Ecological site F094AA008MI
Snowy Wet Acidic Sandy Depression

Last updated: 9/10/2024
Accessed: 09/08/2026

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): 094A–Northern Michigan Sandy Highlands

This area is dominated by outwash plains and moraines. The terrain can be steep on the moraines and flat in the areas of outwash. Elevation ranges from 177 to 520 m (580 to 1705 ft). Local topographic relief averages 14 m and ranges up to 188 m (45 to 615 ft). This area is covered entirely by drift. Bedrock consisting of Devonian limestone and dolomite with interbedded shale, chert, and anhydrite stringers is at various depths below the surface because of the curvature of the Michigan basin. However, bedrock exposures completely absent, as the depth of glacial drift ranges from 60 to 300 m (200-1000 ft). The Au Sable, Manistee, Au Gres, and Pine Rivers are the major streams draining this MLRA, in both the Lake Michigan and Lake Huron watersheds. The Muskegon River has its headwaters in this area. About 70 percent of this area is forested, and about 15 percent is cropland or hayland. About one-third of the area is in small, privately owned holdings, and another one-third consists of national and State forests. The forests are used mainly for timber production and recreation. Dairy and beef operations are very important enterprises in the area. Forage and feed grains for dairy cattle and other livestock are the principal crops. Wheat, oats, corn, potatoes, and hay also are grown in the area. The Huron and Manistee National Forests, Hartwick Pines State Park, Camp Grayling (Department of Defense), Pigeon River Country State Forest are among the most notable conservation lands in the area. Reaches of the Au Sable and Pine Rivers are National Wild and Scenic Rivers. Summary of existing land use: Upland Forest (58%) Hardwood (41%) Conifer (15%) Swamps and Marshes (14%) Developed (11%) Agricultural (10%) Grassland (5%)

Classification relationships

According to the USFS (Bailey) system of ecoregions, the site is located mostly within 212Hc (Interlobate End and Ground Moraines), 212He (Kalkaska Sandy Moraines), and 212Hi (Wolverine Moraines) subsections. According to the EPA (Omernik) system of ecoregions, the site is located in western 50ac (Onaway Moraines), western 50ad (Vanderbilt Moraines), and 50af (Cadillac Hummocky Moraines) level IV ecoregions. This site is outside the environmental range of the Kotar system. This site corresponds to the Mineral Wetland, ecological land type phase, 72, in the USFS Ecological Land Type system.

Ecological site concept

The central concept of Snowy Wet Acidic Sandy Depression is lowlands with hydric soil (poorly drained to very poorly drained) and a soil pH of the upper 50 cm less than 5.5, and a low base saturation, including Spodosols, Ultic subgroups, and dysic great groups and families. Site occurs on sandy drift (outwash, ice contact, or lake plains) where soil textures are sand or loamy sand (upper 50 cm >70% sand). Site is in the heavy annual snowfall belt, mostly west of Houghton Lake where fire was rare. Vegetation trending towards swamp forest with an acidophilic species composition.

Associated sites

F094AA007MI	**Snowy Acidic Sandy Depression**
F094AA009MI	**Snowy Sandy Depression**

Similar sites

F094AB021MI	**Wet Acidic Sandy Depression**

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) *Tsuga canadensis* (2) *Acer rubrum*
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	(1) *Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*

Physiographic features

Site occurs on coarse textured ice contact, glacial till, outwash, and lake plain deposits. Landforms are gently sloping lower slope positions and depressions.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Kame (2) Outwash plain (3) Lake plain
Runoff class	Negligible to low
Elevation	190 – 520 m
Water table depth	0 – 30 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

Mean annual temperatures are 5.8 to 7.4 °C (42 to 45 °F). The warmest six months average 14.2 to 15.9 °C (58 to 61 °F). Mean July temperatures range from 18.6 to 20.6 °C (65 to 69 °F). Mean January temperatures range from -8.3 to -5.7 °C (17 to 22 °F). The maximum monthly average daily highs are 24.9 to 27.5 °C (77 to 82 °F). The minimum monthly average daily lows are -13.2 to -10 °C (8 to 14 °F). Temperatures generally decrease with elevation and latitude. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 770 to 910 mm (30 to 36 in). Average 0 °C (32 °F) frost-free season ranges from 73 to 144 days. Average -2 °C (28 °F) freeze-free season is 106 to 172 days. Mean annual snowfall ranges from 1.5 to 4.1 m (60 to 160 in). Mean annual extreme minimum temperatures range from -33.3 to -23.1 °C (-28 to -10 °F), or hardiness zones 4a to 6a.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	90-110 days

Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	120-140 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	840-910 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	90-120 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	120-140 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	810-940 mm
Frost-free period (average)	100 days
Freeze-free period (average)	130 days
Precipitation total (average)	860 mm

- (1) GAYLORD [USC00203096], Gaylord, MI
- (2) GAYLORD 9SSW [USC00203099], Gaylord, MI
- (3) CADILLAC [USW00014817], Cadillac, MI
- (4) BIG RAPIDS WTR WKS [USC00200779], Big Rapids, MI
- (5) BOYNE FALLS [USC00200925], Boyne City, MI
- (6) EAST JORDAN [USC00202381], East Jordan, MI
- (7) KALKASKA [USC00204257], Kalkaska, MI
- (8) LAKE CITY EXP FARM [USC00204502], Lake City, MI

Influencing water features

Site has seasonal high water table within 0-25 cm of the surface. Water source mostly from local rainfall with short residence time in low base substrate (interfluvial wetlands).

