

Ecological site F115XB036MO

Calcareous Limestone Protected Backslope Forest

Last updated: 12/30/2024
Accessed: 10/03/2026

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): 115X—Central Mississippi Valley Wooded Slopes

This MLRA is characterized by deeply dissected, loess-covered hills bordering well defined valleys of the Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and Wabash Rivers and their tributaries. It is used to produce cash crops and livestock. About one-third of the area is forested, mostly on the steeper slopes. This area is in Illinois (50 percent), Missouri (36 percent), Indiana (13 percent), and Iowa (1 percent) in two separate areas. It makes up about 25,084 square miles (64,967 square kilometers). Most of this area is in the Till Plains section and the Dissected Till Plains section of the Central Lowland province of the Interior Plains. The Springfield-Salem plateaus section of the Ozarks Plateaus province of the Interior Highlands occurs along the Missouri River and the Mississippi River south of the confluence with the Missouri River. The nearly level to very steep uplands are dissected by both large and small tributaries of the Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and Wabash Rivers. The Ohio River flows along the southernmost boundary of this area in Indiana. Well defined valleys with broad flood plains and numerous stream terraces are along the major streams and rivers. The flood plains along the smaller streams are narrow. Broad summits are nearly level to undulating. Karst topography is common in some parts along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers and their tributaries. Well-developed karst areas have hundreds of sinkholes, caves, springs, and losing streams. In the St. Louis area, many of the karst features have been obliterated by urban development. Elevation ranges from 90 feet (20 meters) on the southernmost flood plains to 1,030 feet (320 meters) on the highest ridges. Local relief is mainly 10 to 50 feet (3 to 15 meters) but can be 50 to 150 feet (15 to 45 meters) in the steep, deeply dissected hills bordering rivers and streams. The bluffs along the major rivers are generally 200 to 350 feet (60 to 105 meters) above the valley floor. The uplands in this MLRA are covered almost entirely with Peoria Loess. The loess can be more than 7 feet (2 meters) thick on stable summits. On the steeper slopes, it is thin or does not occur. In Illinois, the loess is underlain mostly by Illinoian-age till that commonly contains a paleosol. Pre-Illinoian-age till is in parts of this MLRA in Iowa and Missouri and to a minor extent in the western part of Illinois. Wisconsin-age outwash, alluvial deposits, and sandy eolian material are on some of the stream terraces and on dunes along the major tributaries. The loess and glacial deposits are underlain by several bedrock systems. Pennsylvanian and Mississippian bedrock are the most extensive. To a lesser extent are Silurian, Devonian, Cretaceous, and Ordovician bedrock. Karst areas have formed where limestone is near the surface, mostly in the southern part of the MLRA along the Mississippi River and some of its major tributaries. Bedrock outcrops are common on the bluffs along the Mississippi, Ohio, and Wabash Rivers and their major tributaries and at the base of some steep slopes along minor streams and drainageways. The annual precipitation ranges from 35 to 49 inches (880 to 1,250 millimeters) with a mean of 41 inches (1,050 millimeters). The annual temperature ranges from 48 to 58 degrees F (8.6 to 14.3 degrees C) with a mean of 54 degrees F (12.3 degrees C). The freeze-free period ranges from 150 to 220 days with a mean of 195 days. Soils The dominant soil orders are Alfisols and, to a lesser extent, Entisols and Mollisols. The soils in the area have a mesic soil temperature regime, an aquic or udic soil moisture regime, and mixed or smectitic mineralogy. They are shallow to very deep, excessively drained to poorly drained, and loamy, silty, or clayey. The soils on uplands in this area support natural hardwoods. Oak, hickory, and sugar maple are the dominant species. Big bluestem, little bluestem, and scattered oak and eastern redcedar grow on some sites. The soils on flood plains support mixed forest vegetation, mainly American elm, eastern cottonwood, river birch, green ash, silver maple, sweetgum, American sycamore, pin oak, pecan, and willow. Sedge and grass meadows and scattered trees are on some low-lying sites. (United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2022)

