Ecological site F002XC002OR
Backswamp Group

Last updated: 12/03/2024
Accessed: 08/29/2026

General information

Provisional. A provisional ecological site description has undergone quality control and quality assurance review. It contains a working state and transition model and enough information to identify the ecological site.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 002X–Willamette and Puget Sound Valleys

The Willamette and Puget Sound Valleys Major Land Resource Area (MLRA 2) is located in western Washington and Oregon. It occupies a forearc basin between coast ranges and the Cascade Mountain volcanic arc. The northern part contains Pleistocene drift, outwash, lacustrine and glaciomarine deposits associated with continental glaciers. The southern part contains Late Pleistocene deposits from glacial outburst floods (Missoula Floods). Climate is mild and moist, with a long growing season. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 20 to 60 inches, falling mostly in fall, winter, and spring. Summers are dry. Soil temperature regime is mesic and soil moisture regimes are xeric and aquic. Most sites in this MLRA can support forested vegetation, but some were maintained as prairie, savanna, or woodland through cultural burning prior to Euro-American settlement. Puget Sound has a moderating effect on temperatures and humidity can be higher in the northern part of the MLRA. Douglas-fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii) is widespread throughout. Oregon white oak (Quercus garryana) is common on uplands in the south and on warm, exposed or droughty sites in the north. Pacific madrone (Arbutus menziesii) occurs in areas close to salt water. Western hemlock (Tsuga heterophylla) is codominant with Douglas-fir in the north. Floodplains usually contain black cottonwood (Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa) and red alder (Alnus rubra). Oregon ash (Fraxinus latifolia) is typical of forested wetlands in the south. Forestry, urban development, and cultivated agriculture are currently the most extensive land uses (Soil Survey Staff, 2006).

LRU notes

The Willamette Valley land resource unit (LRU C) is located in northwestern Oregon. It is bounded by the Portland Basin to the north and the Umpqua Valley to the south. Topography is generally flat to hilly. Major landforms include floodplains and alluvial terraces, glaciolacustrine terraces, hills, and foothills. The valley floor is underlain by Pleistocene fluvial deposits (Rowland Formation). Valley borders and foothills are underlain by Eocene to Pliocene sedimentary rocks (Yamhill, Spencer, and Nestucca Formations) or, in some western areas, Eocene pillow basalts (Siletz River Volcanics). Other hills consist of Miocene Columbia River Basalt (Yeats et al., 1996; Orr et al., 1992). Locations below 400 feet elevation are covered with late Pleistocene silts deposited by the Missoula Floods (Willamette Silts). Mean annual precipitation ranges from 35 to 60 inches. Most falls as rain between October and May. The frost-free period ranges from 160 to 210 days. Snowfall occasionally occurs in winter, but snow cover rarely lasts longer than a few days. Ice storms usually occur at least once each winter. Winter storm winds come from the south. Fair-weather winds during summer come from the north. Prior to Euro-American settlement, fire was used in this LRU to maintain early-seral plant communities for food and fiber. General Land Office (GLO) land surveys conducted between 1851 and 1910 documented widespread prairies and savannas (Hulse et al., 2002). Fire exclusion since Euro-American settlement allowed many of these to succeed to forested communities (Johannessen et al., 1971; Day, 2005). Historic prairies and savannas were less common at the north end of the Willamette Valley, but an island of these types occurred in the Tualitan Valley. In general, fire frequency decreased with distance from human settlements (Christy and Alverson, 2011). Presence of Oregon white oak and absence of western hemlock distinguish this area from the coast range (MLRA 1) and Cascade mountains (MLRA 3). This LRU is distinguished from Portland Basin and Hills (LRU B) by low-frequency occurrence of species common in the Umpqua and Rogue valleys, including California black oak (Quercus kelloggii), Pacific madrone (Arbutus menziesii), incense cedar (Calocedrus decurrens), and white alder (Alnus rhombifolia) (Franklin and Dyrness, 1973).

Classification relationships

This ecological site group is similar to following plant associations (Christy, 2004) which emphasize observed plant communities with unspecified successional status: • Oregon ash/Dewey sedge - California nettle association • Pacific willow/California nettle association This ecological site group fits within the following LANDFIRE Biophysical Setting (BpS): • LANDFIRE Biophysical Setting: North Pacific Lowland Riparian Forest and Shrubland (0711560)

Ecological site concept

This site occurs in backswamps on floodplains. Soils are very deep and poorly or somewhat poorly drained. The rooting zone is saturated during at least part of the growing season. Occasional to frequent flooding, deposits of overbank sediment, a seasonally high water table, relatively neutral soil reaction, humid microclimate favor the development of deciduous forest vegetation.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) *Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa* (2) *Fraxinus latifolia*
Shrub	(1) *Spiraea douglasii*
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

Landform: floodplains
Parent material: alluvium
Elevation: 50 to 600 feet
Slope: 0 to 2 percent
Flooding: frequent; brief duration (low velocity)
Ponding: none

This site occurs on the Ingram geomorphic surface of active Willamette Valley floodplains (Balster and Parsons, 1968; Reckendorf, 1993).

