

Ecological site F116AY033MO

Wet Footslope Forest

Last updated: 9/24/2020
Accessed: 09/02/2026

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): 116A–Ozark Highland

The Ozark Highland constitutes the Salem Plateau of the Ozark Uplift. Elevation ranges from about 300 feet on the southeast edge of the Ozark escarpment, to about 1,600 feet in the west, adjacent to the Burlington Escarpment of the Springfield Plateau. The underlying bedrock is mainly horizontally bedded Ordovician-aged dolomites and sandstones that dip gently away from the uplift apex in southeast Missouri. Cambrian dolomites are exposed on deeply dissected hillslopes. In some places, Pennsylvanian and Mississippian sediments overlie the plateau. Relief varies, from the gently rolling central plateau areas to deeply dissected hillslopes associated with drainageways such as the Buffalo, Current, Eleven Point and White Rivers.

Classification relationships

Terrestrial Natural Community Type in Missouri (Nelson, 2010): The reference state for this ecological site is most similar to a Wet-Mesic Bottomland Forest. Missouri Department of Conservation Forest and Woodland Communities (MDC, 2006): The reference state for this ecological site is most similar to a Wet Bottomland Forest. National Vegetation Classification System Vegetation Association (NatureServe, 2010): The reference state for this ecological site is most similar to a *Quercus macrocarpa* – *Quercus shumardii* – *Carya cordiformis* / *Chasmanthium latifolium* Forest (CEGL004544). Geographic relationship to the Missouri Ecological Classification System (Nigh & Schroeder, 2002): This ecological site occurs primarily within the following Subsections: Inner Ozark Border Gasconade River Hills Osage River Hills

Ecological site concept

NOTE: This is a “provisional” Ecological Site Description (ESD) that is under development. It contains basic ecological information that can be used for conservation planning, application and land management. After additional information is collected, analyzed and reviewed, this ESD will be refined and published as “Approved”. Wet Footslope Forests occur primarily in the northern part of the Ozark Highland. Soils are very deep, with silt loam surface horizons, loamy to clayey subsoils and seasonal high water tables. The reference plant community is forest with an overstory dominated by a variety of trees including bur oak, Shumard oak, swamp white oak, American elm, and black cherry, an understory dominated by American hornbeam, northern spicebush, and Ohio buckeye, and a rich herbaceous ground flora.

Associated sites

F116AY011MO	Chert Upland Woodland Chert Upland Woodlands, and other upland and backslope ecological sites, are upslope.
F116AY034MO	Loamy Terrace Forest Loamy Terrace Forests are adjacent and downslope.

F116AY035MO	Wet Terrace Forest Wet Terrace Forests are adjacent and downslope.
F116AY039MO	Loamy Floodplain Step Forest Loamy Floodplain Step Forests are adjacent and downslope.
F116AY042MO	Sandy/Gravelly Floodplain Forest Sandy/Gravelly Floodplain Forests and other floodplain ecological sites are downslope.

Similar sites

F116AY035MO	Wet Terrace Forest Wet Terrace Forests are adjacent and downslope.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) <i>Quercus macrocarpa</i> (2) <i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>
Shrub	(1) <i>Vitis</i> (2) <i>Cornus foemina</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Boehmeria cylindrica</i> (2) <i>Cardamine concatenata</i>

Physiographic features

This site is on footslopes and strath terraces with slopes of 1 to 9 percent. The site receives runoff from adjacent upland sites. This site does not flood.

The following figure (adapted from Holbrook & Childress, 2005) shows the typical landscape position of this ecological site, and landscape relationships with other ecological sites. It is within the area labeled “2” on the figure. Wet Footslope Forest sites are downslope from a variety of upland sites. They often grade downslope into Loamy Terrace Forest sites, labeled “3”, or into Wet Terrace Forest sites.

Figure 1. Landscape relationships for this ecological site.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hillslope (2) Strath terrace
Flooding frequency	None

Ponding frequency	None
Slope	0 – 10 %
Water table depth	30 – 60 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The Ozark Highland 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 Ozark Highland 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 crossing the MLRA from northwest to southeast.

The average annual precipitation in almost all of this area is 38 to 45 inches. Snow falls nearly every winter, but the snow cover lasts for only a few days. The average annual temperature is about 53 to 60 degrees F. The lower temperatures occur at the higher elevations in the western part of the MLRA. Mean January minimum temperature follows a stronger north-to-south 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 a northwest to southeast gradient. 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.

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. Deep sinkholes often have a microclimate significantly cooler, moister, and shadier than surrounding surfaces, a phenomenon that may result in a strikingly different ecology. 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>; 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)	160-170 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	190-200 days

Precipitation total (characteristic range)	1,140-1,220 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	160-180 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	190-210 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	1,090-1,220 mm
Frost-free period (average)	170 days
Freeze-free period (average)	200 days
Precipitation total (average)	1,170 mm

- (1) ROLLA UNI OF MISSOURI [USC00237263], Rolla, MO
- (2) TRUMAN DAM & RSVR [USC00238466], Warsaw, MO
- (3) WEST PLAINS [USC00238880], West Plains, MO

Influencing water features

This ecological site is influenced by a seasonal high water table from high groundwater levels, as well as slow hydraulic conductivity, which impedes throughflow from precipitation and flood events. The water table is typically near the surface in late fall through spring, receding in the summer. This ecological site is on footslopes of perennial streams. They are not adjacent to the current stream channel. Areas on stream terraces are subject to flooding, typically of short duration and low intensity. Constructed levees, often accompanied by stream channelization, have altered the flooding dynamics in many places.

