10980

California Montane Woodland and Chaparral

BpS Model/Description Version: Aug. 2020

Vegetation Type

Shrubland

Map Zone

6

Geographic Range

Montane chaparral is located from the Southern Cascades, through the Sierra Nevada, the Peninsular and Transverse ranges, and into Baja, California.

Biophysical Site Description

Primarily occurs at elevations where much of the precipitation occurs as snowfall -- above 1,500m (4,500ft). These locations are commonly on steep, exposed slopes with rocky or shallow soils, favoring southern and western aspects in canyons, glaciated landscapes, recent volcanics, and other areas with low site productivity/shallow soils.

Vegetation Description

These are mosaics of woodlands with chaparral understories, shrub-dominated chaparral, or short-lived chaparrals, with conifer species invading if good seed source is available. Shrubs often have greater densities than trees, which are more limited due to the rocky/thin soils. These can also be short-duration chaparrals in previously forested areas that have experienced crown fires. Trees tend to have a scattered open canopy or can be clustered over a usually continuous, dense shrub layer. Trees can include PINJEF, ABICON, ABIMAG, PINMONTICOLA, PINLAM, *Pinus coulteri*, *Pinus attenuata*, *Cupressus forbesii*, *Cupressus arizonica*, *Cupressus arizonica* ssp. *nevadensis* (=*Cupressus nevadensis*). Typical sclerophyllous chaparral shrubs include *Arctostaphylos nevadensis*, *Arctostaphylos patula*, *Arctostaphylos glandulosa*, *Ceanothus cordulatus*, *Ceanothus diversifolius*, *Ceanothus pinetorum*,and *Chrysolepis sempervirens* (=*Castanopsis sempervirens*). Some stands can be dominated by winter deciduous shrubs, such as PRUEMA, PRUVIR, *Ceanothus integerrimus*, HOLDIS, HOLMIC, and QUEGARB. Most chaparral species are fire adapted, resprouting vigorously after burning or producing fire-resistant seeds. Occurrences of this system likely shift across montane forested landscapes with catastrophic fire events.

BpS Dominant and Indicator Species

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

Disturbance Description

Stand-replacing fires occur mostly in the shrub-dominated stages. In the conifer-dominated late-seral closed stage, surface fire is also important. Mean fire return interval is generally greater than that of the surrounding forested landscape (including the lower elevation California Mesic Chaparral -- 031097) -- perhaps double (Nagel and Taylor in press) -- due to the lack of flammability of many young shrub fields without a long history of fuel accumulation.

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

Montane chaparral typically originates following large stand-replacing fires in conifer forests. A variety of montane shrubs occupy the site and limit establishment and growth of conifers. If these shrublands burn again before succession to late-seral closed forest, they can stay shrub dominated for long periods of time (centuries). Patch size can be quite large, especially in the northern part of the state.

Adjacency or Identification Concerns

This includes several types of montane shrublands on sites that are typically seral to conifers. Montane chaparral is usually embedded within mixed-conifer, red fir, white fir, Jeffrey pine, and other conifer forests on sites that are prone to stand-replacing fire, or on otherwise disturbed or more open sites.

Issues or Problems

Not sure about historical composition of seral stages. System described over broad area on east and west side of Sierras. It also occurs elsewhere; however, most literature summarized is characteristic of the Sierra Nevada range.

Reviewers have commented that this vegetation type is usually seral to mixed-conifer types, and so a Biophysical Setting (BpS) model would only apply where it is unlikely to succeed to conifers.

Native Uncharacteristic Conditions

Shrub canopy closure in Class A does not exceed 70%, but it could in later stages. Trees overtop the shrubs in Class B and Class C. The mid-open stands have at least 10%, but not more than 50%, canopy closure of trees. The range of canopy closure for trees in Class C exceeds 20%, but is <80%. Class C could also include canopy closure up to 80% of trees <25m. Shrub canopy closure for Class B and Class C is in the range of 40-90%. Tree canopy closure in excess of 80% is uncharacteristic.

Comments

This model was modified by John Foster (28 August 2005) for BpSs 031098 and 061098.

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 27 Early Development 1 - All Structures

Indicator Species

Description

Early succession, after large patches of stand-replacement fire. Comprised of grass, shrubs, and few tree seedlings to saplings. *Prunus emarginata* also common. Shrub cover can range up to 70% canopy closure.

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

Class B 29 Mid Development 1 - Open

Indicator Species

Description

Open or closed shrublands with scattered pole to medium-size conifers. Jeffrey pine, ponderosa pine, white fir, red fir, sugar pine, Douglas-fir, incense cedar, and lodgepole pine can occur. *Prunus emarginata* also common. Above-listed shrubs co-occur.

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

Class C 44 Late Development 1 - Open

Indicator Species

Description

Open or closed shrublands with scattered large and very large conifers, and sometimes medium and small shade-tolerant conifers. Tree cover >35% can occur in small to moderate patches on northern aspects and lower slope positions. Jeffrey pine, ponderosa pine, white fir, red fir, sugar pine, Douglas-fir, incense cedar, and lodgepole pine can occur. *Prunus emarginata* also common. Above-listed shrubs still present.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
Very Large >33" DBH

Model Parameters

Deterministic Transitions

Probabilistic Transitions

References

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Also of interest:

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