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Climatic features

Mean annual air temperature: 50 to 54 degrees F
Mean annual precipitation: 35 to 60 inches
Frost free period: 165 to 210 days

Influencing water features

Low-energy flooding deposits sediment periodically. The rooting zone is saturated during at least part of the growing season.

Wetland description

Not determined at this time.

Soil features

Drainage class: poorly or somewhat poorly drained
Parent material: alluvium
Soil restrictive feature(s): none
Soil moisture regime: aquic
Soil moisture subclass: typic
Soil temperature regime: mesic
Particle-size family(s): fine-silty
Soil mineralogy: mixed
Cation exchange capacity: superactive
Soil reaction: slightly acid or neutral

Soils in this group are silty or loamy in the upper part. Gravelly or sandy material usually exists below the soil profile (below 5 feet). Low-energy flooding deposits sediment periodically. The rooting zone is saturated during at least part of the growing season. Soils classify as

Mollisols or Entisols.

Soils correlated with this site include Fluvaquents and Wapato.

Ecological dynamics

Central Concept

This site occurs in backswamps on floodplains. Soils are very deep and poorly or somewhat poorly drained. The rooting zone is saturated during at least part of the growing season. Occasional to frequent flooding, deposits of overbank sediment, a seasonally high water table, relatively neutral soil reaction, humid microclimate favor the development of deciduous forest vegetation. The reference plant community is black cottonwood - Oregon ash / rose spirea / grasslikes - forbs.

Range in Variability

Floodplain size and gradient may define subtypes with distinct reference communities. Black cottonwood (Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa) is most abundant along large floodplains (Franklin and Dyrness, 1973). Alder (Alnus spp.) are predominant along smaller, steeper floodplains.

Disturbance

The primary disturbance is low-energy, overbank flooding marked by loamy or silty sediment deposition. Flood events occur during winter. Since flood control, flooding frequency and sediment supply has decreased. However, if a migrating stream channel moves across this site, soils and flooding regime change to those of Riparian Group, and plant communities will adjust accordingly.

Cultural burning was not focused here prior to Euro-American settlement. General Land Office (GLO) surveys noted mainly deciduous riparian forest. Natural fire is infrequent and stand-replacing; the estimated mean fire return interval is 750 years (Henderson and Lesher, 2007). Tree-throw also occurs.

Plant Composition

Representative native plants are listed below. Not all species are present within the same community phase. Plant lists (especially for grasses, grasslikes, and forbs) are incomplete.

TREES:
black cottonwood (Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa)
red alder (Alnus rubra)
white alder (Alnus rhombifolia)
Oregon ash (Fraxinus latifolia)
white alder (Alnus rhombifolia)
cascara buckthorn (Frangula purshiana)

SHRUBS:
redosier dogwood (Cornus sericea)
Pacific ninebark (Physocarpus capitatus)
red elderberry (Sambucus racemose)
salmonberry (Rubus spectabilis)
common snowberry (Symphoricarpos albus)
willow (Salix spp.)
rose spirea (Spiraea douglasii)
California blackberry (Rubus ursinus)

GRASSLIKES:
sedge (Carex spp.)
Dewey sedge (Carex deweyana)
slough sedge (Carex obnupta)
rush (Juncus spp.)

State and transition model

Additional community tables

Table 3. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)

Table 4. Community 1.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)

Table 5. Community 1.3 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)

Table 6. Community 2.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)

Table 7. Community 2.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)

Table 8. Community 2.3 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)

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Approval

Kirt Walstad, 12/03/2024

Rangeland health reference sheet

Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health is a qualitative assessment protocol used to determine ecosystem condition based on benchmark characteristics described in the Reference Sheet. A suite of 17 (or more) indicators are typically considered in an assessment. The ecological site(s) representative of an assessment location must be known prior to applying the protocol and must be verified based on soils and climate. Current plant community cannot be used to identify the ecological site.

Author(s)/participant(s)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	10/03/2023
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:**

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2. **Presence of water flow patterns:**

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:**

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):**

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:**

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:**

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):**

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):**

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):**

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:**

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):**

12. **Functional/Structural Groups (list in order of descending dominance by above-ground annual-production or live foliar cover using symbols: >>, >, = to indicate much greater than, greater than, and equal to):**

    Dominant:

    Sub-dominant:

    Other:

    Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):**

14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):**

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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):**

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16. **Potential invasive (including noxious) species (native and non-native). List species which BOTH characterize degraded states and have the potential to become a dominant or co-dominant species on the ecological site if their future establishment and growth is not actively controlled by management interventions. Species that become dominant for only one to several years (e.g., short-term response to drought or wildfire) are not invasive plants. Note that unlike other indicators, we are describing what is NOT expected in the reference state for the ecological site:**

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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:**
