Ecological site F004BX103CA
Redwood-Douglas-fir/Pacific rhododendron, mountain slopes, sandstone, clay loam

Accessed: 09/14/2026

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.

Classification relationships

No relationship to other established classifications.

Associated sites

F004BX108CA	**Redwood, western swordfern, mountain slopes, sandstone and schist, clay loam** F004BX108CA is found in conjunction with this site.
F004BX109CA	**Douglas-fir/redwood/tanoak/California huckleberry, mountain slopes, sandstone and schist, clay loam** F004BX109CA and F004BX103CA are both found on summits and shoulders of ridges.
F004BX111CA	**Redwood/western swordfern-redwood sorrel, floodplains and terraces, loam** F004BX111CA is found in conjunction with this site.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) *Sequoia sempervirens* (2) *Pseudotsuga menziesii*
Shrub	(1) *Rhododendron macrophyllum*
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This ecological site is found east of Redwood Creek and southeast of Orick Valley, within the Mill, Rock, Wilson, and Hunter Creek watersheds. It occurs on uniform to slightly convex summits and shoulders of broad ridges, as well as uniform to slightly convex mountain slopes. These mountain slopes are strongly sloping to very steep.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Mountain slope (2) Ridge
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	20 – 770 m
Slope	10 – 80 %
Water table depth	150 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The climate is humid with cool, foggy summers and cool, moist winters. Coastal influence limits the diurnal range in temperatures. Summertime temperatures range from 42 to 70 degrees F. The total annual precipitation ranges from 70 to 100 inches and usually falls from October to May.

*Note: The climate station used may not represent the conditions on the site as the ecological site is located further to the south and inland.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	290 days
Freeze-free period (average)	290 days
Precipitation total (average)	2,540 mm

Influencing water features

There are no influencing water features on this site.

Soil features

These well-drained soils developed from colluvium and residuum derived from sandstone and mudstone. They are very strongly to moderately acidic at 40 inches with a dominantly loamy subsurface rock content ranging from non-gravelly to extremely gravelly. These soils are dominantly very deep with significant areas ranging from moderately deep to lithic contact. Soils on the nearly-level to moderately steep summit positions may have a clayey subsurface texture group with minimal rock content.

Soils that have been tentatively correlated to this ecological site include the following.
Soil Survey Area: CA605 - Redwood National and State Parks

Mapunit Symbols Soil Components

542 Slidecreek
542 Coppercreek
580 Slidecreek
580 Coppercreek
580 Tectah
581 Coppercreek
581 Slidecreek
581 Tectah
582 Slidecreek
582 Coppercreek
582 Lackscreek

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Loam (2) Gravelly loam (3) Very gravelly loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderate
Soil depth	100 – 200 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 – 20 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	0 – 10 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	5.08 – 17.78 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	Not specified

Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	4.5 – 10
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	10 – 80 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 10 %

Ecological dynamics

The redwood's interior range is largely contained within the coastal fog belt. Coastal fog ameliorates the effects of solar radiation on conifer transpiration rates (Daniel, 1942). Research in the redwood region (Dawson, 1998) has indicated that fog drip and direct fog uptake by foliage may contribute significant amounts of moisture to the forest floor during summer months and over the course of the year.

Previous harvesting and the use of fire to treat logging slash have changed species composition on many formerly redwood-dominated sites (Noss et al, 2000). Within many areas of the park, aerial seeding of Douglas-fir has led to a 10:1 ratio of Douglas-fir to redwood (Noss, 2000).

The historical origins of fires within the northern redwood region remain unknown. Lightning-ignited fires are considered rare. However, Native American burning is thought to have played a major role by burning fires from the interior into the redwood zone (Veirs, 1996). Natural fire intervals ranged from 500 to 600 years on the coast, 150 to 200 years on intermediate sites, and 50 years on inland sites. The northern range of redwoods evolved within a low to moderate natural disturbance regime (Veirs, 1979).

