



Mid-Atlantic Network

Forest Vegetation Resource Brief



Appomattox Court House National Historical Park 2012 Status & Trends

In 2012, seven plots established in 2008 at Appomattox Court House NHP (APCO) were revisited. With only one-half of the total plots in the park resampled, the following highlights of temporal trends are preliminary, however, no substantial changes have been observed with the addition of the 2012 data compared to last year's results.

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 occurred in the pine communities where the pines had a higher mortality than the network average. This is not uncommon due to many patches of early successional forest in the park that are currently maturing, and illustrated by the high recruitment rates of hardwood species, in particular among the oaks. Growth rates were generally higher than observed across the network among smaller trees, but larger trees appeared to have slower growth (Figure 1).

Three microplots in each plot were sampled for tree saplings and shrubs with diameters greater than 1 cm and less than 10 cm. The trends were similar to those observed among mature trees, with most of the recruitment occurring

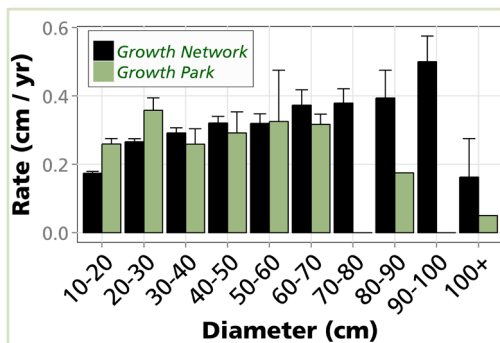


Figure 1. Growth rates of mature trees in different diameter size classes at Appomattox Court House NHP.

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.

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in the oak-hickory and mixed forests. However, growth rates in oak-hickory communities continued to be well below the network average.

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 is 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 stocking index, and “Significant Concern” when it falls below the low deer density stocking index in any park.

Appomattox Court House NHP is considered as “Caution” with the addition of new data this year; the stocking index is below that required under high deer-browse pressure (Figure 2).

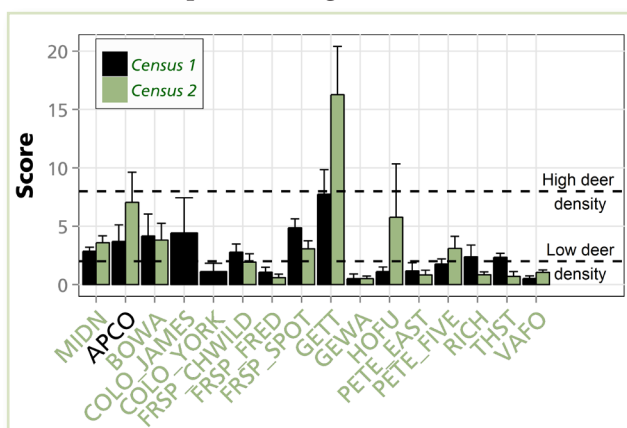


Figure 2. Mean regeneration scores for the Mid-Atlantic Network and individual parks in 2007 and 2008 (Census 1) and 2011 and 2012 (Census 2). Lines indicate minimum score needed to maintain sustainable regeneration under low and high deer densities. Codes refer to the parks monitored (see below; full report at science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/midn).

Invasive exotic and native indicator species are also monitored in the quadrats. The plots sampled in 2012 had a relatively high proportion of exotic species at Appomattox Court House NHP with

the most common species being Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) which showed a significant decrease in cover over the previous four years. However, Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*) showed a substantial increase. Among the native indicators, greenbriar (*Smilax* spp.) species were the most abundant.

In 2013, field crews will revisit plots established in 2009, adding to the data on forest dynamics and increasing our confidence in the forest health trends.

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Photos by James Comiskey (front) and Karen Patterson (below).

A Final Note

It is important to note that the data presented here are preliminary. Only one-half 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 Brian Eick, APCO 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 • Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania NMP • Gettysburg NMP • George Washington Birthplace NM • Hopewell Furnace NHS • Petersburg NB • Richmond NBP • Sagamore Hill NHS • Thomas Stone NHS • Valley Forge NHP

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