Rapid Assessment Reference Condition Model

The Rapid Assessment is a component of the LANDFIRE project. Reference condition models for the Rapid Assessment were created through a series of expert workshops and a peer-review process in 2004-2005. For more information, please visit www.landfire.gov. Please direct questions to helpdesk@landfire.gov.

Potential Natural Vegetation Group (PNVG):

R5OASA **Oak Savanna**

General Information

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Vegetation Type

Grassland

Dominant Species*

QUST ANGE
QUMAD SCHIZ4
QUAL
ANDRO2

General Model Sources

- [x] Literature
- [x] Local Data
- [x] Expert Estimate

LANDFIRE Mapping Zones

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43

Rapid Assessment Model Zones

- [ ] California
- [ ] Great Basin
- [ ] Great Lakes
- [ ] Northeast
- [ ] Northern Plains
- [ ] N-Cent.Rockies
- [ ] Pacific Northwest
- [x] South Central
- [ ] Southeast
- [ ] S. Appalachians
- [ ] Southwest

Geographic Range

Nuzzo(1986) estimated that some 27 to 32 million acres of oak savanna occurred in the Midwest at the time of European settlement extending from southern Texas northward through Missouri into Wisconsin, Minnesota, California and Oregon. Nelson (1987) indicated that perhaps 13 million acres of savanna occurred in Missouri prior to settlement. This number was extrapolated based on interpretations using the extent of prairie cover and descriptions of historic barrens, oak openings and other open woodlands in which grasses dominated the ground cover. The current estimate of six and one half million acres is a relative interpretation excluding presettlement prairie and other natural communities associated with rougher dissected hills. This revised estimate now discounts open woodlands that fall into the woodland natural community descriptions. The estimate is now restricted to the probability of savannas associated with prairie regions and relatively level upland plains.

Biophysical Site Description

Savannas are grasslands interspersed with open-grown scattered trees, groupings of trees of various age, and shrubs. These take on the appearance of widely spaced, orchard-like groves or standing individual trees. They are distinguished from woodlands in that savannas are strongly associated with large prairies on nearly level to dissected plains and are generally dominated by prairie grasses and forbs. The tree canopy cover is generally less than 30 percent. Shrub thickets occur, especially on the northeast-trending lee side of hills or in upland drainages where fire was less frequent or less intense. Savannas are species-rich natural communities, with most diversity found in the understory layer. While no endemic species are presently known to occur in savannas, Packard and Mutel (1997) indicated that oak savanna possesses a distinct herbaceous community characterized by species adapted to frequent large-scale disturbances. Oak Savanna topography is associated with gently rolling plains underlain by Pennsylvanian limestone and sandstone in the unglaciated Osage Plains and the Central Dissected Till Plains sections. However, savannas may occur anywhere upland topography is gently rolling to level, regardless of geologic substrate. Their strongest

*Dominant and Indicator Species are from the NRCS PLANTS database. To check a species code, please visit http://plants.usda.gov.

affinity is to gently rolling plains where prairie occur.

Vegetation Description

In general, three pirmary vegetation associations dominated savanna natural communities. In the Central Dissected Till Plains Section, bur oak groves (Quercus Marcrocarpa) once dominated dry to dry-mesic prairie areas underlain by glacial till soils. Chinquapin oak (Q. muhlenbergii) co-dominated on the driest, steepest loess hills of Springfield Plain and Central Plateau subsections, especially along the Interstate 44 and Highway 63 (Rolla to Thayer) corridors. In the Springfield Plain Subsection, chinquapin oak and post oak often share dominance where associated with limestone/dolomite bedrock. Rock outcrops on prairies or on rugged, hilly terrain dominated by shrubs such as wild crab (Malus ioensis), hawthorn (Crataegus species), rough-leaved dogwood (Cornus drummondii) and winged sumac (Rhus copallina) are often savanna-like in character, but are primarily considered part of the prairie natural community. Moisture modifiers are limited to the primary moisture regime associated with loess and glacial till soils only. Nearly all rock substrate savannas are dry-mesic with inclusions of dry soils, while those found on the deeper soils of glacial till or loess are both mesic and dry-mesic. However, because so little is known about the historic distribution of savanna types developed on bedrock and residuum soils, and distinctions between dry and dry-mesic soils, savannas are named for the primary bedrock substrate only. No wet-mesic or wet savannas are known because either few extant examples remain, or these are too small to function as savannas. Sand savannas are named for the wind or alluvial-deposited sandy soils of terraces or elevated ridges and summits. They are especially characteristic of the Mississippi River Alluvial Basin Section. The typical sand savanna has no moisture modifier because of the difficulty in distinguishing between their dry to dry-mesic soils, and owing to the topographic irregularities of the landscape. Dominant vegetation is listed as big bluestem (Andropogon gerardii),
little bluestem (Schizachyrium scoparium), switchgrass (Panicum
virgatum), and Indiangrass (Sorghastrum nutans).

