

Ecological site F097XB033IN Chicago Dry Sandy Lake Plain

Last updated: 1/16/2024

Accessed: 05/21/2025

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.



Figure 1. Mapped extent

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

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 097X—Southwestern Michigan Fruit and Vegetable Crop Belt

Physiography consists of sandy lake plains and dunes along the western side adjacent to

Lake Michigan, and moderately sloping fine-loamy moraine from the Lake Michigan lobe of the Wisconsin Ice Sheet.

Vegetation is mostly mesophytic forests of central and northern hardwood and conifer species with prairie and oak savanna to the south. Compared to inland locations, cold sensitive hardwood species extend further north due to milder winters, and conifers extend further south due to cooler summers, heavier snowfall, and sandier soils. Lake effect snow and delayed spring warm up dampen the fire frequency relative to similar inland sites, except along the south side of Lake Michigan. The northern extent is defined by a major floristic boundary where several central hardwoods species drop out. The southern boundary is defined by fine-loamy moraines with predominantly prairie vegetation.

The ecological site inference area for MLRA 97 is subdivided along a floristic/climatic break roughly from New Buffalo, Michigan to Portage, Indiana. This corresponds to the heaviest lake effect snow belt (>160 cm) south and east of this line and is associated lower historic fire frequencies. The snow belt portion “A”, has more frequent conifer and beech, while the less snowy portion “B” has more prairie and savanna elements. Although differing in precise boundary location, both USFS and EPA ecoregions support a climatic/floristic break at the next higher rank in their respective hierarchies.

Classification relationships

Among the USFS ecoregional framework (Cleland et al., 2007), most of MLRA 97 is represented by the Humid Temperate Domain (200), Hot Continental Division (220), Midwest Broadleaf Forest Province (222), South Central Great Lakes Section (222J), subsections 222Ja and 222Jb. MLRA 97 was recently extended northward to be more consistent with the limits of the USFS ecoregions subsections 222Ja and 222Jb, because it is more consistent with vegetation patterns and species distributions. A former portion of MLRA 97 that extended westward from the southern end of Lake Michigan (including most of the city of Chicago) was recently removed from the MLRA due to its predominantly non-sandy deposits and reduced lake effect climate, and would have overlapped USFS ecoregion 222K.

Among the EPA ecoregional framework (Omernik and Griffith, 2014), most of MLRA 97 falls within Eastern Temperate Forests (Level I: 8), Mixed Wood Plains (Level II: 8.1), Southern Michigan/Northern Indiana Drift Plains (Level III: 56), and Level IV: 56d and 56f. Ecoregion 56f continues north beyond MLRA 97. Former portions of MLRA 97 that encompassed the city of Chicago included Level III ecoregion 54, Central Corn Belt Plains, before the last revision of MRLA boundaries.

Ecological site concept

The central concept of the Sandy Lake Plain is deep sands (>90% sands >200 cm deep) with low base saturation (pHs <5.5 and/or Spodosols), and water tables usually deeper than 200 cm (excessively drained or well drained) on portions of the lake plain outside the

main Lake Michigan Snow Belt. Intergrades can have water table depths as shallow as 150 cm (well drained – deep water table phase). Slopes are gentle (less than 15%), and as such do not include sand dunes within 1-2 km from Lake Michigan. Sites support vegetation composed of support low-nutrient tolerant, drought tolerant, and fire tolerant species. Early successional stages include dry sand prairie and black oak savanna. Mid-late stages are dominated by black oak (*Quercus velutina*) and white oak (*Q. alba*), and is maintained with periodic fire or else would transition to red maple-red oak forest.

Associated sites

| | |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| F097XB035IN | Chicago Moist Sandy Swale |
| F097XB040IN | Chicago Sandy Slopes |

Similar sites

| | |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| F097XA004MI | Dry Sandy Lake Plain |
|-------------|-----------------------------|

Table 1. Dominant plant species

| | |
|------------|---|
| Tree | (1) <i>Quercus velutina</i> |
| Shrub | Not specified |
| Herbaceous | (1) <i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i> (2) <i>Lupinus perennis</i> |

Physiographic features

Nearshore lacustrine deposits and occasional secondary dune development.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

| | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Landforms | (1) Lake plain |
| Runoff class | Negligible to low |
| Elevation | 177–226 m |
| Slope | 0–15% |
| Water table depth | 99 cm |
| Aspect | Aspect is not a significant factor |

Climatic features

The southern Lake Michigan lake plain has a humid warm continental climate with cold winters and warm summers. Almost two thirds of the precipitation is distributed during the warmer half of the year with a significant portion of the precipitation occurring as heavy

downpours during thunderstorms. Thunderstorm activity is enhanced inland by lake breeze fronts, while it is diminished near the lakeshore by the stabilizing effect of the cooler lake waters. Occasionally, thunderstorm microbursts cause localized high winds which open single tree gaps in forest canopies, or more rarely, tornados and derechos (severe straight-line winds) open larger gaps. Fall storms bring more frequent strong winds, but with impacts moderated by the lack of leaves (wind resistance) in the canopy. During July, average precipitation lags potential evapotranspiration, resulting in droughty conditions in the upper soil horizons of upland sites. During dry years, this droughty period is extended into August and September, resulting in dry fuels and potential for wildfire over oak and pine dominated areas.

Winter precipitation light with annual snowfall of 0.7 to 1.0 m (28-40 inches), which is only occasionally enhanced by lake effect during instances of cold north or northeast winds. The combination of lower snowfall, and more limited lake amelioration of warm southwesterly winds, contribute to higher fire frequencies relative to similar sites to the north and east.

The area falls within USDA Hardiness zones (-22 to -24 C) 5b and 6a (slightly colder than areas to the north and east) and has limited lake protection from premature spring warm up prior to the last killing frosts, limiting the potential for fruit crops relative to other portions of MLRA 97.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Frost-free period (characteristic range) | 154-176 days |
| Freeze-free period (characteristic range) | 199-204 days |
| Precipitation total (characteristic range) | 965-991 mm |
| Frost-free period (actual range) | 150-184 days |
| Freeze-free period (actual range) | 198-204 days |
| Precipitation total (actual range) | 965-991 mm |
| Frost-free period (average) | 165 days |
| Freeze-free period (average) | 201 days |
| Precipitation total (average) | 991 mm |

Climate stations used

- (1) INDIANA DUNES NATL LKS [USC00124244], Chesterton, IN
- (2) CHICAGO UNIV [USW00014892], Chicago, IL
- (3) CHICAGO MIDWAY AP [USW00014819], Chicago, IL

Influencing water features

None

Soil features

Soils are excessively drained sands. They are commonly classified as Typic Udipsamments and Entic Hapludolls, and commonly mapped as Oakville, Plainfield, and Tyner series.

Table 4. Representative soil features

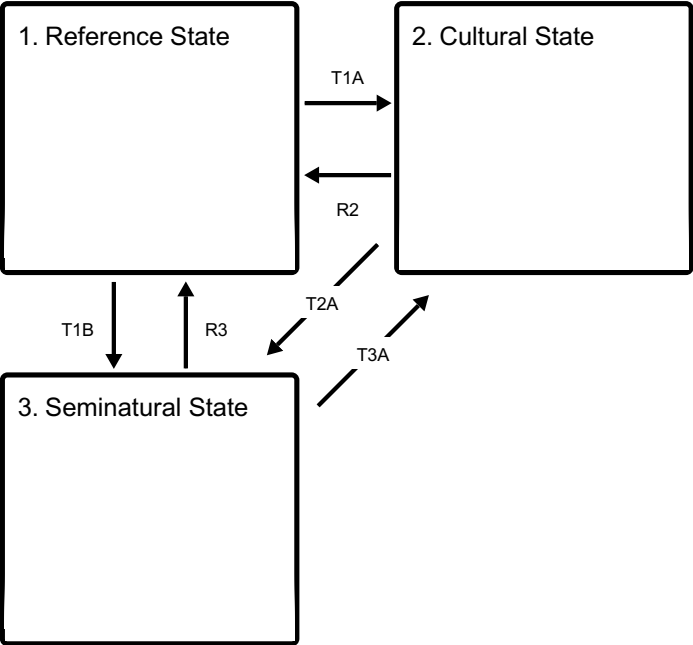
| | |
|---|---|
| Parent material | (1) Glaciolacustrine deposits (2) Eolian sands |
| Surface texture | (1) Sand |
| Drainage class | Well drained to excessively drained |
| Permeability class | Moderately rapid to rapid |
| Soil depth | 201 cm |
| Surface fragment cover $\leq 3"$ | 0–1% |
| Surface fragment cover $> 3"$ | 0% |
| Available water capacity (0-100.1cm) | 3.99–10.01 cm |
| Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-50cm) | 4.5–6 |
| Subsurface fragment volume $\leq 3"$ (0-150.1cm) | 0–10% |
| Subsurface fragment volume $> 3"$ (0-150.1cm) | 0–5% |