LRU notes

The Central Mississippi Valley Wooded Slopes, Western Part consists of deeply dissected, loess-covered hills bordering the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers as well as floodplains and terraces of these rivers. The Northern boundary runs along the South Fabius River valley separating it from the broad rounded interfluvies of the northern till plain. A major physiographic feature within the LRU (Land Resource Unit) includes the Lincoln Hills region. The Lincoln Hills extend along the Mississippi River in Missouri, starting about 40 miles (64 kilometers) northwest of St. Louis and extending north to Hannibal. The Lincoln Hills partially escaped the most recent glaciation in the region during the Pleistocene. In geology and biology, they resemble the rugged and forested hills of the Ozark Highlands (MLRA 116A) more than the rolling plains of northern Missouri. The underlying limestone bedrock has formed bluffs, glades, caves, springs, and

sinkholes. Elevation ranges from about 420 feet (128 meters) along the Mississippi River near Cape Girardeau, Missouri to about 830 feet (253 meters) near Clarksville along the Mississippi River upstream from St. Louis. High ridges near Hillsboro, Missouri can reach over 1,000 feet (305 meters). Underlying bedrock is mainly Ordovician-aged dolomite and sandstone, with Mississippian-aged limestone north of the Missouri River. Loess caps both stream and glacial outwash terraces along the major rivers along with Pre-Illinoian till near the edges of the area.

Classification relationships

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) (USDA-NRCS, 2022): 115X–Central Mississippi Valley Wooded Slopes Terrestrial Natural Community Type in Missouri (Nelson, 2010): The reference state for this ecological site is most similar to a Dry-Mesic Limestone/Dolomite Forest. Missouri Department of Conservation Forest and Woodland Communities (MDC, 2006): The reference state for this ecological site is most similar to a White Oak Forest. National Vegetation Classification System Vegetation Association (NatureServe, 2010): The reference state for this ecological site is most similar to a *Quercus alba* - *Quercus rubra* - *Quercus muehlenbergii* / *Cercis canadensis* Forest (CEGL002070). Geographic relationship to the Missouri Ecological Classification System (Nigh & Schroeder, 2002): This ecological site occurs in the Outer Ozark Border Subsection, in the following Land Type Associations: Harrisburg Oak Woodland/Forest Hills Rock Bridge Woodland/Forest Low Karst Hills Central Missouri Oak Woodland/Forest Hills

Ecological site concept

Calcareous Limestone Protected Backslope Forests occupy the northerly and easterly aspects of steep, dissected slopes, and are mapped in complex with the Calcareous Limestone Exposed Backslope Woodland ecological site. These sites are in the eastern part of the MLRA, north of the Missouri River. They are closely associated with Limestone/Dolomite Glade ecological sites, often occurring directly downslope. Other close ecological site associates include Chert Limestone/Dolomite woodland and forest sites, and loess woodland sites, which are upslope. Soils are high in bases, and are moderately deep over dolomite or limestone bedrock, with gravelly surfaces. The reference plant community is forest dominated by chinkapin oak and white oak, along with northern red oak, sugar maple, bitternut hickory, white ash, red elm and black walnut, with a well-developed understory and a rich herbaceous ground flora.

Associated sites

R115XB009MO	Shallow Limestone/Dolomite Upland Glade/Woodland Shallow Limestone/Dolomite Upland Glade/Woodlands are often closely associated with this ecological site.
F115XB014MO	Chert Limestone/Dolomite Protected Backslope Forest Chert Limestone/Dolomite Protected Backslope Forests are generally upslope on northerly and easterly aspects.
F115XB046MO	Chert Limestone/Dolomite Exposed Backslope Woodland Chert Limestone/Dolomite Exposed Backslope Woodland are generally upslope on southerly and westerly aspects.

