

Land Use History for the Kellogg Biological Station and the Surrounding Area

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SITE HISTORY

The pre-settlement vegetation of Kalamazoo County has been described by at least five authors since 1900, all of whom base their deductions on the United States Survey Field Notes. Authors generally agree that the KBS area was dominated by oak savanna that was perpetuated by fires regularly set by Native American Indians. The Potawatomi tribe resided in this area at the time of pioneer settlement in the 1830s; to other tribes in the region they were known as the “fire-makers.” Their population in Kalamazoo County in the 1830s could have been as high as 1,000.

Early surveyor notes of inner Michigan (pre-1800) depict the area as unsuitable for farming, a myth that may have been purposefully perpetrated by fur traders. In 1818 an expedition reported this to be far from the case, and settlement ensued. The survey of what is now Ross Township, which includes the KBS LTER site, occurred from 1825-1826. Kalamazoo county was organized in 1830, and Ross Township in 1839. The pioneer era is generally agreed to have ended in 1840. KBS lands in Kalamazoo County reside in Sections 4-9 of Ross township. These sections were first purchased from 1834-1837, with most lands purchased in 1836. At the time of purchase, 60% of Ross Township landowners were not known residents of the township, 20% were known residents,

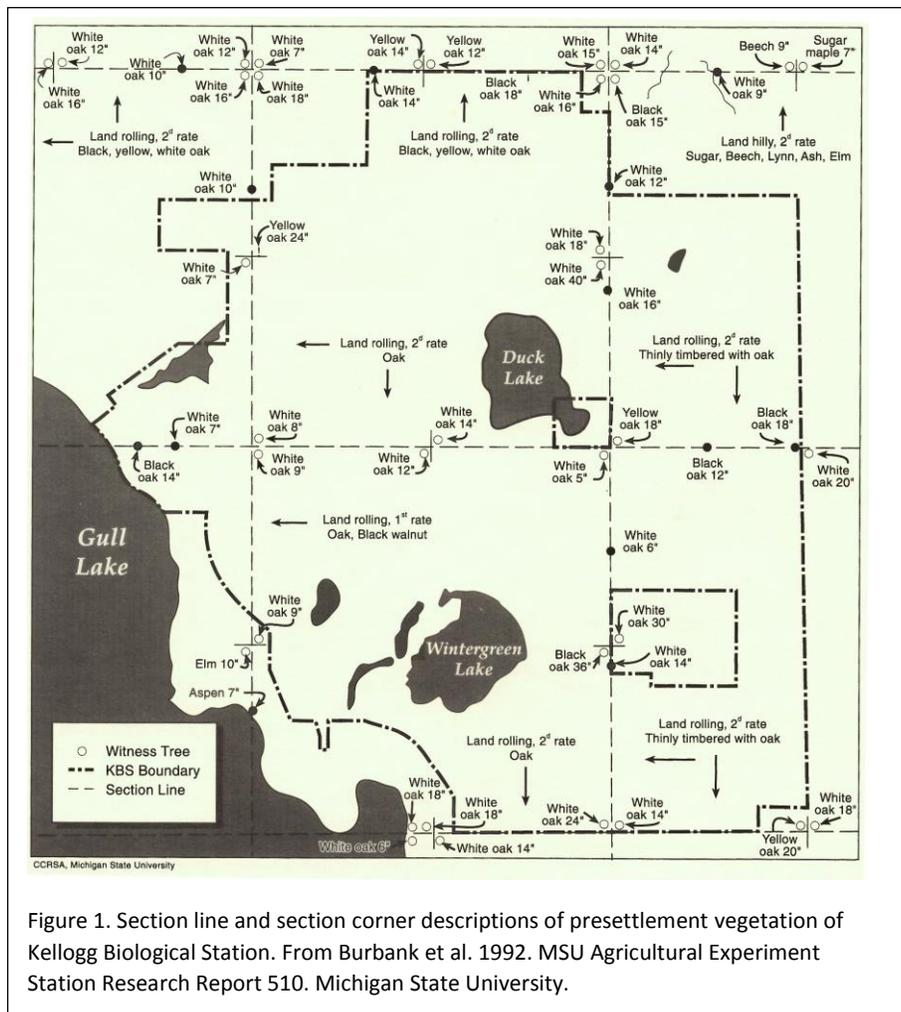


Figure 1. Section line and section corner descriptions of presettlement vegetation of Kellogg Biological Station. From Burbank et al. 1992. MSU Agricultural Experiment Station Research Report 510. Michigan State University.

and residency of the remaining 20% are unknown. Nonresident owners were probably land speculators holding rather than developing the land; 4 of the 9 nonresident owners in the township owned land in 2 sections of sections 4-9. From 1839-1849, nonresidents owned the land comprising the main site of the LTER in section 4. In 1850 the site was bought by John Finley, who resided on site until 1869. By 1873, he had sold this property to F.W. Ford, also a resident. Ford in turn sold the land to J.K. Flower in 1910, who kept it until 1928.

It seems likely that the LTER main site was not tilled until 1850 when Mr. Finley purchased and resided on the land. He is known to have been a 'progressive agriculturalist' who grew cereals. In 1850 Kalamazoo county had 62,000 ha in farmland. Farmland area in the county peaked at 134,000 ha in 1910. At present farmland is 62,000 ha. The number of farms in the county had similarly peaked in 1910: there were 1,100 farms in 1850, 3,372 farms in 1910, and 745 farms today. In Ross Township there were 2,200 ha in farmland in 1850, 8,700 ha in farmland in 1899, and 8,000 ha in farmland in 1959. Township farms numbered 40 in 1850, 183 in 1897, and for the final year of information, 1934, there were 120 farms.

Kalamazoo County row crops from 1850-1953 included primarily wheat, corn, and oats in rank order. Potatoes, buckwheat, and rye were also common. From 1954 to the present, corn has dominated, with soybeans next most common. Oats disappeared as the use of draft animals dwindled post-WWII. Wheat has gradually declined in importance. County forage lands were dominated by grasses from 1878-1920s, after which legumes became more prominent; most forages today are legumes. Cropping patterns in Ross Township show a similar trend for the 100 years of information available.

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See also:

Burbank, D. H., K. S. Pregitzer, and K. L. Gross. 1992. Vegetation of the W.K. Kellogg Biological Station. Michigan State University Agricultural Experiment Station Research Report 510, East Lansing, Michigan, USA.

Gray, S. E. 1996. The Yankee West: community life on the Michigan frontier. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA.

Michigan Natural Features Inventory. 2019. Vegetation circa 1800. MSU Extension, Michigan State University. <https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/resources/vegetation-circa-1800> . (For Kalamazoo County, see <https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/data/veg1800/kalamazoo.pdf>; for Barry County, see <https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/data/veg1800/barry.pdf>).