Footslopes not subject to flooding, are in the SLOPE wetlands of the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) classification system class (Brinson, 1993). SLOPE wetlands are found in stream headwaters, slope toes, or at outcrops of low conductivity soil or rock layers. In a stream network, they are found on stream corridor reaches upstream of higher order RIVERINE reaches. Water is forced to the surface by a break in land slope, or when it encounters an aquaclude that moves it to an outcrop. These topographic conditions are common at the boundary between floodplains and adjoining uplands where groundwater is forced to the surface by a rapid change in slope.

Soil features

These soils have no rooting restriction. The soils were formed under forest vegetation, and have thin, light-colored surface horizons. Parent material is colluvium or alluvium. They have silt loam surface horizons, and loamy to clayey subsoils. Wasola areas have rock fragments in the subsoil. They are affected by a seasonal high water table during the spring months. Soil series associated with this site include Freeburg, Hartville, Higdon, McGirk, and Wasola.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium (2) Colluvium
Surface texture	(1) Silt loam
Family particle size	(1) Clayey

Drainage class	Poorly drained to somewhat poorly drained
Permeability class	Very slow to slow
Soil depth	180 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 – 10 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	10.16 – 20.32 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)	0 – 50 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified

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.

Wet Foothills Forests in the Ozark Highland are on relatively stable former floodplain positions. The historic reference plant community is dominated by a wide variety of deciduous hardwood tree species, tolerant of seasonally wet conditions including bur oak, Shumard oak, swamp white oak, American elm, black cherry. Trees generally form a dense, closed canopy. These forests are structurally and compositionally diverse, with occasional tree-fall gaps and natural mortality providing opportunities for regeneration of overstory species. The understory is also complex, with multiple layers of shade tolerant species such as American hornbeam, northern spicebush, and Ohio buckeye. Grape vine, greenbrier, and trumpet creeper are also present along with a diverse array of ground flora species that carpets the forest floor.

In this region of historic fire-prone savannas and woodlands, Wet Foothills Forests occur in the most protected landscape positions on lower, concave slopes distant from the fire prone uplands. While the upland woodlands had an estimated fire frequency of 3 to 5 years, these sites burned much less frequently (estimated 15 to 25 years) and with lower intensity. Wet Foothills Forests are also 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 and converted to pasture and some cropland, or have undergone repeated timber harvest and periodic domestic grazing. Most existing occurrences have a younger (50 to 80 years) canopy layer whose composition may have been altered by timber harvesting practices. An increase in hickory over historic conditions is common. The absence of periodic fire may have allowed more shade-tolerant tree species, such as elm and hickory 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 erosion related to grazing can lower site productivity.

Wet Foothills Forests are not 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 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. However, without some thinning of the dense stands, the ground flora diversity can be shaded out and productivity of the stand may suffer.

Prescribed fire can play a beneficial but limited role in the management of this ecological site. Foothills 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 these sites 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							
bur oak	QUMA2	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
Shumard's oak	QUSH	<i>Quercus shumardii</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
bitternut hickory	CACO15	<i>Carya cordiformis</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
pecan	CAIL2	<i>Carya illinoensis</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
shellbark hickory	CALA21	<i>Carya laciniosa</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
green ash	FRPE	<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>	Native	–	–	–	–

swamp white oak	QUBI	<i>Quercus bicolor</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
pin oak	QUPA2	<i>Quercus palustris</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
slippery elm	ULRU	<i>Ulmus rubra</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
common hackberry	CEOC	<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	Native	–	–	–	–
American sycamore	PLOC	<i>Platanus occidentalis</i>	Native	–	–	–	–

Table 7. Community 1.1 forest understory composition

Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Nativity	Height (m)	Canopy Cover (%)
Grass/grass-like (Graminoids)					
Indian woodoats	CHLA5	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	Native	–	–
soft fox sedge	CACO13	<i>Carex conjuncta</i>	Native	–	–
Gray's sedge	CAGR5	<i>Carex grayi</i>	Native	–	–
false hop sedge	CALU3	<i>Carex lupuliformis</i>	Native	–	–
hop sedge	CALU4	<i>Carex lupulina</i>	Native	–	–
Muskingum sedge	CAMU9	<i>Carex muskingumensis</i>	Native	–	–
squarrose sedge	CASQ2	<i>Carex squarrosa</i>	Native	–	–
sweet woodreed	CIAR2	<i>Cinna arundinacea</i>	Native	–	–
fowl mannagrass	GLST	<i>Glyceria striata</i>	Native	–	–
Forb/Herb					
smallspike false nettle	BOCY	<i>Boehmeria cylindrica</i>	Native	–	–
jewelweed	IMCA	<i>Impatiens capensis</i>	Native	–	–
pale touch-me-not	IMPA	<i>Impatiens pallida</i>	Native	–	–
calico aster	SYLAA	<i>Symphyotrichum lateriflorum</i> var. <i>angustifolium</i>	Native	–	–
wingstem	VEAL	<i>Verbesina alternifolia</i>	Native	–	–
foxglove beardtongue	PEDI	<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>	Native	–	–
Canadian clearweed	PIPU2	<i>Pilea pumila</i>	Native	–	–
bristly buttercup	RAHI	<i>Ranunculus hispidus</i>	Native	–	–
limestone wild petunia	RUST2	<i>Ruellia strepens</i>	Native	–	–
blue skullcap	SCLA2	<i>Scutellaria lateriflora</i>	Native	–	–
giant goldenrod	SOGI	<i>Solidago gigantea</i>	Native	–	–
cutleaf coneflower	RULA3	<i>Rudbeckia laciniata</i>	Native	–	–
common threeseed mercury	ACRH	<i>Acalypha rhomboidea</i>	Native	–	–
jumpseed	POVI2	<i>Polygonum virginianum</i>	Native	–	–
fourleaf yam	DIQU	<i>Dioscorea quaternata</i>	Native	–	–
Indian-tobacco	LOIN	<i>Lobelia inflata</i>	Native	–	–
spotted snapweed	IMBA	<i>Impatiens balsamina</i>	Native	–	–
Fern/fern ally					
lowland bladderfern	CYPR4	<i>Cystopteris protrusa</i>	Native	–	–
sparselobe grapefern	BOBI	<i>Botrychium biternatum</i>	Native	–	–
shoestring fern	VILI2	<i>Vittaria lineata</i>	Native	–	–
sensitive fern	ONSE	<i>Onoclea sensibilis</i>	Native	–	–
Shrub/Subshrub					
possumhaw	ILDE	<i>Ilex decidua</i>	Native	–	–
northern spicebush	LIBE3	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	Native	–	–
Tree					
American hornbeam	CACA18	<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>	Native	–	–

Ohio buckeye	AEGL	<i>Aesculus glabra</i>	Native	–	–
Vine/Liana					
frost grape	VIVU	<i>Vitis vulpina</i>	Native	–	–
eastern poison ivy	TORA2	<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>	Native	–	–
heartleaf peppervine	AMCO2	<i>Ampelopsis cordata</i>	Native	–	–
trumpet creeper	CARA2	<i>Campsis radicans</i>	Native	–	–
catbird grape	VIPA7	<i>Vitis palmata</i>	Native	–	–
riverbank grape	VIRI	<i>Vitis riparia</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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Animal community

Wildlife (MDC 2006): Moist conditions with abundant coarse woody debris make this type of ecological site important for many herptiles. Ephemeral pools provide important amphibian breeding habitat. Periodic inundation and acorns provide important habitat and food for migrating ducks (especially mallards) and breeding ducks including wood ducks and hooded mergansers. Tall emergent trees along with an uneven canopy structure and canopy gaps are important for heron colonies, eagle nesting, Mississippi kites, cerulean warblers and other bird species. Birds associated with late-successional to mature forests are Wood Duck, Hooded Merganser, Barred Owl, Cerulean Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo, Brown Creeper, and Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Reptiles and amphibians associated with this ecological site include: small-mouthed salamander, central newt, midland brown snake, gray treefrog, northern spring peeper, Blanchard's cricket frog, southern leopard frog, western painted turtle, and red-eared slider.

Other information

Forestry (NRCS 2002, 2014): Management: Estimated site index values are 55 to 60 for oak. On the wettest sites, timber management opportunities may be limited. Management of these groups may be difficult because of variation in species, age, stocking levels and seasonal wetness. Use seed-tree, group selection, or clear cutting regeneration methods. Limitations: Wetness from high water table. Use of equipment may be restricted in spring and other excessively wet periods. Restrict activities to dry periods or surfaced areas. Equipment use when wet may compact soil and damage tree roots. Unsurfaced roads and traffic areas tend to be slippery and form ruts easily. Access to forests is easiest during periods in late summer or winter when soils are frozen or dry. Planting may be extremely difficult during spring periods. Seedling mortality may be high due to excess wetness. Unsurfaced roads and skid trails may be impassable during rainy periods

Inventory data references

Potential Reference Sites: Wet Footslope Forest Plot ROBESP03 – Hartville soil Located in Robertsville SP, Franklin County, MO Latitude: 38.427463 Longitude: -90.818929 Plot CACOF02 – Higdon soil Located in Carter County Forest Service, Carter County, MO Latitude: 36.998615 Longitude: -90.752049

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Contributors

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Approval

Nels Barrett, 9/24/2020

Acknowledgments

Missouri Department of Conservation and Missouri Department of Natural Resources personnel provided significant and helpful field and technical support during this project.

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	09/02/2026
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:
