Identification of Plant Species’ Trinomials with Varying Wetland Indicator Status Designations: Northeast Region
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**Will Cook**, Department of Biology, Duke University, Durham, NC, photos of Acer rubrum var. Drummondii

**Norman C. Melvin**, Ph.D., USDA NRCS National Wetland Team, CNTSC, Fort Worth, TX, all other photographs and text
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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to transmit information on the identification of plant species that have been ascribed with subspecific taxonomic ranks (subspecies, varieties, or other trinomials) and have been listed in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 1988 National List of Vascular Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands (List88) with variable wetland indicator status designations.

Introduction

The wetland provisions in the National Food Security Act Manual (NFSAM) (http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lпсиis.dll/MM_180.htm) and the 1987 Army Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual (http://el.erdc.usace.army.mil/wetlands/pdfs/wlman87.pdf) both require the use of a three-parameter approach when identifying and delineating wetlands. Based upon the guidance contained in these two documents, a site must possess wetland hydrology, undrained hydric soils, and hydrophytic vegetation to be identified as a wetland. This article discusses information critical in the determination of hydrophytic vegetation as it relates to the use of List88 (http://www.nwi.fws.gov/bha/list88.html) and the identification of plant species with trinomials that have been assigned variable wetland indicator status designations. A trinomial (three names; genus, specific epithet, and subspecies or variety) is defined as a taxonomic subdivision of a species based upon heritable differences in morphology, habitat preference, geographic distribution or other trait. These differences are reflected formally in the plant’s name, that is, *Acer rubrum* var. *trilobum*. When making a wetland determination, it is important to consider these trinomials since their presence in the community, especially if a dominant, can affect the outcome of the hydrophytic vegetation determination.

By definition, a hydrophyte is a plant growing in water or in a substrate that is at least periodically deficient in oxygen during a growing season as a result of excessive water content (NFSAM § 527.4). These plant species are adapted for life in saturated soil conditions and have developed adaptations (morphological, physiological, or reproductive) that enable them to survive, flourish, and reproduce when anaerobic conditions occur in their root zone. The USFWS, in cooperation with interagency regional and national plant panels, developed and published List88—a compilation of 13 regional editions. This reference lists each of the approximately 7,000 vascular plant species known to occur in wetlands. Each species has been assigned a “wetland fidelity index” or “wetland indicator status” (OBL, FACW, FAC, or FACU) as to its frequency of occurrence in a wetland. It is important to note that the wetland indicator status designation assigned to each species is only an assessment of its frequency of occurrence in a wetland. It is not an assessment of “how wet” or “how deep” a species will tolerate, although it is commonly misconstrued in this way. The NFSAM (§ 527.4) states that “a plant shall be considered to be a plant species that occurs in wetland if such plant is listed in the National List of Vascular Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands. Species with a distribution that crosses the boundaries defined by regional editions of List88 may have more than one indicator status assignment. When this occurs, the indicator status designation assigned to the region where the plant was collected is considered to be the correct designation for determining the presence/absence of hydrophytic vegetation.

*Hydrophytic vegetation* is generally defined in the plant community context. It is based on the dominant plant species that occur in each community, or by more intensive sampling and using all species encountered. The sampling protocols used to assess the vegetation and make the hydrophytic vegetation determination are described in U.S. Army Corps of Engineers memorandum, Clarification and Interpretation of the 1987 Manual, dated March 6, 1992 (http://www.saw.usace.army.mil/WETLANDS/Policies/clarif_87_man.pdf). This clarification cites the “Basic Rule” (the 50% rule) for determining dominant species, and states that each stratum is to be assessed independently in the assessment and cites the USFWS Regional Plant Lists as the source for determining indicator status designations for the dominants identified.

The Regional Plant Lists (http://www.nwi.fws.gov/bha/list88.html) contain a subset of the species included
in List88 and include only those species known to occur within the particular geographic region defined by the volume. These regional lists identify the wetland indicator status designation for each species as it occurs in that region. The regional volumes organize the species listings into three separate sections. The first section lists each plant’s species name and its associated indicator status designation as determined by the regional and national interagency plant panels. Other information including the author of the species, one common name, and plant habit information is associated with each species. The third section is a listing of synonyms. The entries in this section include older names that appear in floras and/or botanical manuals but are no longer valid; the species is correctly known by a different scientific name. Associated with each synonym name is the accepted name as identified in List88. To determine the indicator status designation for a species listed in the synonymy, the List88 accepted/correct name associated with that synonym must be cross-referenced back to the first section.

