

IMPORTANT FOREST SOIL GROUPS

New Hampshire soils are complex and highly variable due primarily to their glacial origins. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil mapping recognizes and inventories these complex patterns and organized them into a useful and understandable planning tool, Important Forest Soil Groups. The objective—a simplified yet accurate tool that will be helpful to natural resource professionals and landowners.

These groupings allow managers to evaluate the relative productivity of soils and to better understand patterns of plant succession and how soil and site interactions influence management decisions. All soils have been grouped into one of six categories, as described below. For a complete list, contact your local NRCS field office or http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001580_Rep2136.xls

Group IA consists of the deeper, loamy, moderately well-drained and well-drained soils. Generally, these soils are more fertile and have the most favorable soil-moisture conditions. Successional trends are toward climax stands of shade-tolerant hardwoods such as sugar maple and beech. Early successional stands frequently contain a variety of hardwoods such as sugar maple, beech, red maple, yellow, gray, and white birch, aspen, white ash, and northern red oak in varying combinations with red and white spruce, balsam fir, hemlock, and white pine. The soils in this group are well-suited for growing high-quality hardwood veneer and sawtimber, especially, sugar maple, white ash, yellow birch, and northern red oak. Softwoods are usually less abundant and are best managed as a minor component of predominantly hardwood stands. Hardwood competition is severe on these soils. Successful natural regeneration of softwoods and the establishment of softwood plantations requires intensive management.

Group IB generally consists of soils that are moderately well-drained and well-drained, sandy or loamy-over-sandy, and slightly less fertile than those in group IA. Soil moisture is adequate for good tree growth but may not be quite as abundant as in group IA. Successional trends and the trees common in early successional stands are similar to those in group IA. However, beech is usually more abundant on group IB and is the dominant species in climax stands. Group IB soils are well-suited for growing less-nutrient-and-moisture-demanding hardwoods such as white birch and northern red oak. Softwoods generally are scarce to moderately abundant and managed in groups or as part of a mixed stand. Hardwood competition is moderate to severe on these soils. Successful regeneration of softwoods and the establishment of softwood plantations are dependent upon intensive management. The deeper, coarser-textured, and better-drained soils in this group are generally suitable for conversion to intensive softwood production.

Group IC soils are derived from glacial outwash sand and gravel. The soils are coarse textured and are somewhat excessively drained to excessively drained and moderately well-drained. Soil moisture and fertility are adequate for good softwood growth but are limiting for hardwoods. Successional trends on these soils are toward stands of shade-tolerant softwoods, such as red spruce and hemlock. White pine, northern red oak, red maple, aspen, gray birch, and paper birch are common in early successional stands. These soils are well-suited for high quality softwood sawtimber, especially white pine, in nearly pure stands. Less site-demanding hardwoods such as northern red oak and white birch have fair to good growth on sites where soil moisture is more abundant. Hardwood competition is moderate to slight. With modest levels of management, white pine can be maintained and reproduced. Although chemical control of woody and herbaceous vegetation may be desirable in some situations, softwood production is possible without it.

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Group IIA consists of diverse soils and includes many of the soils that are in groups IA and IB. The soils in IIA, however, have limitations such as steep slopes, bedrock outcrops, erodibility, surface boulders, and extreme stoniness. Productivity of these soils isn't greatly affected by those limitations, but management activities such as tree planting, thinning, and harvesting are more difficult and more costly.

Group IIB soils are poorly drained. The seasonal high water table is generally at a depth of 12 inches or less. Productivity is lower than in IA, IB, or IC. Fertility is adequate for softwoods but is a limitation for hardwoods. Successional trends are toward climax stands of shade-tolerant softwoods, such as red spruce and hemlock. Balsam fir is a persistent component in nearly all stands. Early successional stands frequently contain a variety of hardwoods such as red maple, yellow, gray, and paper birch, aspen, and white and black ash in varying mixtures with red spruce, hemlock, balsam fir, and white pine. These soils are well-suited for spruce and balsam fir pulpwood and sawtimber. Advanced regeneration is usually adequate to fully stock a stand. Hardwood competition isn't usually a major limitation, but intensive management by chemical control of competing woody and herbaceous vegetation may be desirable.

Not Rated Several mapping units in New Hampshire are either so variable or have such a limited potential for commercial production of forest products that they haven't been placed in a group. Examples are very poorly drained soils and soils at high elevations.