Ecological dynamics

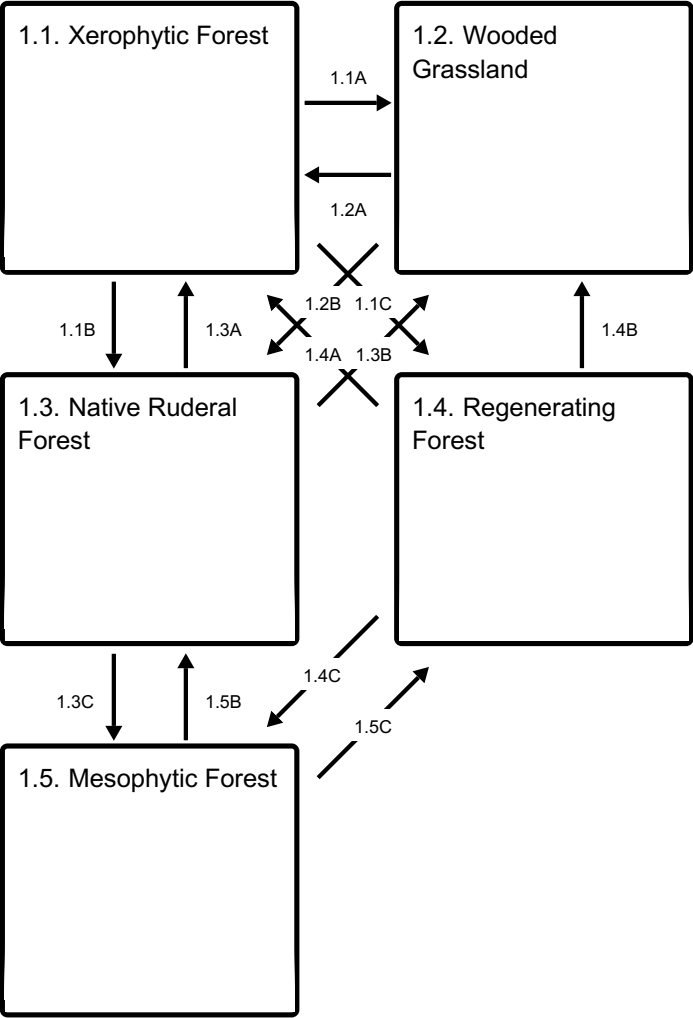
Fire occurred every 5-20 years, preventing recruitment of fire sensitive species. The low fertility combined with frequent fire favored oak woodland.

State and transition model

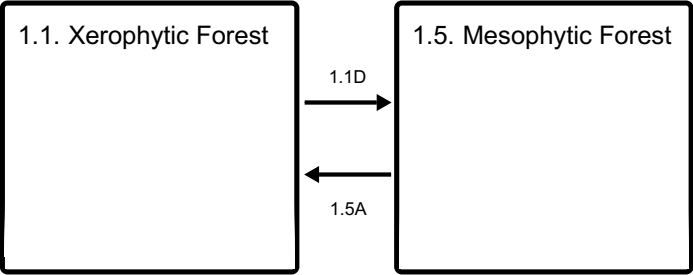
Ecosystem states



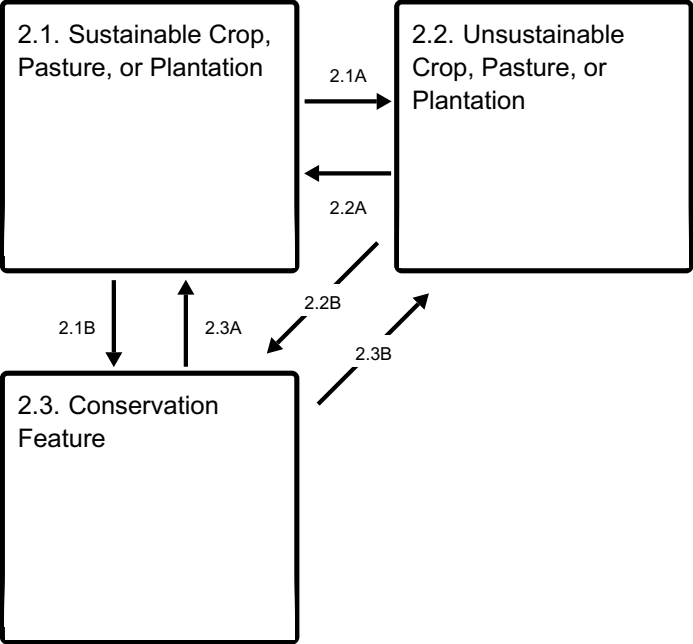
State 1 submodel, plant communities



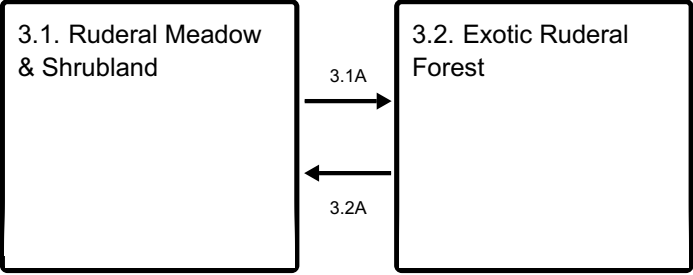
Communities 1 and 5 (additional pathways)



State 2 submodel, plant communities



State 3 submodel, plant communities



State 1
Reference State

The Reference State consists of forest, open woodlands and prairie.

Dominant plant species

- black oak (*Quercus velutina*), tree
- little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), grass
- sundial lupine (*Lupinus perennis*), other herbaceous

Community 1.1
Xerophytic Forest

Community 1.2
Wooded Grassland

Community 1.3
Native Ruderal Forest

Community 1.4
Regenerating Forest

Community 1.5
Mesophytic Forest

Pathway 1.1A
Community 1.1 to 1.2

Blowdown; increased fire/drought.

Conservation practices

| |
|---|
| Prescribed Burning |
| Early Successional Habitat Development/Management |
| Forest Stand Improvement |

Pathway 1.1B
Community 1.1 to 1.3

Blowdown/clearcut

Conservation practices

| |
|---|
| Early Successional Habitat Development/Management |
| Forest Stand Improvement |

Pathway 1.1C
Community 1.1 to 1.4

Blowdown/clearcut

Conservation practices

| |
|--------------------------|
| Forest Stand Improvement |
|--------------------------|

Pathway 1.1D
Community 1.1 to 1.5

Succession; decreased fire/drought

Pathway 1.2A
Community 1.2 to 1.1

Succession

Pathway 1.2B
Community 1.2 to 1.3

Decreased fire/drought; succession

Pathway 1.3A
Community 1.3 to 1.1

Succession

Pathway 1.3B
Community 1.3 to 1.2

Blowdown; increased fire/drought.

Pathway 1.3C
Community 1.3 to 1.5

Succession; decreased fire/drought.

Pathway 1.4A
Community 1.4 to 1.1

Succession.

Pathway 1.4B
Community 1.4 to 1.2

Blowdown; increased fire/drought.

Pathway 1.4C
Community 1.4 to 1.5

Succession; decreased fire/drought.

Pathway 1.5A

Community 1.5 to 1.1

Increased fire/drought with mortality.

Conservation practices

| |
|--------------------------|
| Prescribed Burning |
| Forest Stand Improvement |

Pathway 1.5B

Community 1.5 to 1.3

Blowdown/clearcut.

Conservation practices

| |
|---|
| Early Successional Habitat Development/Management |
| Forest Stand Improvement |

Pathway 1.5C

Community 1.5 to 1.4

Blowdown/clearcut

Conservation practices

| |
|--------------------------|
| Forest Stand Improvement |
|--------------------------|

State 2

Cultural State

[Alternative States to be developed; refer to component communities.]

Community 2.1

Sustainable Crop, Pasture, or Plantation

Community 2.2

Unsustainable Crop, Pasture, or Plantation

Community 2.3

Conservation Feature

Can be a grassed waterway, conservation reserve, a small patch pollinator garden, or other land taken out of its primary cultural production to mitigate or reduce impacts of adjacent land use, and is not by itself a permanent restoration of a complete native biological community and associated ecosystem services.

Pathway 2.1A
Community 2.1 to 2.2

Revert to unsustainable cultural practices.

Pathway 2.1B
Community 2.1 to 2.3

Establish conservation feature.

Conservation practices

| |
|--------------------|
| Conservation Cover |
| Grassed Waterway |

Pathway 2.2A
Community 2.2 to 2.1

Implement sustainable cultural practices.

Conservation practices

| |
|----------------------------------|
| Conservation Crop Rotation |
| Cover Crop |
| Nutrient Management |
| Integrated Pest Management (IPM) |

Pathway 2.2B
Community 2.2 to 2.3

Establish conservation feature.

Conservation practices

| |
|--------------------|
| Conservation Cover |
| Grassed Waterway |

Pathway 2.3A

Community 2.3 to 2.1

Implement sustainable cultural practices.

Conservation practices

| |
|----------------------------------|
| Conservation Cover |
| Conservation Crop Rotation |
| Nutrient Management |
| Integrated Pest Management (IPM) |

Pathway 2.3B

Community 2.3 to 2.2

Revert to unsustainable cultural practices.

State 3

Seminatural State

[Alternative States to be developed; refer to component communities.]

Community 3.1

Ruderal Meadow & Shrubland

Community 3.2

Exotic Ruderal Forest

Pathway 3.1A

Community 3.1 to 3.2

Succession.

Pathway 3.2A

Community 3.2 to 3.1

Blowdown/clearcut.

Transition T1A

State 1 to 2

Clear vegetation; cultivate domesticated species

Transition T1B

State 1 to 3

Clear vegetation, invasive species introduced

Restoration pathway R2

State 2 to 1

Remove domesticated species; restore native species.

Conservation practices

| |
|---|
| Brush Management |
| Tree/Shrub Site Preparation |
| Tree/Shrub Establishment |
| Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitats |
| Upland Wildlife Habitat Management |
| Herbaceous Weed Control |

Transition T2A

State 2 to 3

Abandoned, succession.

Restoration pathway R3

State 3 to 1

Control invasive species; restore native species

Conservation practices

| |
|---|
| Brush Management |
| Tree/Shrub Site Preparation |
| Tree/Shrub Establishment |
| Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitats |
| Upland Wildlife Habitat Management |
| Herbaceous Weed Control |

Restoration pathway T3A

State 3 to 2

Clear vegetation; cultivate domesticated species

Additional community tables

Inventory data references

Site Development and Testing Plan

Future work is needed, as described in a future project plan, to validate the information presented in this provisional ecological site description. Future work includes field sampling, data collection and analysis by qualified vegetation ecologists and soil scientists. As warranted, annual reviews of the project plan can be conducted by the Ecological Site Technical Team. A final field review, peer review, quality control, and quality assurance reviews of the ESD are necessary to approve a final document.

Other references

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Contributors

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Approval

Nels Barrett, 1/16/2024

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 | 05/21/2025 |
| Approved by | Nels Barrett |
| 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:**
-