Note: If you are utilizing the PLANTS Web site (http://plants.usda.gov) to determine the wetland indicator status designations, the name identified in List88 may not be the currently accepted name in PLANTS. Since 1988, there have been changes to some plant names, and PLANTS maintains the most up-to-date record of these changes. Since the currently accepted names (in PLANTS) and the synonyms (in List88 and elsewhere) are linked together on the PLANTS Web site, there should be no difficulty in moving from one to the other to find the indicator status designation for your species in question.

The second section of each of the Regional Lists includes a few individuals that are varieties or subspecies (i.e., trinomials) of a species, and the indicator status designation for these subspecific taxa are different than the typical variety. In the Northeast, there are a total of nine of these trinomials with variable indicator status designations. When performing a wetland determination and one of these taxa is encountered, the indicator status designation assigned to that trinomial is the correct one to use in the determination of hydrophytic vegetation. For example, Northeast, Region 1, (http://www.nwi.fws.gov/bha/download/1988_region1.txt) lists Acer rubrum three times in the first section. Each time it is listed, the common names and indicator status designations are different. This triplicate listing signifies that Acer rubrum has three varieties or subspecies (i.e., trinomials) with indicator status designations that are different from one another. In the Northeast, many other wetland plant species have trinomials ascribed to them; however, if the indicator status designations for all the trinomi-
Plants with Multiple Wetland Indicator Status Designations: Northeast Region

**Acer rubrum var. rubrum L**

**Symbol:** ACRUR

**Common names:** red maple, soft maple, scarlet maple

**Leaves:**
- shape – subcordate, suborbicular, to deltoid-ovate
- base – slightly cordate to rounded
- lobes – (3) 5 acuminate, coarsely toothed, ascending lobes
- pubescence – young leaves hairy on the lower surface but becoming glabrate (hairless) with age
- width – 6 to 15 cm at the widest point

**Flowering time:** March to May

**Fruiting time:** May to July

**Range:** Quebec to Manitoba and south into Texas and Florida

**Habitat:** Native tree of mesic and low woods
Acer rubrum var. trilobum Torr. and Gray ex. K. Koch

Symbol: ACRUT

Common name: trident red maple, three lobed maple

Leaves:
- shape – ovate
- base – cuneate to rounded
- lobes – 3 short (to obsolete) small toothed lobes
- pubescence – variable, glaucus, glabrous, or hairy beneath at maturity width—3 to 10 cm

Flowering time: March to May

Fruiting time: May to July

Range: Canada and south into Texas and Florida

Habitat: Native tree of swamps and lowlands
**Acer rubrum** var. *Drummondii* (Hook. and Arn. ex. Nutt.) Sargent  

**Symbol:** ACRUD

*Synonym as appears in the 1988 National List:*

*Acer rubrum* ssp. *drummondii* (Hook. and Arn. ex. Nutt.) E. Murray

**Common name:** Drummond’s red maple

**Leaves:**
- shape – (similar to var. *rubrum*) subcordate suborbicular, to deltoid-ovate
- base – (similar to var. *rubrum*) slightly cordate to rounded
- lobes – 5 coarsely toothed ascending lobes but with deeper clefts (or sinuses) than in var. *rubrum*
- pubescence – white tomentose (thickly hairy) beneath and remaining with age (this is a very good identifying characteristic)
- texture – more coriaceous (leathery and dark green) than var. *rubrum*

**Flowering time:** March to May

**Fruiting time:** May to July

**Range:** New Jersey to Illinois and south to Texas and Florida

**Habitat:** Native tree of bottomlands, sandy woods, and swamps


**Fagus grandifolia var. grandifolia** Erhr.

**Symbol:** FAGR

**Common name:** American beech

**Leaves:**
- texture – thin, pale to yellowish green
- margins – sharply to coarsely serrate
- base – mostly cuneate, rounded to subcordate

