11600

Rocky Mountain Subalpine/Upper Montane Riparian Systems

BpS Model/Description Version: Aug. 2020

Vegetation Type

Woody Wetland

Map Zone

16

Model Splits or Lumps

This Biophysical Setting (BpS) is lumped with 161159 (models are identical).

Geographic Range

Great Basin, California, northern Rockies, Alaska, Pacific Northwest, and northcentral regions.

Biophysical Site Description

This ecological system represents the combination of numerous riparian types occurring in the montane zone. This ecological system exists as relatively small linear stringers in the fire management landscape.

Vegetation Description

This ecological system encompasses a broad array of riparian species. These systems are highly variable and generally consist of one or more of the following five basic vegetation forms: 1) cottonwoods; 2) willows; 3) sedges and other herbaceous vegetation; 4) aspen; and 5) conifers (primarily spruce and subalpine fir).

BpS Dominant and Indicator Species

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

Disturbance Description

The moisture associated with riparian areas promotes lower fire frequency compared with adjacent uplands and rapid recovery from fire events. Wet meadow types seldom burn. In riparian systems, the pre-burn herbaceous plant community is not permanently destroyed and rapidly recovers. Recovery is possible within a single growing season. Woody species (i.e., aspen, *Salix* spp., and occasionally cottonwood species) can be topkilled but generally resprout within a short period. In systems with conifers, post-fire establishment is from seed. Hydrological events are the major disturbance agents in these systems. In addition, beaver (*Castor canadensis*) were historically important in many of these systems. Older vegetation experienced fire when replacement fires burned the uplands. Surface fire affected the early development class through a combination of replacement fire from uplands and occasional native burning.

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

These systems are small linear features in the landscape.

Adjacency or Identification Concerns

This type is very similar to Rocky Mountain Montane Riparian Systems (161159), and the VDDT models are identical.

Issues or Problems

Over-grazing and irrigation use have had major impacts on some of these systems. This ecological system occurs at scales <30m resolution of LANDFIRE.

There is a paucity of information on this system.

Native Uncharacteristic Conditions

Comments

Fire behavior in these systems is strongly influenced by the adjacent uplands. Hydrological processes (e.g., flooding) are the determining factors in these systems.

This BpS did not receive any peer 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 63 Early Development 1 - All Structures

Indicator Species

Description

Early-seral class dominated by shrub or grass. The dominant lifeform may vary between shrubs and herbaceous. The herbaceous layer may range in cover from 0-100% and in height from short (<0.5m) to tall (>1m). Immediate post-fire responses in this ecological system are dependent on pre-burn vegetation form, and composition will vary within the stream reach. Generally, this class is expected to last several years post-disturbance. Reestablishment of conifers may require decades, however. Replacement fire was typically rare and not included. Surface fire was more frequent and a combination of upland-driven fire and native burning. Beaver would remove woody vegetation. Two flooding disturbances were included: frequent minor flood events that did not cause a change in successional age (i.e., had no ecological setback or delay in succession) and less frequent major flood events that revert the vegetation to the post-replacement stage. The duration of this class will be highly variable due to high moisture levels and high species variability.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
None

Class B 37 Mid Development 1 - Closed

Indicator Species

Description

The composition of this class is highly dependent on the hydrologic regime. For example, it could include any combination of the five vegetation forms described above. The dominant lifeform may also include trees (but will be highly variable). Canopy cover of trees may range from 0-30% and will range in height from regeneration (<5m) to tall (25-49m). Composition of adjacent uplands is the determining factor for future fire events. Further, conifer establishment in these higher elevation areas also influences the MFRI; therefore, replacement fire was selected to characterize this disturbance.

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

Model Parameters

Deterministic Transitions

Probabilistic Transitions

Optional Disturbances

Optional 1: Beaver

Optional 2: 50yr flood event

References

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