Surface fires likely modified the tree species composition by favoring the thicker-barked redwood (Sequoia sempervirens) (Veirs, 1979). Western hemlock's (Tsuga heterophylla) shallow roots and thin bark make it susceptible to fire damage (Arno, 2002). Fires also expose the mineral-rich soil and reduce competition from other plants, thereby increasing the establishment of new western hemlock (Veirs, 1979, Williamson, 1976). Tanoak (Lithocarpus densiflorus) seedlings and sapling-sized stems are often top-killed by surface fire, though larger stems may survive with only basal wounding (Tappeiner, 1984).

Both redwood and tanoak have the ability to re-sprout following fire (Veirs, 1996). After fire, redwood may sprout from the root crown or from dormant buds located under the bark of the bole and branches (Noss, 2000). The sprouting ability of redwood is most vigorous in younger stands and decreases with age. Frequent fire reduces tanoak’s sprouting ability and also tends to keep understories open (Arno, 2002). Fire exclusion would allow for the gradual increase of tanoak in the understory (McMurray, 1989).

A moderate fire could lead towards more of a mosaic in regeneration patterns. Patches of trees would be killed leaving others slightly damaged or unharmed. Douglas-fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii) regeneration would be favored in the large gaps that are created following a moderate fire, potentially leading to a larger proportion of Douglas-fir to redwood for several centuries (Agee, 1993). Without these gaps caused by fire, Douglas-fir regeneration is unsuccessful, and with continued lack of disturbance it may slowly be replaced by redwood as the dominant canopy species (Veirs, 1979, 1996).

Fires will also alter the composition of shrubs and forbs in the understory community. California huckleberry (Vaccinium ovatum) is a common species in both moist and dry redwood environments. It is normally a fire-dependent shrub species, but little is known concerning it's adaptation to fire under low to moderate fire return intervals (Tirmenstein, 1990). Following a fire, California huckleberry will often re-sprout and recover rapidly.
Pacific rhododendron (Rhododendron macrophyllum) is considered sensitive to fire. Following a surface fire, it may reestablish seedlings by sprouting from the rootcrown or stembase (Crane, 1990). After a disturbance such as fire, a decrease in plant cover is common, and will be followed by a gradual increase in cover over time.

Other potential disturbances in the redwood zone include winter storms that can cause top breakage. This breakage may kill individual or groups of trees and create small openings from windfall (Noss, 2000). This would likely favor the establishment of redwood and other shade tolerant conifers. On alluvial sites with periodic flooding, redwood and other colonizing hardwoods would dominate (Veirs, 1996). Where existing redwoods are inundated, new roots would develop in newly deposited silt (Veirs, 1996).

State and transition model

Figure 3. State and Transition Model

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 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 3.1 plant community composition

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

Table 8. Community 4.1 plant community composition

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

Table 9. Community 5.1 plant community composition

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

Table 10. Community 6.1 plant community composition

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

Animal community

The Redwood forest provides habitat for many species of mammals and native birds. Predators include black bear, fisher and marten, mountain lion, fox and bobcat. Ungulates included deer and elk, which use the forested areas for foraging and cover. Many bird species use the redwood forest on a seasonal basis. Bird species include warblers, tanagers, sparrows, blackbirds, the Marbeled Murrelet, the Northern spotted owl and the Bald Eagle. Common reptiles found in forested areas would include the alligator lizard and garter snake. Amphibians are mostly associated with riparian and wetland areas. The northwest salamander and two newt species spend much of their lives in upland habitat.

Hydrological functions

These soils have a moderate infiltration rate when thoroughly wet. They are dominantly very deep, well-drained, and have a moderately fine texture. These soils have a moderate rate of water transmission. The site is subject to erosion where adequate vegetative cover is not maintained. Road building, timber harvest, and site preparation for planting may increase surface erosion and potential for mass wasting. Hydrologic Group: 542--Slidecreek--C 542--Coppercreek--C 580--Slidecreek--C 580--Coppercreek--C 580--Tectah--D 581--Coppercreek--C 581--Slidecreek--C 581--Tectah--D 582--Slidecreek--C 582--Coppercreek--C

Recreational uses

In some locations steep slopes and subsurface rock may limit recreation site development.

Wood products

Redwood is a highly valued lumber because of its resistance to decay. Uses of redwood include house siding, paneling, trim and cabinetry, decks, hot tubs, fences, garden structures, and retaining walls. Other uses include fascia, molding and industrial storage and processing tanks. Douglas-fir is employed in residential structures and light commercial timber-frame construction. It is also used for solid timber heavy duty construction such as pilings, wharfs, bridge components and warehouse construction.

Other products

Redwood burls are used for tabletops, veneers, bowls and other turned products. Redwood bark is widely used as garden mulch. Douglas-fir is a very desirable Christmas tree; branches and cones are also used as materials for Christmas wreaths. California huckleberries are made into wine, as well as processed into pie fillings for home and commercial use. Foliage of the California huckleberry is used by florists in floral arrangements and to make Christmas decorations.

Other information

Pacific rhododendron is sometimes used for erosion protection on steep slopes. California Huckleberry leaves may be eaten by deer, and its berries are utilized by many bird and mammal species including bear, fox, squirrel, and skunk.

Table 11. Representative site productivity

Common Name	Symbol	Site Index Low	Site Index High	CMAI Low	CMAI High	Age Of CMAI	Site Index Curve Code	Site Index Curve Basis	Citation
redwood	*SESE3*	135	188	178	331	–	–	–	
Douglas-fir	*PSME*	132	197	133	206	–	–	–	

Inventory data references

Data for this site was obtained from NRCS Wood-5 forms collected at forest soil pits, unless otherwise noted. Transects were conducted within similar map units. Coppercreek-542 6048* Note 04-20 04-27 Coppercreek-580 04-92 04-63 04-62 04-87 04-153 Coppercreek-581 04-47 04-66 Coppercreek-582 04-79 04-49 Slidecreek-580 04-74 04-93 04-95 Slidecreek-581 04-88 04-90 04-83 04-96 Slidecreek-582 04-97 04-78 04-99 Lackscreek-580 04-65

Type locality

Location 1: Humboldt County, CA	
Township/Range/Section	T8N R2E S22
UTM zone	N
UTM northing	4547446
UTM easting	421710
General legal description	Panthercreek Quad

Other references

Agee, James K., 1993. Fire Ecology of Northwest Forests. P 187-225.

Arno, Stephen H. and Allison-Bunnel, Steven. 2002. Flames in Our Forest, Disaster or Renewal? Island Press.

Burns, Russel M. and Honkala, B.H., Ed., 1990. Silvics of North America, Volume 1, Conifers. Agricultural Handbook 654. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service.

Crane, M. F. 1990. Rhododendron macrophyllum. In: Fire Effects Information System, [Online] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Fire Sciences Laboratory (Producer). Available: http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis [2005, November 9.]

Daniel, T. W. 1942. The comparative transpiration rates of several western conifers under controlled conditions. PhD. diss., University of California. Berkeley.

McMurray, Nancy E. 1989. Lithocarpus densiflorus. In: Fire Effects Information System, [Online]. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory (Producer).
Available: http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/ [2006, June 2].

Noss, Reed, F., editor. 2000. The Redwood Forest. 377 pages.

Silvics of North America. 1990. USDA Handbook 654

Tappeiner, John C., II; Harrington, Timothy B.; Walstad, John D. 1984. Predicting recovery of tanoak (Lithocarpus densiflorus) and Pacific madrone (Arbutus menziesii) after cutting or burning. Weed Science. 32: 413-417.

Tirmenstien, D. 1990. Vaccinium ovatum.
In: Fire Effects Information System, [Online] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Fire Sciences Laboratory (Producer). Available: http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis

Viers, Stephen D. 1996. Ecology of the Coast Redwood. Conference on Coast Redwood Forest Ecology and Management. P 9-12.

Viers, Stephen D. 1979. The Role of Fire in Northern Coast Redwood Forest Dynamics. Conference on Scientific Research in the National Parks.

Williamson, Richard L.; Ruth, Robert H. 1976. Results of shelterwood cutting in western hemlock. Res. Pap. PNW-201. Portland, OR: U.S.
Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station. 25 p.

Contributors

Judy Welles

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	
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

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

   _____

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):**

---

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

---

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:**

---

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:**