Similar sites

F115XB014MO	Chert Limestone/Dolomite Protected Backslope Forest Chert Limestone/Dolomite Protected Backslope Forests are on similar northerly and easterly aspects but are generally more productive.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) <i>Quercus alba</i> (2) <i>Quercus muehlenbergii</i>
Shrub	(1) <i>Cercis canadensis</i> (2) <i>Lindera benzoin</i>

Herbaceous	(1) <i>Maianthemum racemosum</i> (2) <i>Sanguinaria canadensis</i>
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Physiographic features

This site is on backslopes with slopes of 20 to 70 percent. It is on protected aspects (north, northeast, and east), which receive significantly less solar radiation than the exposed aspects. Sites are often downslope from limestone/dolomite glades. The site generates runoff to adjacent, downslope ecological sites. This site does not flood.

The following figure (adapted from Young et al., 2003) shows the typical landscape position of this ecological site, and landscape relationships among the major ecological sites in the uplands. The site is within the area labeled “3”, and is often closely associated with Chert Limestone/Dolomite sites (labeled “2” in the figure), as well as Shallow Limestone/Dolomite Glade sites.

Figure 1. Landscape relationships for this ecological site.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Hillslope
Runoff class	Very high
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	150 – 370 m
Slope	20 – 70 %
Water table depth	150 cm
Aspect	NW, N, NE, E

Climatic features

The Central Mississippi Valley Wooded Slopes, Western Part has a continental type of climate marked by strong seasonality. In winter, dry-cold air masses, unchallenged by any topographic barriers, periodically swing south from the northern plains and Canada. If they invade reasonably humid air, snowfall and rainfall result. In summer, moist, warm air masses, equally unchallenged by topographic barriers, swing north from the Gulf of Mexico and can produce abundant amounts of rain, either by fronts or by convectional processes. In some summers, high pressure stagnates over the region, creating extended droughty periods. Spring and fall are transitional seasons when abrupt changes in temperature and precipitation may occur due to successive, fast-moving fronts separating contrasting air masses.

The Central Mississippi Valley Wooded Slopes, Western Part experiences regional differences in climates, but these differences do not have obvious geographic boundaries. Regional climates grade inconspicuously into each other. The basic gradient for most climatic characteristics is along a line diagonally crossing the MLRA from northwest to southeast. Both mean annual temperature and precipitation exhibit gradients along this line.

The average annual precipitation in most of this area is 38 to 48 inches. The average annual temperature is 53 to 57 degrees F. Mean

January minimum temperature follows the northwest-to-southeast gradient. However, mean July maximum temperature shows hardly any geographic variation in the MLRA. Mean July maximum temperatures have a range of only two or three degrees across the area.

Mean annual precipitation varies along the same gradient as temperature. Seasonal climatic variations are more complex. Seasonality in precipitation is very pronounced due to strong continental influences. June precipitation, for example, averages three to four times greater than January precipitation. Most of the rainfall occurs as high-intensity, convective thunderstorms in summer. Snowfall is common in winter.

During years when precipitation comes in a fairly normal manner, moisture is stored in the top layers of the soil during the winter and early spring, when evaporation and transpiration are low. During the summer months the loss of water by evaporation and transpiration is high, and if rainfall fails to occur at frequent intervals, drought will result. Drought directly affects plant and animal life by limiting water supplies, especially at times of high temperatures and high evaporation rates.

Superimposed upon the basic MLRA climatic patterns are local topographic influences that create topoclimatic, or microclimatic variations. In regions of appreciable relief, for example, air drainage at nighttime may produce temperatures several degrees lower in valley bottoms than on side slopes. At critical times during the year, this phenomenon may produce later spring or earlier fall freezes in valley bottoms. Higher daytime temperatures of bare rock surfaces and higher reflectivity of these unvegetated surfaces may create distinctive environmental niches such as glades and cliffs. Slope orientation is an important topographic influence on climate. Summits and south-and-west-facing slopes are regularly warmer and drier than adjacent north- and-east-facing slopes. Finally, the climate within a canopied forest is measurably different from the climate of a more open grassland or savanna areas.