Six savanna natural communities are described based on differences in soil moisture and rock/parent material substrate:

Dry-mesic loess/glacial till savanna
Mesic loess/glacial till savanna
Limestone/dolomite savanna
Chert savanna
Sandstone/shale savanna
Sand savanna

Disturbance Description

Many oak species are adapted to the frequent, low to moderate intensity fires with the capability of resprouting. Curtis (1959) described brush prairie remnants at Wisconsin savanna sites that burned annually more than 100 years with no observed reduction in the number of oak grubs. Grubs refer to oak (and other species) sprouts killed back by repeated fires and forming large root balls. The presence of these oak grubs account for the rapid degrading of savanna to landscapes overgrown in woody thickets following heavy grazing and the cessation of fire (Schroeder 1981). Savannas, prairies, glades and open woodlands -- all are direct reflections and inextricably linked to natural or aboriginal fires and are relicts of once common grazing sites of American bison (Bison bison). In addition, browsing by American elk (Cervus elaphus) and white-tailed deer (Odocoileus virginianus) influenced the vegetation. Large expanses of level to nearly level landscape coupled with frequent fire and grazing by native herbivores will eventually lead to either prairie or savanna. Though grazing was a natural disturbance questions remain as to the scale that would of altered

vegetation changes. Wind and ice storms may have also played a role opening closed communities.

Adjacency or Identification Concerns

Scale Description

Sources of Scale Data ☑ Literature ☐ Local Data ☑ Expert Estimate

Landscape is adequate in size to contain natural variation in vegetation and disturbance regime. Topographically complex areas can be relatively small (< 1000 acres). Larger landscapes can be up to several thousand acres in size.

Issues/Problems

The causative factors that eventually led to mass degradation, and in some regions total extirpation, of Missouri savannas include suppression of historic natural or anthropogenic fires, replacement of natural herbivory by domestic livestock grazing, logging, conversion to cropland and seeding to cool-season exotic grasses. Because most former savannas (like their associated prairie natural communities) were highly productive in terms of forage (or palatable vegetation), these served as the primary foraging sites for domestic livestock that were allowed to range freely during early settlement. The richest savanna soils, especially in northern Missouri, were rapidly converted to cropland or intensively grazed.

Model Evolution and Comments

Doug Zollner, Tom Foti

Succession Classes

Succession classes are the equivalent of "Vegetation Fuel Classes" as defined in the Interagency FRCC Guidebook (www.frcc.gov).

Class A 7%

Early1 All Structures

Description

The early seral open stage is recently burned with a herbaceous species response. Most of the shrubs and oak grubs are top killed by recent replacement fire. However, herbaceous species and oak grubs will resprout and not all are killed by fire.

Indicator Species* and Canopy Position

SCHIZ4	Lower
ANGE	Lower
ANDRO2	Lower

Upper Layer Lifeform

☑ Herbaceous
☐ Shrub
☐ Tree

Fuel Model 2

Structure Data (for upper layer lifeform)

	Min	Max
Cover	5 %	100 %
Height	no data	Herb Short <0.5m
Tree Size Class	Seedling <4.5ft	

☐ Upper layer lifeform differs from dominant lifeform. Height and cover of dominant lifeform are:

Class B 3%

Mid1 Closed

Description

The mid seral closed stage consists of areas that have not had a recent surface fire. As a result of altered fire regimes, oak grubs have resprouted into medium sized shrubs and pole sized trees. Herbaceous species are present in the ground cover but are limited throughout this stage due to the reduced amount of light reaching

Indicator Species* and Canopy Position

ANDRO2	Lower
ANGE	Lower
QUERC	Middle
QUMA2	Middle

Upper Layer Lifeform

☐ Herbaceous
☑ Shrub
☐ Tree

Fuel Model 9

Structure Data (for upper layer lifeform)

	Min	Max
Cover	30 %	50 %
Height	Shrub Dwarf <0.5m	Shrub Tall >3.0 m
Tree Size Class	Pole 5-9" DBH	

☐ Upper layer lifeform differs from dominant lifeform. Height and cover of dominant lifeform are:

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the surface.

Class C 40 %

Mid1 Open

Description

The mid seral open stage consists of areas of the landscape that has recently burned. Due to periodic surface fires some of the oak grub sprouts and shrubs have been top killed resulting in more light reaching the surface propagating the spread of a variety of herbaceous species. Overstory is an intermix of shrubs and pole sized oaks that have not been recently top killed.

Indicator Species* and Canopy Position

QUMA2	Middle
QUERC	Middle
ANGE	Lower
ANDRO2	Lower

Upper Layer Lifeform

- ☐ Herbaceous
- ☐ Shrub
- ☑ Tree

Fuel Model 3

Structure Data (for upper layer lifeform)

	Min	*Max*
Cover	5 %	30 %
Height	Tree Short 5-9m	Tree Medium 10-24m
Tree Size Class	Pole 5-9" DBH	

☐ Upper layer lifeform differs from dominant lifeform. Height and cover of dominant lifeform are:

Class D 45 %

Late1 Open

Description

The late open seral stage represents the oak savanna community type. Due to a 3-year surface fire interval the oak grub sprouts and shrubs have been top killed. Tall mature oaks with spreading branches are scattered in a park-like setting with an open canopy allowing light to reach the surface propagating the spread of a variety of herbaceous species.

Indicator Species* and Canopy Position

QUST	Upper
QUERC	Upper
ANGE	Lower
ANDRO2	Lower

Upper Layer Lifeform

- ☐ Herbaceous
- ☐ Shrub
- ☑ Tree

Fuel Model 3

Structure Data (for upper layer lifeform)

	Min	*Max*
Cover	5 %	30 %
Height	Tree Short 5-9m	Tree Medium 10-24m
Tree Size Class	Very Large >33"DBH	

☐ Upper layer lifeform differs from dominant lifeform. Height and cover of dominant lifeform are:

Class E 5 %

Late1 Closed

Description

The late closed seral stage represents the oak savanna that has not had recent surface or mixed fire. Tall mature oaks with spreading branches are scattered throughout this type however, oak grubs and shrubs have sprouted into pole size limiting light

Indicator Species* and Canopy Position

QUST	Upper
QUERC	Upper
QUMA2	Upper
ANDRO2	Lower

Upper Layer Lifeform

- ☐ Herbaceous
- ☐ Shrub
- ☑ Tree

Fuel Model 9

Structure Data (for upper layer lifeform)

	Min	*Max*
Cover	30 %	50 %
Height	Tree Short 5-9m	Tree Medium 10-24m
Tree Size Class	Very Large >33"DBH	

☐ Upper layer lifeform differs from dominant lifeform. Height and cover of dominant lifeform are:

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reaching the surface and therefore reducing the herbaceous species cover. This stage represents a places on the landscape that have an altered fire regime.

Disturbances

Non-Fire Disturbances Modeled

- ☐ Insects/Disease
- ☑ Wind/Weather/Stress
- ☑ Native Grazing
- ☐ Competition
- ☐ Other:
- ☐ Other:

Fire Regime Group: 1

I: 0-35 year frequency, low and mixed severity
II: 0-35 year frequency, replacement severity
III: 35-200 year frequency, low and mixed severity
IV: 35-200 year frequency, replacement severity
V: 200+ year frequency, replacement severity

Historical Fire Size (acres)

Avg: 10000
Min: 2000
Max: 20000

Fire Intervals (FI):
Fire interval is expressed in years for each fire severity class and for all types of fire combined (All Fires). Average FI is the central tendency modeled. Minimum and maximum show the relative range of fire intervals, if known. Probability is the inverse of fire interval in years and is used in reference condition modeling. Percent of all fires is the percent of all fires in that severity class. All values are estimates and not precise.

Sources of Fire Regime Data

- ☑ Literature
- ☑ Local Data
- ☑ Expert Estimate

	Avg FI	*Min FI*	*Max FI*	*Probability*	*Percent of All Fires*
Replacement	100	5	110	0.01	3
Mixed	60	5	250	0.01667	5
Surface	3	1	4	0.33333	93
All Fires	3			0.36	

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