10610

Inter-Mountain Basins Aspen-Mixed Conifer Forest and Woodland

BpS Model/Description Version: Aug. 2020

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Modelers** |  | **Reviewers** |  |
| Mike Manthei | mmanthei@fs.fed.us | Rory Steinke | rsteinke@fs.fed.us |
| Rory Steinke | rsteinke@fs.fed.us | Tim Christiansen | tchristiansen@tnc.org |
| JackTriepke | jtriepke@fs.fed.us | Keith Schulz | Keith\_Schulz@natureserve.org |

Reviewer: Casey Teske

Vegetation Type

Forest and Woodland

Map Zones

15, 25

Geographic Range

This is typically found in Nevada, Utah, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, and eastern Oregon. It may occur in map zone (MZ) 25, but it is a very minor component.

Biophysical Site Description

This type typically occurs on flat to steep terrain (<80%) on all aspects. Elevation generally ranges from 2,000-2,400m. Soils are variable and are derived from colluvium and have frigid (cool) temperature and udic (moist) moisture regimes, with fairly thick organic surface horizons. This type occurs above the pinyon-juniper and/or sagebrush but below the spruce-fir zone.

Vegetation Description

As a species, *Populus tremuloides* (aspen) is adapted to a much broader range of environments than most plants found associated with it. Stands are usually closed. This highly variable ecological system is comprised of pure aspen or primarily aspen with few to several conifer species at lower montane elevations. These conifers include: *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, *Abies concolor*, *Abies lasiocarpa*, *Pinus strobiformis*, *P. contorta*, and *P. ponderosa*. Conifers are usually <25% relative tree cover. Where it is adjacent to conifer, an occasional conifer seedling may occur, but these do not drive the fire regime.

The species listed between MZs 15 and 25 differed in several cases. If a species was only included in one of the zones, a parenthetical note with the zone number will follow the species. Common shrubs may include: *Amelanchier alnifolia* (MZ15), *Amelanchier utahensis* (MZ25), *Juniperus communis*, *Mahonia repens*, *Sheppherdia ccanadensis* (MZ15), *Symphoricarpos oreophilus*, *Symphoricarpos orbiculatus* (MZ15), and *Vaccinium* spp. The herbaceous layers may be lush and diverse. Graminoids may include *Bromus carinatur* (MZ15), *Bromus marginatus* (MZ25), *Calamagrostis rubensens*, *Carex geyeri* (MZ15), *Carex rossii* (MZ15), *Elymus glaucus*, and *Elymus trachycaulus*. Forbs may include *Achillea millefilium*, *Eucephalus engelmannii* (MZ15), *Delphimium* spp., *Geranium viscosissimum*, *Lupinus argenteus*, and many others. The herbaceous layers may be lush and diverse.

BpS Dominant and Indicator Species

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Scientific Name** | **Common Name** |
| POTR5 | *Populus tremuloides* | Quaking aspen |
| PIPO | *Pinus ponderosa* | Ponderosa pine |
| PICO | *Pinus contorta* | Lodgepole pine |
| PSME | *Pseudotsuga menziesii* | Douglas-fir |

Species names are from the NRCS PLANTS database. Check species codes at http://plants.usda.gov.

Disturbance Description

This is a strongly fire-adapted forest type with mean fire intervals varying from 10-30yrs based on biophysical variation. According to Baker (1925), who most closely studied the historic condition, the mean fire return interval (MFRI) for replacement fire was 20-40yrs (min-max). Baker's MFRI for mixed-severity fire was 10-20yrs (min-max). Studies by Bartos and Campbell (1998) support these findings. Native American burning was the primary source of fire, especially mixed-severity fire. It is important to understand that aspen is considered a fire-proof vegetation type that does not burn during the normal lightning season, yet evidence of frequent fire scars and historical studies show that native burning was the only source of fire that occurred mostly during the spring and fall.

Secondary disturbances may include: snowslides, mudslides, and rotational slumping. Flooding may also operate in these systems. Without regular fire and with high levels of herbivory, conifers may replace the aspen community wherever aspen is present. The presence of even a single aspen tree in a stand provides strong evidence that the area historically supported aspen clones. The predominance of elk herbivory has drastically reduced aspen regeneration in northern Arizona in most places.

Fire Frequency

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Severity** | **Avg FI** | **Percent of All Fires** | **Min FI** | **Max FI** |
| Replacement | 43 | 28 | 25 | 50 |
| Moderate (Mixed) | 20 | 61 |  |  |
| Low (Surface) | 111 | 11 |  |  |
| All Fires | 12 | 100 |  |  |

Fire interval is expressed in years for each fire severity class and for all types of fire combined (All Fires). Average FI is the central tendency modeled. Percent of all fires is the percent of all fires modeled in that severity class. Minimum and Maximum FIs show the relative range of fire intervals as estimated by model contributors, if known.