Source: University of Missouri Climate Center - <http://climate.missouri.edu/climate.php>; accessed June 2012

Land Resource Regions and Major Land Resource Areas of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin, United States Department of Agriculture Handbook 296 - <http://soils.usda.gov/survey/geography/mlra/>

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	170-170 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	190-210 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	1,120-1,170 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	170-180 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	190-210 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	1,090-1,170 mm
Frost-free period (average)	170 days
Freeze-free period (average)	200 days
Precipitation total (average)	1,140 mm

- (1) FULTON [USC00233079], Fulton, MO
- (2) COLUMBIA U OF M [USC00231801], Columbia, MO
- (3) COLUMBIA RGNL AP [USW00003945], Columbia, MO

Influencing water features

The water features of this upland ecological site include evapotranspiration, surface runoff, and drainage. Each water balance component fluctuates to varying extents from year-to-year. Evapotranspiration remains the most constant. Precipitation and drainage are highly variable between years. Seasonal variability differs for each water component. Precipitation generally occurs as single day events. Evapotranspiration is lowest in the winter and peaks in the summer. Water stored as ice and snow decreases drainage and surface runoff rates throughout the winter and increases these fluxes in the spring. The surface runoff pulse is greatly influenced by extreme events. Conversion to cropland or other high intensities land uses tends to increase runoff, but also decreases evapotranspiration. Depending on the situation, this might increase groundwater discharge, and decrease baseflow in receiving streams.

Soil features

These soils are underlain with limestone bedrock at 20 to 40 inches. The soils were formed under a mixture of prairie and woodland vegetation, and have dark, organic-rich surface horizons that are enriched in places by upslope prairie glades. Parent material is slope alluvium over residuum weathered from limestone, overlying limestone bedrock. They have very gravelly silt loam surface layers, with clayey subsoils that have moderate to high amounts of chert and limestone gravel and cobbles. These soils are base-rich, but do not contain free carbonates. These soils are not affected by seasonal wetness. Soil series associated with this site include Clinkenbeard.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Slope alluvium – limestone (2) Residuum – limestone
Surface texture	(1) Very gravelly silt loam
Family particle size	(1) Clayey
Drainage class	Well drained
Soil depth	50 – 100 cm
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	40 – 50 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	10 – 30 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	5.08 – 7.62 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 – 7.3
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	30 – 40 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	10 – 20 %

Ecological dynamics

Information contained in this section was developed using historical data, professional experience, field reviews, and scientific studies. The information presented is representative of very complex vegetation communities. Key indicator plants, animals and ecological processes are described to help inform land management decisions. Plant communities will differ across the MLRA because of the naturally occurring variability in weather, soils, and aspect. The Reference Plant Community is not necessarily the management goal. The species lists are representative and are not botanical descriptions of all species occurring, or potentially occurring, on this site. They are not intended to cover every situation or the full range of conditions, species, and responses for the site.

Calcareous Limestone Protected Backslope Forests have a well-developed forest canopy (60 to 80 feet tall and 80 to 90 percent cover) and subcanopy dominated by a mixture of oaks and other hardwoods adapted to cooler, more mesic site conditions. White oak and chinquapin oak are common, along with northern red oak, sugar maple, bitternut hickory, white ash, red elm and black walnut. This ecological site exhibits a structurally diverse understory and an abundant forest ground flora. While similar to deeper Chert Protected Backslope Forests, the shallower carbonate soils limit tree height, but create an environment where a wider variety of species occur in a more complex structural arrangement.

In this region flanked by historic fire-prone prairies, savannas and open woodlands, Calcareous Limestone Protected Backslope Forests occur in rather protected landscape positions on lower, steep slopes in the deeper valleys furthest from the prairie uplands. While the upland prairies and savannas had an estimated fire frequency of 1 to 3 years, Calcareous Limestone Protected Backslope Forests likely burned less frequently (estimated 10 to 25 years) and with lower intensity.

The moderately deep soils and occasional fires make this community transitional between a forest and more closed woodland, with more open woodland conditions being created briefly after the periodic fires. Site conditions overall, however, favor shade and moisture loving forest species that quickly redevelop after fire.

