11400

Northern Rocky Mountain Subalpine-Upper Montane Grassland

BpS Model/Description Version: Aug. 2020

Vegetation Type

Herbaceous

Map Zones

10, 19

Geographic Range

Northern Idaho, western Montana, and eastern Washington.

Biophysical Site Description

This is a high-elevation (>6,000ft), lush grassland system dominated by perennial grasses and forbs on dry sites, particularly south-facing slopes. Subalpine grasslands are small meadows to large open parks surrounded by conifer trees but lack tree cover within them. In general, soil textures are much finer, and soils are often deeper under grasslands than in the neighboring forests. Grasslands, although composed primarily of tussock-forming species, do exhibit a dense sod that makes root penetration difficult for tree species. Sites are often windswept, resulting in lack of snowpack and summer drought (Daubenmire 1981).

Vegetation Description

Typical dominant species include *Festuca viridula*, *Festuca idahoensis*, *Aster* spp., *Eriogonum* spp., *Lupinus* spp., and *Xerophyllum tenax*.

BpS Dominant and Indicator Species

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

Disturbance Description

Fire regimes are probably similar to adjacent forested vegetation and will generally be long-interval, stand-replacement regimes. Fires may finger into this system from adjacent forests. Conifer encroachment is not common due to the drought nature of these grasslands, but undoubtedly fire also plays some role in preventing conifer encroachment.

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

Patches are typically 10s to 100s of acres.

Adjacency or Identification Concerns

Historical sheep grazing may have occurred in these systems. The cumulative effects are unknown.

Issues or Problems

Native Uncharacteristic Conditions

Comments

Map zones 13 and 14 were combined during 2015 Biophysical Setting Review.

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 3 Early Development 1 - All Structures

Indicator Species

Description

Post-replacement disturbance conditions dominated by herbs and sprouting grasses, including green fescue, Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, *Xerophyllum tenax*, or *Epilobium* spp.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
None

Class B 97 Late Development 1 - Closed

Indicator Species

Description

Closed herbaceous cover dominated by green fescue, Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and *Xerophyllum tenax*. Low shrubs may be present, particularly mountain big sagebrush, *Erigonum* spp., and *Phlox* spp.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
None

Model Parameters

Deterministic Transitions

Probabilistic Transitions

References

Daubenmire, R. 1981. Subalpine parks associated with snow transfer in the mountains of northern Idaho and eastern Washington. Northwest Science. 55(2): 124-135.

Daubenmire, R.F. and J.B. Daubenmire. 1968. Forest vegetation of eastern Washington and northern Idaho. Technical Bulletin 60. Pullman, WA: Washington State University, Agricultural Experiment Station. 104 p.

Franklin, J.F. and C.T. Dyrness. 1973. Natural vegetation of Oregon and Washington. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-8. Portland, OR: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station. 417 p.

NatureServe. 2007. International Ecological Classification Standard: Terrestrial Ecological Classifications. NatureServe Central Databases. Arlington, VA. Data current as of 10 February 2007.