



Source - IFMAP Michigan Land Cover dataset. Herbageous openlands include warm season grass, poverty grass, cladonia, bracken fern, raspberry, and mixed upland herbageous land cover types.

Grassland: Idle/old field

Description

Idle/old field is a grassland community of opportunistic plants and animals that take over bare ground previously disturbed by humans—usually for agricultural purposes. These grassland communities are often a mix of opportunistic (weedy) native and invasive species. These communities are often ultimately replaced by early successional trees if left alone without disturbance (e.g., fire).

General Condition of Feature

Nearly half of the idle or old field occurrences in the Eastern Upper Peninsula are in good condition. Much of the remaining areas are in fair or excellent condition, with about 15% considered degraded or very degraded.

Associated Natural Communities

N/A – no native natural communities

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need

INSECTS

tawny crescent (*Phyciodes batesii*)

AMPHIBIANS

eastern tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum tigrinum*)

pickerel frog (*Rana palustris*)

northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*)

REPTILES

blue racer (*Coluber constrictor foxii*)

northern ringneck snake (*Diadophis punctatus edwardsii*)

western fox snake (*Elaphe vulpina*)

eastern hognose snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*)

smooth green snake (*Liochlorophis vernalis*)

eastern massasauga (*Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*)

Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*)

wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*)

BIRDS

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*)

Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*)

Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*)

Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)

BIRDS cont.

Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*)

American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*)

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)

Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)

Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*)

Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*)

Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*)

Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*)

Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)

Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*)

Vesper Sparrow (*Poocetes gramineus*)

Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*)

Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*)

Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*)

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)

Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*)

MAMMALS

hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*)

deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus gracilis*)

Associated Threats

MODIFICATION OF NATURAL PROCESSES

- Grazing and mowing patterns: A lack of maintenance results in succession to forested landscape features.
- Altered fire regime
- Altered hydrologic regimes: Flooding may impact idle and old fields.

HABITAT CONVERSION

- Industrial, residential and recreational development: Conversion pressure leads to residential and industrial development.
- Conversion to agriculture: High beef prices may fuel a conversion of idle and old fields to pasture.

BIOLOGICAL INTERACTIONS

- Invasive plants and animals: Species like spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*) may alter community composition.

Conservation Actions Needed [Threats addressed]

LAND, WATER & SPECIES MANAGEMENT

- Manage to approximate natural disturbance regimes using prescribed fire, restoring water flow patterns, and implementing managed grazing or mowing. [Grazing and mowing patterns; Altered fire regime; Altered hydrologic regimes]
- Institute invasive species monitoring, prevention and control programs. [Invasive plants and animals]

MICHIGAN'S WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN
TERRESTRIAL SYSTEMS: EASTERN UPPER PENINSULA

LAW & POLICY

- Work with municipalities to promote planning and zoning, insuring adequate protection for idle and old field systems or their conversion to features that have greater value to wildlife. [Industrial, residential and recreational development]

ECONOMIC & OTHER INCENTIVES

- Use Farm Bill funding to provide financial support to allow the retention of idle fields over their conversion to other uses. [Conversion to agriculture]

Research and Survey Needs

- A better understanding is needed of the species associated with idle/old field communities. Are these systems sinks or are they valuable wildlife habitat?
- A better understanding is needed of the role of idle/old field on the landscape. These systems may serve an important role as a buffer around other features.
- Study the species composition of idle/old fields. Are there native communities in old fields? Both native and non-native weeds may colonize fields after the cessation of agriculture.
- Compare the value of old field systems and row crops to wildlife. Is the value of old field significantly higher? Urban sprawl results in the conversion of agricultural land and unmanaged old fields. How do row crops and old fields compare to the value of man-made managed grasslands in residential areas?
- An inventory needs to be conducted to determine the location and condition of idle/old fields.

Monitoring

- Track the total acreage of idle/old field in the ecoregion as well as its distribution across the landscape.