10950

Apacherian-Chihuahuan Mesquite Upland Scrub

BpS Model/Description Version: Aug. 2020

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Vegetation Type

Shrubland

Map Zone

27

Geographic Range

Chihuahuan Desert extending into the Sky Island region to the west and the Edwards Plateau to the east. For map zone (MZ) 27, this system probably mostly occurs south of MZ27. It might occur on the southern edge, but Biophysical Setting (BpS) 1111 Western Great Plains (WGP) Mesquite Woodland/Shrubland would be more important.

Biophysical Site Description

Substrates are typically derived from alluvium, often gravelly without a well-developed argillic or calcic soil horizon that would limit infiltration and storage of winter precipitation in deeper soil layers. Mesquite (*Prosopis* spp.) and other deep-rooted shrubs exploit this deep soil moisture, which is unavailable to grasses and cacti.

Vegetation Description

Vegetation is typically dominated by honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) or velvet mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*) and succulents. Other desert scrub that may co-dominate or dominate includes viscid acacia (*Acacia neovernicosa*), whitethorn acacia (*A. constricta*), creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), oneseed juniper (*Juniperus monosperma*), or redberry juniper (*J. coahuilensis*). Grass species may include sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), purple threeawn (*Aristida purpurea*), bush muhly (*Muhlenbergia porteri*), cane bluestem (*Bothriochloa barbinodis*), streambed bristlegrass (*Setaria leucopila*), and *Vulpia* spp. The deeper soils within this BpS help support good grass cover beneath the shrub canopy. Higher annual rainfall and deeper soils in this BpS, as compared to a Sonoran Desert location, allows for a more diverse plant community.

BpS Dominant and Indicator Species

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

Disturbance Description

Drought is a relatively common occurrence in this BpS, generally occurring every 10-15yrs and lasting 2-3yrs. Occasional long-term drought periods (10-15yr duration) will affect this BpS. Historical natural-ignition fires within this BpS were probably 10-15ac in size. Fire helped maintain a general mosaic pattern between open grassland and shrub-dominated areas.

Fire Frequency Results

Scale Description

Patch size of this BpS ranges from 50-1,000,000ha (from literature).

Adjacency or Identification Concerns

Similar to Chihuahuan Mixed Desert and Thorn Scrub (CES302.734) but is generally found at higher elevations where *L. tridentata* and other desert scrub are not co-dominant. It is also similar to Chihuahuan Stabilized Coppice Dune and Sand Flat Scrub (CES302.737) but does not occur on eolian-deposited substrates.

Issues or Problems

This is probably not a BpS but may be a class within semi-desert grassland (BpS 1121). During the last century, the area occupied by this system has increased through conversion of desert grasslands as a result of drought, overgrazing by livestock, and/or decreases in fire frequency. It is believed that this is a system that occurred in very minor amounts and has become widespread as a result of drought, heavy grazing, and other actions.

Even though this may be a minor system, the effects from a change in this habitat on surrounding habitats are not known. A decreased drought interval may change this to even more desert scrub habitat, which could increase wind erosion and increase the time between fire returns and time of recovery.

Native Uncharacteristic Conditions

Comments

This model for MZ27 was adopted as is from the same BpS from MZ26 created by Richard Gatewood, Michael Margo, and Joseph White and reviewed by John Morlock. No review was obtained for MZ27, as modelers/reviewers felt it was a minor if even present occurrence.

For MZ26, the model for BpS 1095/1391 was initiated from the MZ25 BpS 1095 model. Significant changes to the model for MZ26 resulted in a change in the model. BpS 1095 for MZ25 is based on 151095, Mike Babler, 10/05. Information provided by Heather Schussman (hschussman@tnc.org) informed 151095. The VDDT model is the same as 151121.

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 12 Early Development 1 - All Structures

Indicator Species

Description

Grasses and forbs. Early succession post-fire grass and forb community dominated by perennial bunchgrasses, annual grasses, and forbs. Upper layer of shrub canopy cover typically <5%. Short period of duration in this stage effectively precludes disturbance.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
None

Class B 66 Mid Development 1 - Open

Indicator Species

Description

Grasses with some low shrubs; perennial bunchgrasses regenerate and young shrubs begin growing. Species are perennial bunchgrasses and shrubs. Drought stress induces high mortality in brush fires, which causes a change to a regeneration phase. Surface fires may burn infrequently, but higher fine fuels lead to stand-replacement fires.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
None

Class C 16 Mid Development 2 - Open

Indicator Species

Description

Shrubs continue to increase in size and/or number of individuals; species are perennial bunchgrasses and shrubs. Drought impacts vegetation occasionally. Replacement fires are frequent with surfaces fires occurring.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
None

Class D 6 Late Development 1 - Open

Indicator Species

Description

Shrub-dominated landscape with little perennial grass cover. Shrub cover and densities are high enough to outcompete perennial grasses, resulting in low levels of fine fuels and increased erosion potential. Stand-replacement fires and drought-induced mortality occur.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
None

Model Parameters

Deterministic Transitions

Probabilistic Transitions

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