Historically, grazing by large native herbivores, such as bison, elk, and white-tailed deer, also kept understory conditions more open. In addition, Calcareous Limestone Protected Backslope Forests are subject to occasional disturbances from wind and ice, which periodically open the canopy up by knocking over trees or breaking substantial branches of canopy trees. Such canopy disturbances allow more light to reach the ground and favor reproduction of the dominant oak species.

Today, these communities have been cleared, converted to pasture or have undergone repeated timber harvest and domestic grazing. Most existing sites have a younger (50 to 80 years) canopy layer whose composition may have been altered by timber harvesting practices. An increase in hickories over historic conditions is common. The absence of periodic fire allowed more shade-tolerant tree species, such as sugar maple, white ash, or hickories to increase in abundance.

Uncontrolled domestic grazing has also diminished the diversity and cover of woodland ground flora species, and has often introduced weedy species such as gooseberry, coralberry, poison ivy and Virginia creeper. Grazed sites also have a more open understory. In addition, soil compaction and soil erosion related to grazing can lower site productivity.

Calcareous Limestone Protected Backslope Forests are only moderately productive timber sites. Timber harvest in this region typically is done using single-tree selection, and often results in removal of the most productive trees, or high-grading of the stand. This can result in poorer quality timber and a shift in species composition away from more valuable oak species. Carefully planned single tree selection or

the creation of small group openings can help regenerate more desirable oak species and increase vigor on the residual trees. Clear-cutting does occur and results in dense, even-aged stands of primarily oak. This may be most beneficial for existing stands whose composition has been highly altered by past management practices.

Prescribed fire can play a beneficial but limited role in the management of this ecological site. The higher productivity of these sites makes it more challenging than on woodland sites in the region. Control of woody species will be more difficult. Protected aspect forests did evolve with some fire, but their composition often reflects more closed, forested conditions, with fewer woodland ground flora species that can respond to fire. Consequently, while having protected aspects in a burn unit is acceptable, targeting them solely for woodland restoration is not advisable.

A State and Transition Diagram follows. Detailed descriptions of each state, transition, plant community, and pathway follow the model. This model is based on available experimental research, field observations, professional consensus, and interpretations. It is likely to change as knowledge increases.

State and transition model

Figure 8. State and transition diagram for this ecological site

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 6. Community 1.1 forest overstory composition

Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Nativity	Height M	Canopy Cover (%)	Diameter Cm	Basal Area (square M/hectare)
Tree							
white oak	QUAL	<i>Quercus alba</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
northern red oak	QURU	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
chinquapin oak	QUMU	<i>Quercus muehlenbergii</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
sugar maple	ACSA3	<i>Acer saccharum</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
blue ash	FRQU	<i>Fraxinus quadrangulata</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
mockernut hickory	CATO6	<i>Carya tomentosa</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
white ash	FRAM2	<i>Fraxinus americana</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
shagbark hickory	CAOV2	<i>Carya ovata</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
slippery elm	ULRU	<i>Ulmus rubra</i>	Native	–	–	–	–

Table 7. Community 1.1 forest understory composition

Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Nativity	Height (m)	Canopy Cover (%)
Grass/grass-like (Graminoids)					
eastern bottlebrush grass	ELHY	<i>Elymus hystrix</i>	Native	–	–
hairy woodland brome	BRPU6	<i>Bromus pubescens</i>	Native	–	–
hairy wildrye	ELVI	<i>Elymus villosus</i>	Native	–	–
woodland muhly	MUSY	<i>Muhlenbergia sylvatica</i>	Native	–	–
Forb/Herb					
bloodroot	SACA13	<i>Sanguinaria canadensis</i>	Native	–	–
largeflower bellwort	UVGR	<i>Uvularia grandiflora</i>	Native	–	–
roundlobe hepatica	HENOO	<i>Hepatica nobilis var. obtusa</i>	Native	–	–
eastern greenviolet	HYCO6	<i>Hybanthus concolor</i>	Native	–	–
wild comfrey	CYVI	<i>Cynoglossum virginianum</i>	Native	–	–
early meadow-rue	THDI	<i>Thalictrum dioicum</i>	Native	–	–
clustered blacksnakeroot	SAOD	<i>Sanicula odorata</i>	Native	–	–
dutchman's breeches	DICU	<i>Dicentra cucullaria</i>	Native	–	–

