10230

Madrean Encinal

BpS Model/Description Version: Aug. 2020

**Reviewer:** Tim Christiansen

Vegetation Type

Forest and Woodland

Map Zones

14, 15, 24, 25

Geographic Range

Sierra Madre Occidentale and Sierra Madre Oriental in Mexico, Trans-Pecos Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, generally south of the Mogollon Rim.

Biophysical Site Description

The Madrean encinal of the interior North American Southwest is characterized by evergreen oaks, alligator junipers, and Mexican pines that range in height from 15-50ft (6-15m); the understory is dominated by graminoids (Brown 1994). With increasing elevation, alligator juniper and evergreen oak trees give way to a mixture of relatively mesic evergreen oak species and pines.

Kuchler (1964) includes this type within type number 31, the oak-juniper woodland. Coarse-scale PNVGs included this type with type number 26, chaparral. This PNV type is included in Bailey’s (1995) and McNab and Avers’s (1994) ecoregions within the Chihuahuan Semi-Desert Province and Basin and Range Section (321A) and the Arizona-New Mexico Semi-Desert Mountains Province (M313) within the White Mountain-San Francisco Peaks Section (M313A) and Sacramento-Monzano Mountain Section (M313B).

Vegetation Description

These forests and woodlands are dominated by Madrean oaks with scattered pine and juniper intermingled with patchy shrublands on most mid-elevation slopes (1,500-2,300m elevation). Tree species include *Quercus arizonica*, *Q. emoryi*, *Q. grisea*, *Cupressus arizonica*, *Juniperus deppeana*, *Pinus arizonica*, *Pinus discolor*, *P. engelmannii*, and *P. ponderosa*. Subcanopy and shrub layers may include typical encinal and chaparral species such as *Agave* spp., *Arbutus arizonica*, *Arctostaphylos pringlei*, *Arctostaphylos pungens*, *Garrya wrightii*, *Nolina* spp., *Quercus hypoleucoides*, *Q. rugosa*, and *Q. turbinella*. Some stands have moderate cover of perennial warm-season grasses such as *Bouteloua curtipendula*, *B. gracilis*, *Muhlenbergia emersleyi*, *M. longiligula*, *M. virescens*, and *Schizachyrium cirratum*. Graminoids decrease in cover and biomass with increasing cover of woody plants.

BpS Dominant and Indicator Species

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

Disturbance Description

The fire regime of this ecological system is poorly understood. Particularly at the lowest elevations, dominant trees rarely record fires, and they resprout after fire. The increasing abundance of pines with increasing elevation partially mediates this situation and provides limited information about fire regime at these higher elevations.

It would seem that fire occurrence was determined primarily by fire occurrence in adjacent ecosystems and was ignited by lightning during early summer. However, this information is poorly documented; based on contemporary ecological knowledge, models that assume specific fire regimes are little more than guesses. These follow, in the sincere hope they will be ignored or improved upon.

This system likely is predisposed to stand-replacement fires during any stage of stand development. Replacement fires are assumed to have occurred every century or so coincident with hot, dry, windy conditions during early summer. Surface fires and mixed-severity fires likely occurred more frequently, perhaps on the magnitude of every 5-30yrs (with considerable variability around the mean frequency).

Drought likely was the most common disturbance after fire. Multi-decadal drought probably thinned stands but did not cause or contribute to stand replacement.

Fire Frequency

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 usually was distributed across the landscape in patches of 100s-1000s of acres. In particularly dissected topography, this type may have occurred in smaller patches.

Adjacency or Identification Concerns

This system generally is found at higher elevations and more mesic sites than semi-desert grassland. It may be bordered by, and confused with, pinyon-juniper woodland or interior chaparral (e.g., Great Basin pinyon-juniper woodland [Brown 1982], the juniper-pinyon, or juniper steppe types of coarse-scale PNVG [Schmidt et al. 2002] and PNV [Kuchler 1964]).

Indicator species of this type include alligator juniper, evergreen oaks, Mexican pines, mountain muhly, blue grama, and sideoats grama.

Issues or Problems

Few components of the fire regimes are known with certainty. Fire scars are rare, and most trees in this system cannot be aged accurately with conventional dendrochronological techniques. Information about fire regimes is extrapolated from adjacent systems or from the few pine trees in upper-elevation patches of this system; thus, caution is warranted when interpreting these models. Fire season can be inferred more reliably than fire frequency; most fires likely occurred during early summer as a result of lightning associated with early “monsoonal” thunderstorms. Fire season likely is equally or more important than the fire frequency, despite the overwhelming attention to the latter instead of the former.

Lehmann lovegrass (*Eragrostis lehmanniana*) was purposely introduced into North America in the 1930s and has spread to the lower and drier edge of Madrean encinal. By continuing to spread and therefore add fine fuel, it may contribute to significantly increased fire frequency in this system. Lehmann lovegrass may have an advantage over native grasses following fire.

Native Uncharacteristic Conditions

Tree cover >70% is uncharacteristic.

Comments

Succession Classes

**Mapping Rules**

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 21 Early Development 1 - All Structures

Indicator Species

Description

Post-fire graminoids and herbaceous dicots with 10-30% cover dominated by grama and muhly grasses, asters, penstemons, and mid-height shrubs such as manzanita and silktassel. Herbs are the dominant (grasses, dicots) lifeform.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
Seedling <4.5ft

Class B 37 Mid Development 1 - Closed

Indicator Species

Description

Woodlands in relatively productive draws and northerly aspects with 25-70% cover (average = 50%).

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

Class C 25 Mid Development 1 - Open

Indicator Species

Description

Grasslands on southerly slopes and ridges, often with relatively shallow or poorly developed soils. Herbaceous cover is the dominant lifeform, 25-70% (average = 50%) cover; scattered trees and shrubs comprise 5-15% cover.

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

Class D 17 Late Development 1 - Open

Indicator Species

Description

Open woodland derived from succession on slopes and ridge tops and from thinning on relatively productive soils. Woodland has 5-35% canopy, 25% average; alligator juniper, oaks, mountain muhly, blue grama, sideoats grama.

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

Model Parameters

Deterministic Transitions

Probabilistic Transitions

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