**Fruit:** prickers longer (4–10 mm), spreading, erect, or sometimes recurved

**Range:** Nova Scotia to Minnesota and south to Texas and Florida

**Habitat:** Native tree occurring in rich upland soils and is a more northern variety even though it can be found in the south
**Fagus grandifolia var. caroliniana (Loud.) Fern. and Rehd.***

**Symbol:** FAGRC

**Common name:** Carolina beech, white beech

**Leaves:**
- texture – thicker, dark green
- apex – strongly acuminate
- margins – teeth smaller to merely denticulate
- base – rounded or subcordate

**Fruit:** prickers fewer and shorter (1–3 mm) abruptly reflexed from the base

**Range:** Massachusetts to southern Illinois and Missouri and south to Florida and Texas

**Habitat:** Native tree occurring in moist or lowland woods, bottomlands, and margins of swamp boarders. It is a more southern variety as compared to the typical var. grandifolia.

*Note on taxonomy:* Recent changes in taxonomy have submerged (i.e., lumped) var. caroliniana into *F. grandifolia*. Although var. caroliniana is no longer viewed taxonomically as a variety distinct from *F. grandifolia*, populations displaying the greater hydrology tolerances represented by the former var. caroliniana exist and can be identified morphologically. The map shown represents the distribution of *Fagus grandifolia* var. caroliniana.
Nyssa sylvatica Marsh

Symbol: NYSY

*Synonym as appears in the 1988 National List: Nyssa sylvatica var. typica Fern

Common names: black gum, sourgum

Leaves:
- shape – obovate to widely elliptic
- texture – thin and membranous
- apex – short acuminate
- base – acuminate to cuneate
- margins – with one or more small, dentate teeth

Fruit: (2) 3 to 4 fruits clustered at the end of the peduncle

Fruiting times: August to September

Range: Maine to Missouri, south into Texas and Florida

Habitat: Native tree growing solitary to widely spaced in uplands and low woods
**Nyssa biflora** Walt.

Symbol: NYBI

*Synonym as appears in the 1988 National List:*
  *Nyssa sylvatica* var. *biflora* (Walt.) Sarg.

Common name: swamp tupelo

Leaves:
  - shape – elliptic to lance-elliptic (oblanceolate)
  - texture – thick and stiff, coriaceous, nonmembranous
  - apex – acute to obtuse or rounded
  - base – cuneate
  - margins – entire (one or two small dentate teeth may be found on seedlings and stump sprouts)

Fruits: 2 (3) in a cluster at the ends of the peduncle

Fruiting dates: August to September

Range: Texas to Florida and north into New Jersey

Habitat: Native tree of inundated swamps, low woods, and wet areas
**Quercus falcata** Michx.

**Symbol:** QUFA

*Synonym as appears in the 1988 National List:*

Quercus falcata var. falcata (Michx.) Nutt

**Common name:** southern red oak, red oak, Spanish oak, southern bell

**Leaves:**

- shape – variable but usually with 3 to 5 main lobes and with additional shallow lobes toward the tip, often resembling a bell
- lobes – falcate and irregular, the apical lobes abruptly smaller than the main lobes
- texture – leaf undersurface densely gray tomentose
- base – rounded

**Terminal buds:** gray tomentose

**Twigs:** gray tomentose

**Trunk:** dark brown to nearly black

**Flowering:** March

**Range:** New Jersey to Missouri and south to Texas and Florida

**Habitat:** Native tree of sandy plains
Quercus pagoda Raf.

Symbol: QUPA5

*Synonym as appears in the 1988 National List: Quercus falcata var. pagodifolia (Michx.) Ell.

Common name: cherrybark oak, pagoda oak

Leaves:

- shape – broader than Q. falcata and with more blade tissue, somewhat resembling Q. rubra (red oak)
- lobes – regularly 7 to 11 single-pointed lobes at right angles to the midvein, diminishing in size toward the apex in a regular and gradual pattern, not strongly falcate
- texture – leaf undersurface only pubescent and not densely tomentose
- base – sharply angled

Trunk: reddish brown to nearly black

Flowering: April to May

Range: North Florida to Louisiana and north to Missouri and Maryland

Habitat: Native tree of rich, moist areas and bottomlands
References

The following references were used to develop morphological, habit, and habitat data for the species trinomials:


