

## Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) Interagency Handbook Reference Conditions

**Modeler:** Ron Masters

**Date:** 11-12-04

**PNVG Code:** PRAR5

**Potential Natural Vegetation Group:** Bluestem Prairie, mixed and tallgrass prairie

**Geographic Area:** Central US from North Dakota and Minnesota south through parts of Kansas and Oklahoma, to the east bordering and mingling with Oak-Hickory forest.

**Description:** Tallgrass prairie. Dominated by big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*). Secondary species vary in importance regionally depending on topography and soil moisture relations and include sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), needlegrass (*Achnatherum sparteae*), Junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*), buffalo grass (*Buchloe dactyloides*), and blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*). At the southwestern extent of this type sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), buffalo grass (*Buchloe dactyloides*), and blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*) increase in percent cover. Western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), porcupine grass (*Hesperostipa sparteae*) and various *Nassella* and *Hesperostipa* become more important in the northern half of this type. Several short stature grasses such as *Dicanthelium* spp. and *Carex* spp. are also important throughout the type, particularly following heavy grazing. Conspicuous perennial forbs include the genera *Helianthus*, *Solidago*, *Liatris*, *Dalea*, *Viola*, and *Antennaria*. Shrubs that are important include *Rosa* spp., *Salix*, *Symphoricarpos*, *Rhus* and in the southern part of the region *Juniperus virginiana* is rapidly increasing in the absence of fire. Bison disturbance was historically an important disturbance that increased heterogeneity of patches on the landscape. A problem with much of the literature on fire in prairies, and therefore a caution, is that it does not include interaction with herbivory (Engle and Bidwell 2001).

**Fire Regime Description:** Fire regime group II, with frequent surface fires, both lightning and anthropogenic in origin (Higgins 1986). Natural fire was possible during the dormant season through spring and during the late-growing season (Bragg 1982, Higgins 1986, Engle and Bidwell 2001) and dependant on the availability of dry fine fuels sufficient to carry a fire. Historic accounts from the 1800's often depict very large landscape scale burns where an entire landscape was described as burning (Irving 1935, Jackson 1965). However it must be noted that these accounts occurred following aggressive market hunting and depletion of bison herds and were not characteristic of reference conditions. Bison grazing affected fire patterns and thus the landscape patterns in tallgrass prairie (Risser 1990). Bison and other grazing/browsing wildlife species preferentially seek out the new growth of recently burned areas affecting patch composition (e.g., Coppedge and Shaw 1998, Jackson 1965, Risser 1990, Steuter 1986, Fuhlendorf and Engle 2004). The large burn accounts are in contrast to the patch burn model where small burns are preferentially grazed by bison. Using the fire/bison interaction model first proposed by Steuter (1986) recent modifications propose that anywhere from 1/6 to 1/3 of a 20,000 acre (8,094 hectares) landscape likely burned (Fuhlendorf and Engle 2004). This caused earlier green-up and increased nutrient content of native grasses. Typically following green-up, fire is followed by intensive bison grazing pressure to the point that structural classes shifted over the landscape in response to an interaction between bison grazing pressure and fire (Steuter 1986; Fuhlendorf and Engle 2001, 2004). Heavily grazed and trampled areas would not burn in the next year to three years creating a one-way closed path. Following this type disturbance the patches are dominated with forbs and will not burn in the succeeding dormant and growing season because of lack of fuel. Whereas previous years unburned post-grazing re-growth would be the next patch to burn. Bison grazing drove the fire regime or at the least strongly influenced fire return intervals. Fire occurrence in turn influenced bison grazing distribution. This model depicts a landscape composed of a continuously shifting mosaic of patches with a short time period of duration. The small patch burn scenario is essential to perpetuate suitable lek sites and

brood rearing habitat for prairie chickens (*Tympanicus cupido*) in the number accounted for presettlement (Sparks and Masters 1996).

### Vegetation Type and Structure

Class*	Percent of Landscape	Description
A: post replacement	17	Post fire community that is short duration (weeks to months- depending on time of burning) before transitioning into one of the other community stages
B: mid-seral closed	36	Mixed forb and grass community either somewhat recovered from bison grazing, or continuing post burn development
C: mid- seral open	15	Forb dominated site with sparse bunchgrass clumps, derived from heavy bison grazing and trampling pressure, wallowing and horning
D: late- seral closed	32	Tallgrass dominated, tillering and overall plant vigor reduced by mulching effect from accumulation of ungrazed, unburned plant litter, over extended periods woody encroachment may occur.
Total	100	

\*Formal codes for classes A-E are: AESP, BMSC, CMSO, DLSO, and ELSC, respectively.

### Fire Frequency and Severity

Fire Severity	Fire Frequency (yrs)	Probability	Percent, All Fires	Description
Replacement Fire	5.6	0.1776	96	Surface fire during dormant to early growing season and late growing to dormant season fire
Non-Replacement Fire	154	0.0065	4	Mid-growing season fires that burn a given patch incompletely
All Fire Frequency*	5.4	0.1841	100	

\*All Fire Probability = sum of replacement fire and non-replacement fire probabilities. All Fire Fire Frequency = inverse of all fire probability (previous calculation).

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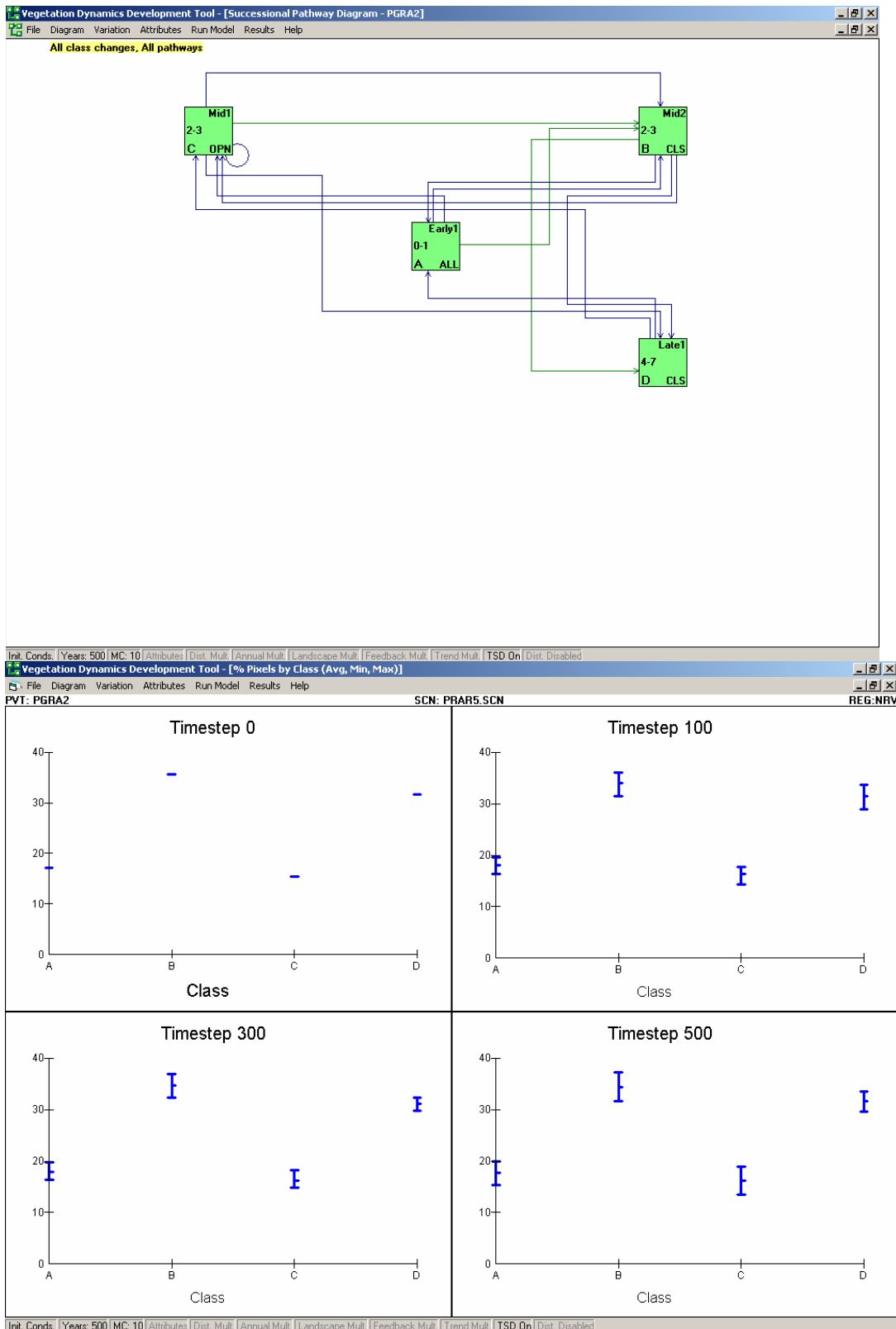
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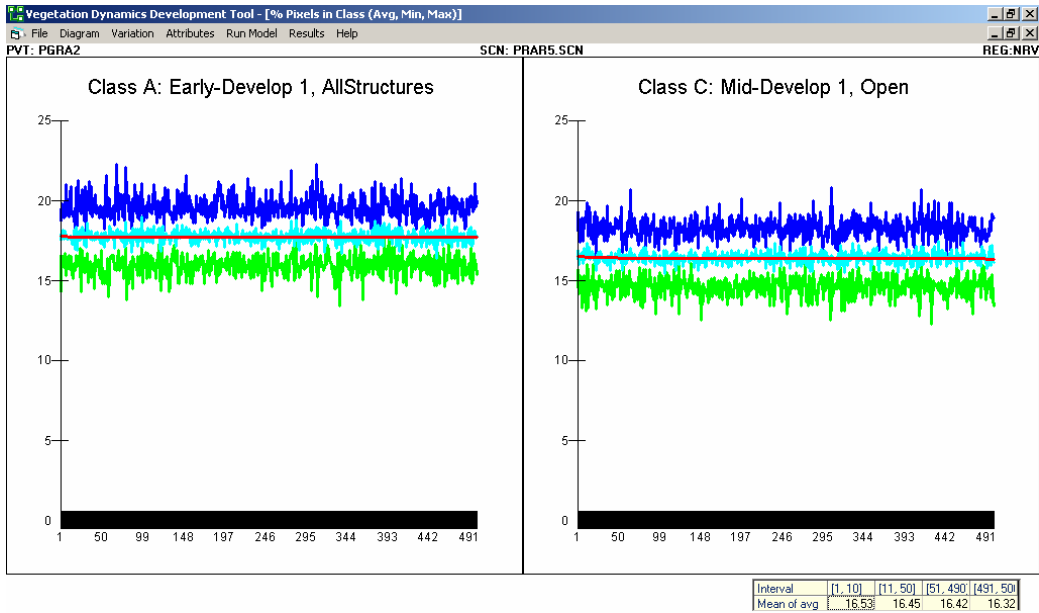
David M. Engle, Professor, Oklahoma State University  
Terrance Bidwell, Professor, Oklahoma State University  
Sam Fuhlendorf, Assistant Professor, Oklahoma State University  
Jim Shaw, Professor, Oklahoma State University  
Brian Coppedge, Dean, Tulsa Community College

## VDDT File Documentation

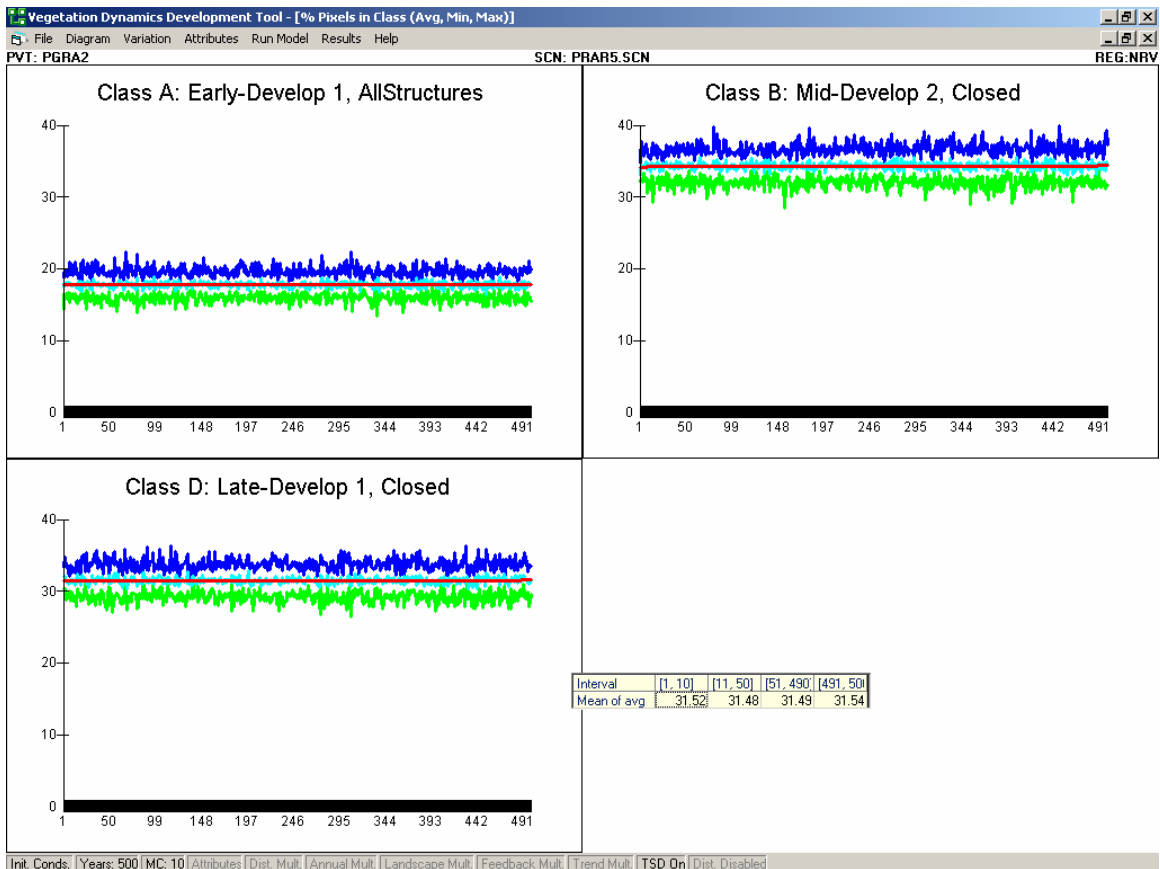
Include screen captures (print-screens) from any of the VDDT graphs that were used to develop reference conditions.