Scale Description

This type occurs in a landscape mosaic from moderate- to large-sized patches.

Adjacency or Identification Concerns

This type is significantly altered today and is very difficult to identify because of conifer encroachment and fire suppression.

This Biophysical Setting (BpS) is characterized by a shorter MFRI and lower elevations than 1011 (Rocky Mountain Aspen Forest and Woodland). The BpS 1052 (Rocky Mountain Mesic Montane Mixed Conifer Forest and Woodland) is adjacent to this BpS along the riparian systems.

If subalpine fir or spruce are present, the aspen with mixed conifers for high-elevation model (1055) should be considered.

Issues or Problems

Mapping: if any aspen is present, this is probably the correct BpS (or 1011 at higher elevations).

As this type has a fairly short fire return interval compared to other aspen types, it should be noted that aspen can act as a tall shrub. Bradley et al. (1992) state that Loope and Gruell estimated a fire frequency of 25-100yrs for a Douglas-fir forest with seral aspen in Grand Teton National Park (p39). They later state that fire frequencies of 100-300yrs appear to be appropriate for maintaining most seral aspen stands. In the Fontenelle Creek, WY, drainage, the mean fire-free interval was estimated to be 40yrs. Fires in this area burned in a mosaic pattern of severities, from stand-replacement to low fires that scarred bur did not kill the relatively thin-barked lodgepole pine on the site (p46).

There is uncertainty about the role of mixed-severity fire. We assumed that native burning in aspen stands invaded by young conifers resulted in mixed-severity fire, whereas the same source of fire would cause low-severity fire (surface fire) in same-age stands that were more open. Experts and modelers expressed different views about the frequency of all fires, citing MFRIs longer than those noted by Baker (1925), who actually studied the historic condition. The MFRIs used here were a compromise: 1) the longer MFRIs were used for the oldest development states and 2) the maximum MFRI of Baker (1925) was used for stands <80yrs that were being encroached upon by lower-elevation conifers. Keith Schulz of NaureServe suggests this model is more reflective of Aspen Forest and Woodland and that it could be renamed Rocky Mountain Aspen Forest and Woodland.

Native Uncharacteristic Conditions

In mid- and late-development pure aspen conditions (Classes B and C), <20% cover of aspen is generally uncharacteristic, created from overgrazing or browsing.

Comments

Casey Teske reviewed this model during the 2016 BpS Review. As a result of review comments, surface fire was added to the model. MZs 15 and 25 were combined during 2015 BpS Review. The few descriptive differences between the zones (mostly species differences) are noted in the revised description.

Additional modelers for MZ15 included Linda Wadleigh, lwadleigh@fs.fed.us; George Robertson, grobertson@fs.fed.us; Deb Bumpus, dbumpus@fs.fed.us; and Ed Smith, esmith@tnc.org. Steinke was a modeler for MZ15 and did further review for MZ25. MZ25 was reviewed by T. Christansen and K. Schulz.

Succession Classes

**Mapping Rules**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Upper Layer Lifeform** | **Height (m)** | **Canopy Cover (%)** | | | | | | | | | |
| **0-10** | **11-20** | **21-30** | **31-40** | **41 - 50** | **51-60** | **61-70** | **71-80** | **81-90** | **91-100** |
| Herb | 0-0.5 | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A |
| Herb | 0.5-1.0 | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A |
| Herb | >1.0 | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A |
| Shrub | 0-0.5 | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A |
| Shrub | 0.5-1.0 | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A |
| Shrub | 1.0-3.0 | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A |
| Shrub | >3.0 | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A |
| Tree | 0-5 | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A | A |
| Tree | 5-10 | D | D | D | D | B | B | B | B | B | B |
| Tree | 10-25 | D | D | D | D | C | C | C | C | C | C |
| Tree | 25-50 | D | D | D | D | E | E | E | E | E | E |
| Tree | >50 | D | D | D | D | E | E | E | E | E | E |

Succession class letters A-E are described in the Succession Class Description section. Some classes use a leafform distinction where a qualifier is added to the class letter: Brdl (broadleaf), Con (conifer), or Mix (mixed conifer and broadleaf). UN refers to uncharacteristic native or a combination of height and cover that would not be expected under the reference condition. NP refers to not possible or a combination of height and cover which is not physiologically possible for the species in the BpS.