meadow zizia	ZIAP	<i>Zizia aptera</i>	Native	–	–
pointedleaf ticktrefoil	DEGL5	<i>Desmodium glutinosum</i>	Native	–	–
cutleaf toothwort	CACO26	<i>Cardamine concatenata</i>	Native	–	–
feathery false lily of the valley	MARA7	<i>Maianthemum racemosum</i>	Native	–	–
Shrub/Subshrub					
Carolina buckthorn	FRCA13	<i>Frangula caroliniana</i>	Native	–	–
northern spicebush	LIBE3	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	Native	–	–
Tree					
eastern redbud	CECA4	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	Native	–	–
red mulberry	MORU2	<i>Morus rubra</i>	Native	–	–
slippery elm	ULRU	<i>Ulmus rubra</i>	Native	–	–
hophornbeam	OSVI	<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>	Native	–	–
American bladdernut	STTR	<i>Staphylea trifolia</i>	Native	–	–
Vine/Liana					
Virginia creeper	PAQU2	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	Native	–	–

Table 8. Community 1.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 9. Community 2.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 10. Community 3.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 11. Community 4.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 12. Community 4.2 plant community composition

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

Wildlife (MDC 2006): This forest type contains high structural and compositional diversity important for a number of songbirds and amphibians. Wild turkey, white-tailed deer, and eastern gray squirrel depend on hard and soft mast food sources and are typical upland game species of this type. Birds associated with this ecological site include Worm-eating warbler, Whip-poor-will, Great Crested Flycatcher, Ovenbird, Pileated Woodpecker, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Louisiana Waterthrush (near streams), and Broad-winged Hawk. Reptile and amphibian species associated with mature forests include: ringed salamander, spotted salamander, marbled salamander, central newt, long-tailed salamander, dark-sided salamander, southern red-backed salamander, three-toed box turtle, western worm snake, western earth snake, and American toad.

Other information

Forestry (NRCS 2002, 2014): Management: Estimated site index values for oak range from 45 to 60. Timber management opportunities are fair to good. Create group openings of at least 2 acres. Large clearcuts should be minimized if possible to reduce impacts on wildlife and aesthetics. Uneven-aged management using single tree selection or small group selection cuttings of ½ to 1 acre are other options that can be used if clear cutting is not desired or warranted. Using prescribed fire as a management tool could have a negative impact on timber quality, may not be fitting, or should be used with caution on a particular site if timber management is the primary objective. Limitations: Large amounts of coarse fragments throughout profile; bedrock is within 40 inches. Surface stones and rocks are problems for efficient and safe equipment operation and will make equipment use somewhat difficult. Disturbing the surface excessively in harvesting operations and building roads increases soil losses, which leaves a greater amount of coarse fragments on the surface. Hand planting or direct seeding may be necessary. Seedling mortality due to low available water capacity may be high. Mulching or providing shade can improve seedling survival. Mechanical tree planting will be limited. Erosion is a hazard when slopes exceed 15 percent. On steep slopes greater than 35 percent, traction problems increase and equipment use is not recommended.

Inventory data references

Potential Reference Sites: Calcareous Limestone Protected Backslope Forest Plot GRCASP_KS07 – Clinkenbeard soil Located in Graham Cave State Park, Montgomery County, MO Latitude: 38.906763 Longitude: -91.575943

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Approval

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Acknowledgments

Missouri Department of Conservation and Missouri Department of Natural Resources personnel provided significant and helpful field and technical support in the development of this ecological site.

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	10/03/2026
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:
