

Fire Regime Condition Class Biophysical Settings (BPS) Key Alaska

Note: As used in this key, Biophysical Settings can be considered equivalent to Potential Natural Vegetation Groups (PNVGs).

How to use this key:

1. First use Key to Potential Natural Lifeforms (Formations) to determine Vegetation Formation
2. Then identify your geographic area in the key below.
3. Follow the key to determine Biophysical Setting by dominance of species in the highest general canopy layer. **Important note:** Dominant species present in many communities may be part of a seral community of a BPS with different dominant species (e.g., willow and alder dominated communities are an early sere in the Riparian Spruce Hardwood BPS). Thoroughly review the Physical Setting Description and Model Classes Descriptions in the BPS Description Documents before making a final determination.
4. In cases where two or more BPS appear to fit your conditions, go with the greater dominance and/or read the description document for the BPS.

“Dominant” here means the majority of the overstory canopy cover (or highest structural layer in non-forest ecosystems).

Coastal (Southeast Alaska, extending north along coast to Prince William Sound and west along coastal fringe to Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula)

1. Forested lifeform dominated by one or more of the following species: western hemlock, Sitka spruce, mountain hemlock, western redcedar, yellowcedar, or shore pine (coastal variety of lodgepole pine).

CSLF Coastal Forests

1. Non-forested lifeforms dominate. Go to 2.
2. Low shrubs such as cassiope or mountain heather dominate in alpine tundra ecosystem.

DSTN Dwarf Shrub Tundra

2. Persistent tall or low shrubs including willow, alder, and ericads (other than in alpine tundra ecosystem).

PSHS Persistent Shrub South

2. Not dominated by shrubs. Go to 3.
3. Wetlands dominated by sedges, grasses, mosses, or aquatic vegetation.
NFWL Non-Forested Wetland

South Central/Southwest (South Central inland area north to Alaska Range, Kenai Peninsula, Alaska Peninsula and Southwest region)

1. Forested areas. Go to 2.
1. Non-forested areas. Go to 4.
2. Complex mosaic of black spruce, paper birch, aspen, tall alder, and herbaceous communities indicative of poor soil drainage and colder conditions. White spruce may be mixed with black spruce, but is not the dominant species.

BSPS Black Spruce Southcentral

2. Upland complex of paper birch, aspen, and white spruce communities occurring throughout range except on Kenai Peninsula.

USHS Upland Spruce Hardwood Southcentral

2. Upland complex of paper birch, aspen, and white or Lutz spruce on Kenai Peninsula.

CBTF Coastal Boreal Transition

2. Mountain hemlock communities in the Kenai Mountains.

KMHM Kenai Mountains Hemlock

2. Riparian forest. Go to 3.
3. Kenai Peninsula broad river floodplain mosaics of braided channels and upland areas. Key tree indicators are white spruce, black cottonwood, balsam poplar, and paper birch. Alder-willow communities are also part of the mosaic.

RISHK Riparian Spruce Hardwood Kenai

3. Same as above outside the Kenai Peninsula

RISH Riparian Spruce Hardwood

4. Shrub-dominated areas. Go to 5.

4. Herbaceous-dominated areas. Go to 6.

5. Persistent tall or low shrubs such as willow, alder and dwarf birch.

PSHN Persistent Shrub North

5. Low shrubs such as cassiope or mountain heather dominate in alpine tundra ecosystem.

DSTN Dwarf Shrub Tundra

5. Low shrubs and/or sedges in tussock growth form occurring throughout the region except in Bristol Bay Lowlands, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and Ahklun Mountains.

TUTN1 Tussock Tundra 1

5. Low shrubs and/or sedges in tussock growth form occurring in Bristol Bay Lowlands, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and Ahklun Mountains.

TUTN2 Tussock Tundra 2

6. Wetlands dominated by sedges, mosses or aquatic vegetation. Shrubs may also be present.

NFWL Non-Forested Wetland

6. Non-wetland mesic grasses such as bluejoint or hairgrass.

MEHM Mesic Herbaceous Meadow

6. Non-wetland vegetation such as Elymus, dry fescue, or alpine herbs

DHRM Dry Herbaceous Meadow

Northern Alaska (north of Brooks Range)

1. Tall or low persistent shrub communities dominated by alder, willow, or dwarf birch

PSHN Persistent Shrub North

1. Low shrubs such as cassiope or mountain heather dominate in tundra ecosystem.

DSTN Dwarf shrub tundra

1. Herbaceous or graminoid dominated areas. Go to 2.
2. Wetlands dominated by sedges. Shrubs may also be present.

NFWL Non-Forested Wetland

2. Tundra dominated by sedges and/or shrubs in tussock growth form

TUTN Tussock Tundra 2

Interior (areas not listed above)

Note: Interior Alaska approximately coincides with the range of white spruce.

1. Forested areas. Go to 2.
1. Non-forested areas. Go to 4.
2. Complex mosaic of black spruce, paper birch, aspen, tall alder, and herbaceous communities indicative of poor soil drainage and colder conditions.

BSPI Black Spruce Interior

2. Upland complex of paper birch, aspen, and white spruce communities

UWSI Upland White Spruce Interior

2. Riparian forest. Go to 3.

3. Broad river floodplain mosaics of braided channels and upland areas. Key tree indicators are white spruce, black cottonwood, balsam poplar, and paper birch. Alder-willow communities are also part of the mosaic.

RISH Riparian Spruce Hardwood

4. Shrub-dominated areas. Go to 5.
4. Herbaceous-dominated areas. Go to 6.

5. Persistent tall or low shrubs such as willow, alder and dwarf birch.

PSHN Persistent Shrub North

5. Low shrubs such as cassiope or mountain heather dominate in tundra ecosystem.

DSTN Dwarf Shrub Tundra

6. Wetlands dominated by sedges, mosses or aquatic vegetation. Shrubs may also be present.

NFWL Non-Forested Wetland

6. Non-wetland mesic grasses such as bluejoint or hairgrass.

MEHM Mesic Herbaceous Meadow

6. Non-wetland vegetation such as Elymus, dry fescue, or alpine herbs

DHRM Dry Herbaceous Meadow