**Description**

Class A 58 Early Development 1 - All Structures

Indicator Species

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Scientific Name** | **Common Name** | **Canopy Position** |
| POTR5 | Populus tremuloides | Quaking aspen | Upper |

Description

Grass/forb and aspen suckers and saplings.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
Sapling >4.5ft; <5" DBH

Class B 21 Mid Development 1 - Closed

Indicator Species

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Scientific Name** | **Common Name** | **Canopy Position** |
| POTR5 | Populus tremuloides | Quaking aspen | Upper |

Description

Canopy cover is highly variable. Conifers can invade. The stand is composed of 80% aspen, up to 10% conifers.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
Pole 5-9" DBH

Class C 6 Mid Development 2 - Closed

Indicator Species

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Scientific Name** | **Common Name** | **Canopy Position** |
| POTR5 | Populus tremuloides | Quaking aspen | Upper |

Description

Aspen 5-16in DBH. This is a pure aspen stage. Mixed aspen overstory dominance. An insect/ disease disturbance will typical kill the larger stems.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
Medium 9-21" DBH

Class D 14 Late Development 1 - All Structures

Indicator Species

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Scientific Name** | **Common Name** | **Canopy Position** |
| POTR5 | Populus tremuloides | Quaking aspen | Upper |
| PIPO | Pinus ponderosa | Ponderosa pine | Mid-Upper |
| PSEUD7 | Pseudotsuga | Douglas-fir | Mid-Upper |

Description

Aspen 5-16in DBH dominate with conifer understory up to co-dominance: 80% aspen overstory. Conifers (e.g., ponderosa pine) are assumed more resistant to fire than aspen and will likely cause the progressive suppression of aspen.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
Medium 9-21" DBH

Class E 1 Late Development 1 - Closed

Indicator Species

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Scientific Name** | **Common Name** | **Canopy Position** |
| PIPO | Pinus ponderosa | Ponderosa pine | Upper |
| PICO | Pinus contorta | Lodgepole pine | Upper |
| PSME | Pseudotsuga menziesii | Douglas-fir | Upper |
| POTR5 | Populus tremuloides | Quaking aspen | Mid-Upper |

Description

Conifers dominate. Aspen >16in DBH, mixed conifer mixed sizes, main overstory is conifers; >50% conifer in the overstory.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
Large 21-33" DBH

Model Parameters

Deterministic Transitions

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **From Class** | **Begins at (yr)** | **Succeeds to** | **After (years)** |
| Early1:ALL | 0 | Mid1:CLS | 39 |
| Mid1:CLS | 40 | Late1:ALL | 79 |
| Mid2:CLS | 80 | Mid2:CLS | 999 |
| Late1:ALL | 80 | Late1:CLS | 149 |
| Late1:CLS | 150 | Late1:CLS | 999 |

Probabilistic Transitions

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Disturbance Type** | **Disturbance occurs In** | **Moves vegetation to** | **Disturbance Probability** | **Return Interval (yrs)** | **Reset Age to New Class Start Age After Disturbance?** | **Years Since Last Disturbance** |
| Surface Fire | Early1:ALL | Early1:ALL | 0.01 | 100 | No | 0 |
| Replacement Fire | Early1:ALL | Early1:ALL | 0.025 | 40 | Yes | 0 |
| Mixed Fire | Early1:ALL | Early1:ALL | 0.05 | 20 | No | 0 |
| Alternative Succession | Mid1:CLS | Mid2:CLS | 0.0062 | 161 | Yes | 0 |
| Surface Fire | Mid1:CLS | Mid1:CLS | 0.01 | 100 | No | 0 |
| Replacement Fire | Mid1:CLS | Early1:ALL | 0.025 | 40 | Yes | 0 |
| Mixed Fire | Mid1:CLS | Mid1:CLS | 0.05 | 20 | No | 0 |
| Insects or Disease | Mid2:CLS | Mid1:CLS | 0.005 | 200 | Yes | 0 |
| Surface Fire | Mid2:CLS | Mid2:CLS | 0.01 | 100 | No | 0 |
| Replacement Fire | Mid2:CLS | Early1:ALL | 0.017 | 59 | Yes | 0 |
| Mixed Fire | Mid2:CLS | Mid2:CLS | 0.05 | 20 | No | 0 |
| Surface Fire | Late1:ALL | Late1:ALL | 0.004 | 250 | No | 0 |
| Replacement Fire | Late1:ALL | Early1:ALL | 0.017 | 59 | Yes | 0 |
| Mixed Fire | Late1:ALL | Late1:ALL | 0.05 | 20 | No | 0 |
| Insects or Disease | Late1:CLS | Late1:ALL | 0.003 | 333 | Yes | 0 |
| Surface Fire | Late1:CLS | Late1:CLS | 0.004 | 250 | No | 0 |
| Replacement Fire | Late1:CLS | Early1:ALL | 0.017 | 59 | Yes | 0 |
| Mixed Fire | Late1:CLS | Late1:ALL | 0.05 | 20 | Yes | 0 |

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