



Mid-Atlantic Network

Forest Vegetation Resource Brief

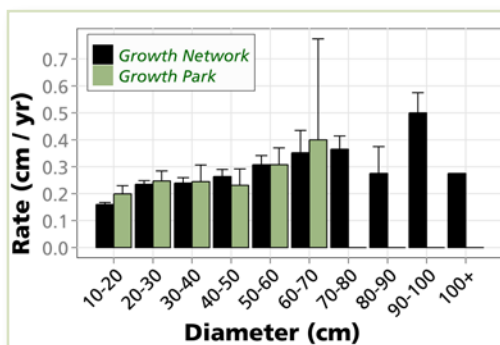


Petersburg National Battlefield 2011 Status & Trends

In 2011, 13 plots established in 2007 at Petersburg NB (PETE) were revisited, seven in the Eastern Front unit and six in the Five Forks unit. With only one-quarter of the total plots in the park resampled, the following highlights of temporal trends are preliminary.

All trees with a diameter at breast height (DBH) equal to or greater than 10 cm were measured, and their condition was assessed. Trees that had died since the last census were noted, while recruited

trees, those reaching the minimum DBH of 10 cm, were identified, measured, mapped, marked, and tagged. Most of the tree mortality and recruitment occurred in the oak-hickory community of the Five Forks unit, at a rate above the network average. Growth rates were generally lower than observed across the network, especially in the tulip poplar community. Larger diameter size classes at the Eastern Front unit had growth rates that were above the network average (see figure to left).



Growth rates of mature trees in different diameter size classes at the Eastern Front unit of Petersburg NB.

Three microplots in each plot were sampled for tree saplings and shrubs with diameters greater than 1 cm and less than 10 cm. Sapling mortality was substantially lower in the loblolly pine communities of Five Forks than across the network, but growth rates of sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) saplings at Eastern Front were higher than average for the Mid-Atlantic Network.

Objectives

1. Determine the status and trends in forest structure, composition, and dynamics of canopy and understory woody species.
2. Determine the status and trends in the density and composition of native tree seedlings and selected herbaceous species that are indicators of deer browse.
3. Detect and monitor the presence of invasive exotic plants, exotic plant diseases and pathogens, and forest pests.
4. Determine the status and trends in forest coarse woody debris and the availability of snags.
5. Determine the status and trends in soil Ca:Al and C:N ratios to assess the extent of base cation depletion, change in aluminum availability, and nitrogen saturation impacting MIDN forest soils.

Importance

The Mid-Atlantic region is primarily a forested ecoregion and all Mid-Atlantic Network parks have forests that form an essential part of the landscape and provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife. Forest structure, composition, and dynamics are important measures of forest condition and health. Changes in these metrics can be indicative of stressors that may result in

alterations in the future ecological integrity of forest communities. For example, high tree mortality rates can signal a change in the canopy species; declines in seedling and sapling densities can indicate a reduced capacity of the forest to regenerate; or increases in invasive exotic plants can exclude other herbaceous plants in the forest understory.



Management Applications

- Provide a measure of forest health and changes over time.
- Indicate composition and trends in invasive exotic plants, pests, and pathogens in the park.
- Evaluate the impact of and trends in white-tailed deer browse on forest understory communities.

Long-term Monitoring

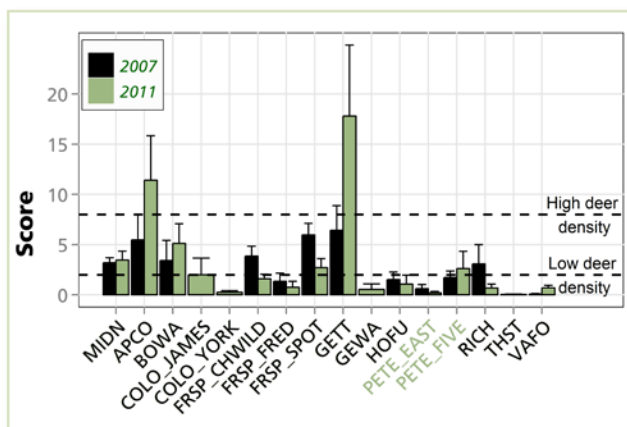
Plot locations were randomly selected from a 250-m sampling grid. Each plot consists of a 20 x 20 m square where all trees and shrubs with a diameter at breast height (dbh) ≥ 10 cm are identified, measured, tagged, marked, and mapped, and their condition is assessed. Trees and shrubs with a dbh ≥ 1 cm are identified, measured, marked, and tagged in each of three microplots. The number and height of tree seedlings and cover of a select group of

native and invasive herbaceous indicator plants are recorded in 12 quadrats. Coarse woody debris is measured along three transects. Soil samples are collected from outside each plot. A variety of parameters are measured to describe the overall plot characteristics, including vegetation cover at different strata or layers, evidence of disturbance and deer-browse, slope, and aspect. The plots are revisited every four years to evaluate changes.

2011 Status & Trends...

Tree seedlings are identified in each of 12 quadrats, and their heights measured. The number and height of seedlings determines whether there is adequate regeneration to sustain the forest canopy. In parks where deer densities are high, a larger number of seedlings are required due to the heavier browse pressure than in parks where deer densities are low. Thus, regeneration is considered as “Good” if it exceeds the high deer density level, and “Significant Concern” when it falls below the low deer density level in any park. At the Eastern Front unit, the tree seedling regeneration score decreased from 2007 to 2011, being classified as “Significant Concern”. However, at Five Forks the seedling score increased, and the regeneration is now

classified as “Caution” in that unit (see figure below). Additional data over the coming years will help us determine if there are potential long-term impacts on the forest communities of the park.



Mean regeneration scores for the Mid-Atlantic Network and individual parks in 2007 and 2011. Lines indicate minimum score needed to maintain sustainable regeneration under low and high deer densities. Codes refer to the parks monitored (see below or full report at www.nature.nps.gov/im/units/midn).

Indicator invasive exotic and native species are also monitored in the quadrats. The Five Forks unit had a very low average percent cover of exotics in the plots sampled, while the Eastern Front plots had a high percent cover of Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*) that increased since 2007. Among the native indicators, *Vaccinium* species (blueberries) were the most abundant in both units.

In 2012, field crews will revisit plots established in 2008, adding to the data on forest dynamics and increasing our confidence in forest health trends.

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Photos by James Comiskey (front) and Gary Flemming (below).

A Final Note

It is important to note that the data presented here is preliminary. Only one-quarter of the park's plots have been revisited, and therefore the trends we report are likely to change as we add more data. However, these early results illustrate the analyses and indicators derived from long-term monitoring and their value to park management.

We would like to thank Tim Blumenschine, PETE Natural Resource Manager, for his continued support and input, as well as the field crews that dedicated long, hot summer days to sample the plots across the network.



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Parks monitored: Appomattox Court House NHP • Booker T. Washington NM • Colonial NHP • Eisenhower NHS • Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania NMP • Gettysburg NMP • George Washington Birthplace NM • Hopewell Furnace NHS • Petersburg NB • Richmond NBP • Thomas Stone NHS • Valley Forge NHP

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