conditions (e.g., exotic species control, appropriate connectivity between stream and floodplain, potential artificial regeneration of community components, etc.).

### **Restoration pathway R5B**

#### **State 5 to 3**

This pathway represents prescribed management strategies for transitioning abandoned cropland to managed woodland. Activities may include artificial regeneration of and management for desired species and exotic species control.

### **Restoration pathway R5C**

#### **State 5 to 4**

Seedbed preparation and establishment of desired forage/grassland mixture.

### **Additional community tables**

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## **Contributors**

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

## Indicators

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 
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:**
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