13250

East Gulf Coastal Plain Northern Mesic Hardwood Slope Forest

BpS Model/Description Version: Aug. 2020

Update: 5/25/2018

Vegetation Type

Forest and Woodland

Map Zones

46, 47, 48

Geographic Range

This system includes mesic deciduous hardwood forests of inland portions of the East Gulf Coastal Plain, including Alabama, Mississippi, western Kentucky, and western Tennessee. This system covers parts of the more mesic forests in the coastal plain portion of the Western Mesophytic Forest Region of Braun (1950), referred to as mesophytic mixed hardwoods, as well as mesic forests in the adjacent "Oak-Pine-Hickory" region to the south (Greller 1988). Examples of this system occur on slopes and ravines between dry uplands and stream bottoms.

Biophysical Site Description

For this model, the broader concept of the Western Mesophytic Forest of Braun (1950) has been split. This model is specific to the mesic forests of the northern portion of the East Gulf Coastal Plain. The distribution of these forests is determined by the interaction of topography and fine textured soils. Within the type, local variability in topography and moisture determine the canopy dominants. Drier sites (occupied by different systems) occur along the bluff tops and on the loess plain. Loess deposits make the fertility and the local topography of this area distinct (NatureServe 2005; Braun 1950; Miller and Neiswender 1987). The geology of the area is mapped as the Jackson Formation (Hardeman 1966).

Vegetation Description

The most characteristic feature of the vegetation of this system is a high cover value for *Fagus grandifolia*, but a variety of other hardwood species may also be found in the overstory. Stands are mesic, and some may be dominated by *Fagus grandifolia* and *Quercus alba*, others by *Quercus alba* or *Quercus pagoda* with other mesic hardwoods. From north to south, there is some floristic variability in the component floristics of this system. *Quercus rubra* will be of greater importance north of 35 degrees N latitude, and *Pinus taeda,* conversely, of greater importance to the south of this boundary. This system is defined as being north of the range of *Magnolia grandiflora* and *Pinus glabra*, which excludes the "Beech-Magnolia" forests of the deeper south. The core concept of this system consists of association types in which *Quercus* spp. can be present in the canopy, but are not dominant. Some may exhibit codominance by *Fagus grandifolia*, or other mesic *Quercus* spp. Other important canopy components include *Liriodendron tulipifera, Liquidambar styraciflua, Acer rubrum, Nyssa sylvatica, Fraxinus* *americana, Magnolia acuminata* (of local distribution), *Magnolia virginiana*, and *Pinus taeda*. Some subcanopy components (in addition to canopy species) include *Carpinus caroliniana, Diospyros virginiana, Oxydendrum arboreum, Cornus florida, Acer barbatum, Magnolia macrophylla, Ostrya virginiana, Ulmus alata*, and *Ilex opaca*.

BpS Dominant and Indicator Species

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

Disturbance Description

Generally stable, fire-sheltered forests (NatureServe 2006). Fire frequency and severity can be classified as Fire Regime Group III, with infrequent, low intensity surface fires and rare mosaic or replacement fires. The mean fire return interval (MFRI) is about 35yrs with wide year-to-year and within-type variation related to moisture cycles, degree of sheltering, and proximity to more fire-prone vegetation types. Anthropogenic fire was considered and it contributes to within-type MFRI variation.

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 mesic forests are described by NatureServe (2006) as large patch communities.

Adjacency or Identification Concerns

This system occurs as large to small patches in suitable habitat (e.g. slopes and ravines) throughout its range, the northern part of the East Gulf Coastal Plain north of the range of *Magnolia grandiflora* and *Pinus glabra.* There is an equivalent system to the south [Southern Coastal Plain Mesic Slope Forest (ces203.477 or biophysical setting [BpS]1357)], and separate systems (similarly divided north and south) to cover the mesic forests of the Loess Bluffs bordering the Mississippi River Alluvial Plain.

NatureServe (2006) notes East Gulf Coastal Plain Northern Loess Plain Oak-Hickory Upland (CES203.482 or BpS 1306) as an adjacent ecological system.

Issues or Problems

Native Uncharacteristic Conditions

Comments

Models and descriptions for map zones (MZ)s 46, 47, and 48 were identified as duplicates during the BpS review process. The description from MZ47 was adopted for all three map zones. Some disturbance description information in the Sclass descriptions was originally only in the description for MZ47.

This model was developed for MZs 46 and 47. Although the model description is based upon the rapid assessment model R9OADM, it has been modified to more accurately describe or tease apart the mesic slope portion of the R9OADM model. The modelers of the R9OADM model were Bruce Davenport, Alexa McKerrow, and Paul Arndt.

Ideally, the modelers would like to see more forest in the late successional classes (D & E) rather than in mid-succession (B & C) and with more closed than open structure. The Vegetation Dynamics Development Tool (VDDT) model for this BpS was conceived of by modifying the R9OADM model to more accurately reflect the desired class percentages as noted below. The original R9OADM description had indicated the class percentages in this model, but the actual VDDT model was modified to adhere to LANDFIRE modeling rules without consulting the class information below. Thus, there was a discrepancy between VDDT class percent outputs and what the modelers intended.

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 7 Early Development 1 - All Structures

Indicator Species

Description

This class is characterized by sprouts, seedlings, and saplings, primarily of major overstory species, in gaps created by wind, lightning, insect/disease, and less frequently, fire. Shade intolerant species (e.g. *Liriodendron tulipifera*, LITU) are confined to multiple-tree gaps. This is not a fire-driven system, so most of early succession would result from other disturbances, including tree fall.

*Maximum Tree Size Class*  
Sapling >4.5ft; <5"DBH

Class B 30 Mid Development 1 - Closed

Indicator Species

Description

This class is dominated by a young to early mature canopy with some obligate mid-story and understory species. The closed condition is a function of understory/midstory development and depending on the age of the overstory, at least two strata are present. The fire frequency primarily impacts the amount of subcanopy vegetation. Under standard conditions, infrequent and low intensity fires, the stands have dense undergrowth and are considered closed.

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

Class C 6 Mid Development 1 - Open

Indicator Species

Description

This class has a similar overstory composition and structure as earlier closed states but without a well-developed midstory.

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

Class D 15 Late Development 1 - Open

Indicator Species

Description

This class is characterized by an early to late mature canopy that may exceed 30m (100ft) in height. Dominant overstory species vary depending on location and stand history. The open condition is dependent on the absence of multi-layered vertical structure.

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

Class E 42 Late Development 1 - Closed

Indicator Species

Description

This class exhibits the same overstory composition and structure as D. However, well-developed lower layers are present containing canopy species and other species confined to those levels. Fire frequency primarily impacts the amount of subcanopy vegetation. Under standard conditions, infrequent and low intensity fires, the stands have dense undergrowth and are considered closed.

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

Model Parameters

Deterministic Transitions

Probabilistic Transitions

References

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