Soil features

Soils are very poorly drained to poorly drained sands. They are commonly classified Typic Endoaquods and Aeric Haplaquods, and commonly mapped as Kinross, Jebavy, and Typic Endoaquods series or components. The top 50 cm has a typical pH of 4.8 and is 80% sand and 5.1% organic matter. At depth, pH ranges up to 5.5, and texture averages 90% sand and 5% clay. Depth to impeded hydraulic conductivity or root restrictive layers averages >200 cm. Depth to carbonates averages >200 cm.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Outwash
Surface texture	(1) Sand
Drainage class	Poorly drained to very poorly drained

Permeability class	Slow to moderately rapid
Soil depth	200 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	Not specified
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-100.1cm)	3.99 – 10.01 cm
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-50cm)	3.5 – 5.5
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (0-150.1cm)	0 – 10 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (0-150.1cm)	0 – 10 %

Ecological dynamics

Snowy Wet Acidic Sandy Depression tends to share the same ecological dynamics as Natureserve/Landfire system, Laurentian-Acadian Pine-Hemlock-Hardwood Forest. Stand replacing fires occurred every 250-950 years, with light surface fires every 140-550 years. Overstory was dominated by acid tolerant, low nutrient demanding, shade tolerant hemlock (Tsuga canadensis) and red maple (Acer rubrum). Understory is composed of acid tolerant wetland species such as cinnamon fern (Osmundastrum cinnamomeum).

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 1.2 plant community composition

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

Table 7. Community 1.3 plant community composition

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

Table 8. Community 1.4 plant community composition

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

Table 9. Community 1.5 plant community composition

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

Table 10. Community 2.1 plant community composition

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

Table 11. Community 2.2 plant community composition

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

Table 12. Community 2.3 plant community composition

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

Table 13. Community 3.1 plant community composition

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

Table 14. Community 3.2 plant community composition

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

Table 15. Community 4.1 plant community composition

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

Table 16. Community 4.2 plant community composition

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

Other references

A PROVISIONAL ECOLOGICAL SITE is a conceptual grouping of soil map unit components within a major land resource area (MLRA) based on the similarities in response to management. A provisional ecological site is a first approximation based on a cursory literature review, personal experience, and limited field reconnaissance. As more adequate literature review, expert opinion, and intensive plot data are collected, the site concept is subject to shifting, broadening, narrowing, subdivision, or re-aggregation in definition. Likewise, the community dynamics will be more elaborate in content, and may also change in structure, upon reaching approved status.

Future work, as described in a project plan, to validate the information in this provisional ecological site description is needed. This will include field activities to collect low and medium intensity sampling, soil correlations, and analysis of that data. Annual field reviews should be done by soil scientists and vegetation specialists. A final field review, peer review, quality control, and quality assurance reviews of the ESD will be needed to produce the final document. Annual reviews of the project plan are to be conducted by the Ecological Site Technical Team.

Albert, D. A. et al., 1995. Vegetation circa 1800 of Michigan. Michigan's native landscape as interpreted from the General Land Office Surveys 1816-1856 (digital map), Lansing: Michigan Natural Features Inventory.

Baker, M.E. and Barnes, B.V., 1998. Landscape ecosystem diversity of river floodplains in northwestern Lower Michigan, USA. Canadian Journal of Forest Research, 28(9), pp.1405-1418.

Barnes, B. V. and Wagner, W. H., 2004. Michigan trees: a guide to the trees of the Great Lakes region. Ann Arbor (Michigan): University of Michigan Press.

Burger, T. L. and Kotar, J., 2003. A Guide to Forest Communities and Habitat Types of Michigan. Madison, Wisconsin: Department of Forest Ecology and Management, University of Wisconsin.

Cleland, D. T. et al., 1994. Field guide: Ecological classification and inventory system of the Huron-Manistee National Forests, s.l.: USDA Forest Service, North Central Forest Experiment Station.

Eichenlaub, V.L., 1979. Weather and climate of the Great Lakes region. University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana. 335 pages.

GHCN, 2016. Global Historical Climatology Network Monthly Versions 2 and 3 (temperature and precipitation data). NOAA. https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/ghcnm/

Kost, M. A. et al., 2010. Natural Communities of Michigan: Classification and Description, Lansing, MI: Michigan Natural Features Inventory.

Landfire, 2017. Landfire Biophysical Settings Review Site. Accessed May, 2017 http://www.landfirereview.org/descriptions.html.

National Ocean Service, 2017. Tides and Currents (historic water level data for US coastal waters). https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/stations.html?type=Water+Levels

NDBC, 2017. National Data Buoy Center (wave height and period data for US coastal waters). NOAA. http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/

PRISM Climate Group. 2013. Gridded 30 Year Normals, 1981-2010. Oregon State University, http://prism.oregonstate.edu

U.S. Department of the Interior, Geological Survey, 2011. LANDFIRE: LANDFIRE 1.1.0 Existing Vegetation Type layer. http://landfire.cr.usgs.gov/viewer/

USFS, Witness Tree data for northern Lower Michigan.

Contributors

Gregory J. Schmidt

Approval

Greg Schmidt, 9/10/2024

Acknowledgments

The following individuals made substantive comments regarding the development of the Provisional Ecological Sites: Randy Swaty, The Nature Conservancy; Trevor Hobbs, USFS; Richard A. Corner, USFS; Andy Henriksen, NRCS; Dan Zay, NRCS.

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	09/08/2026
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:**