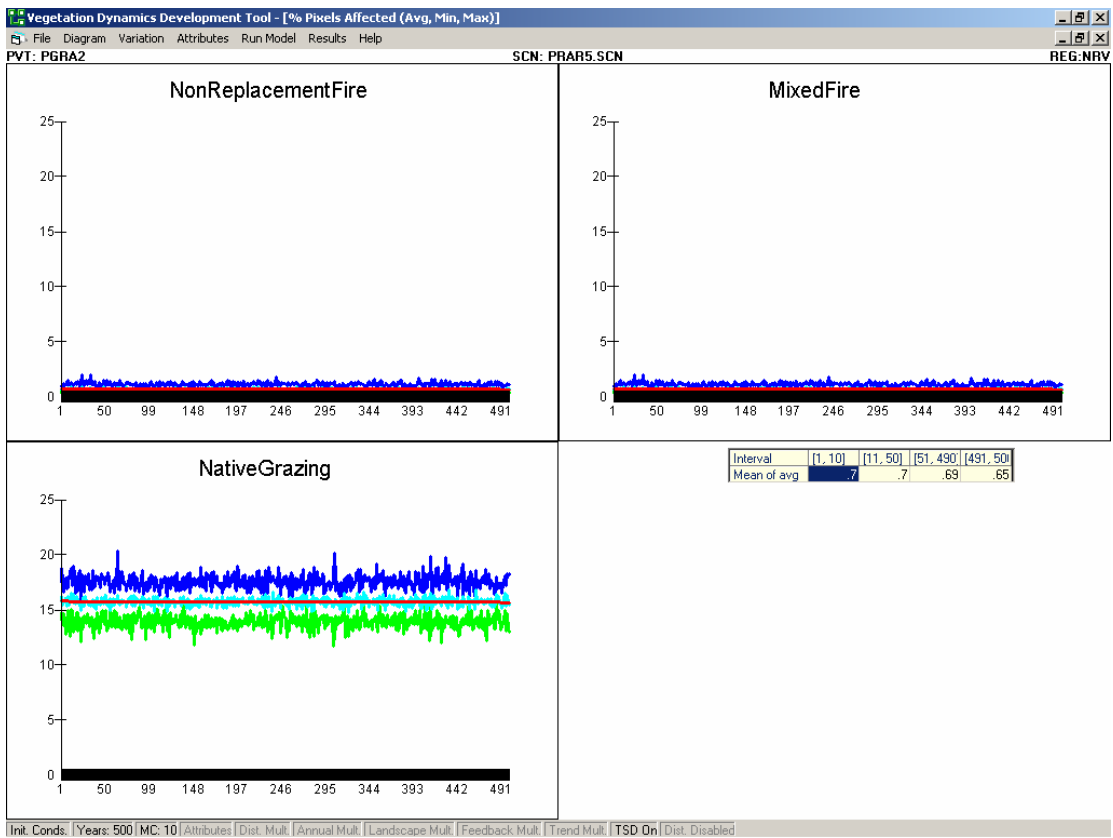
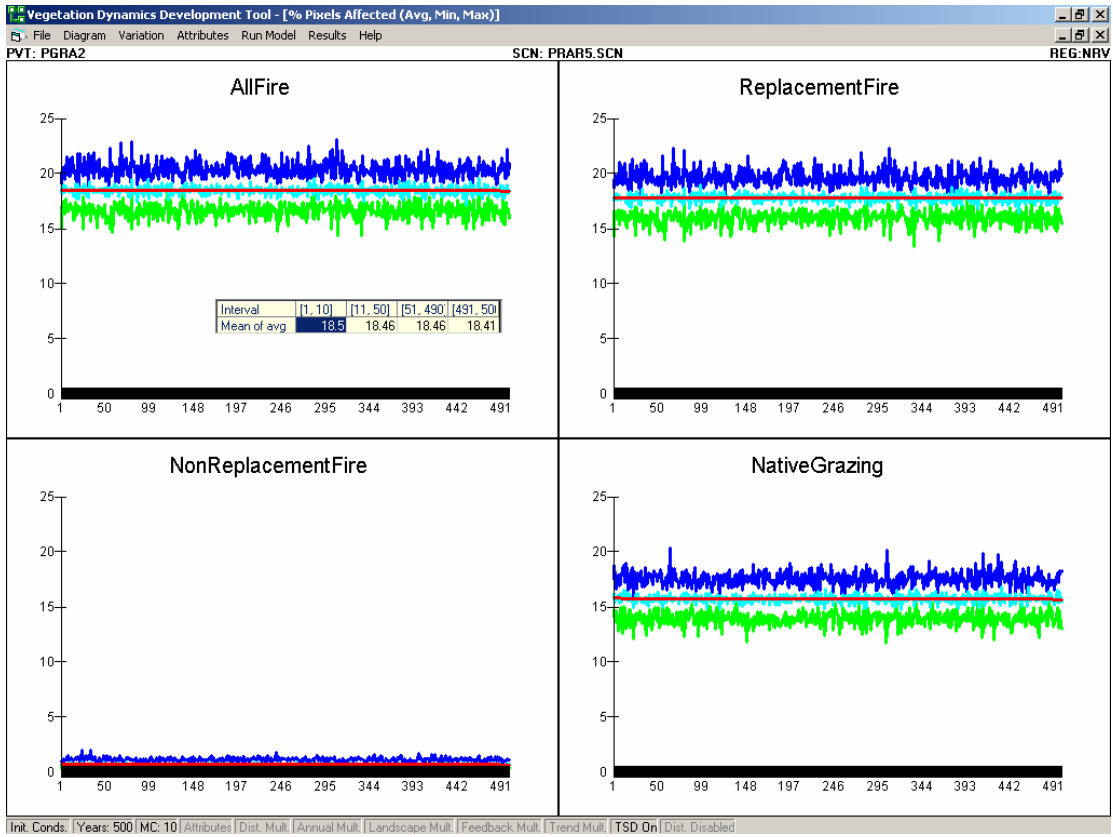


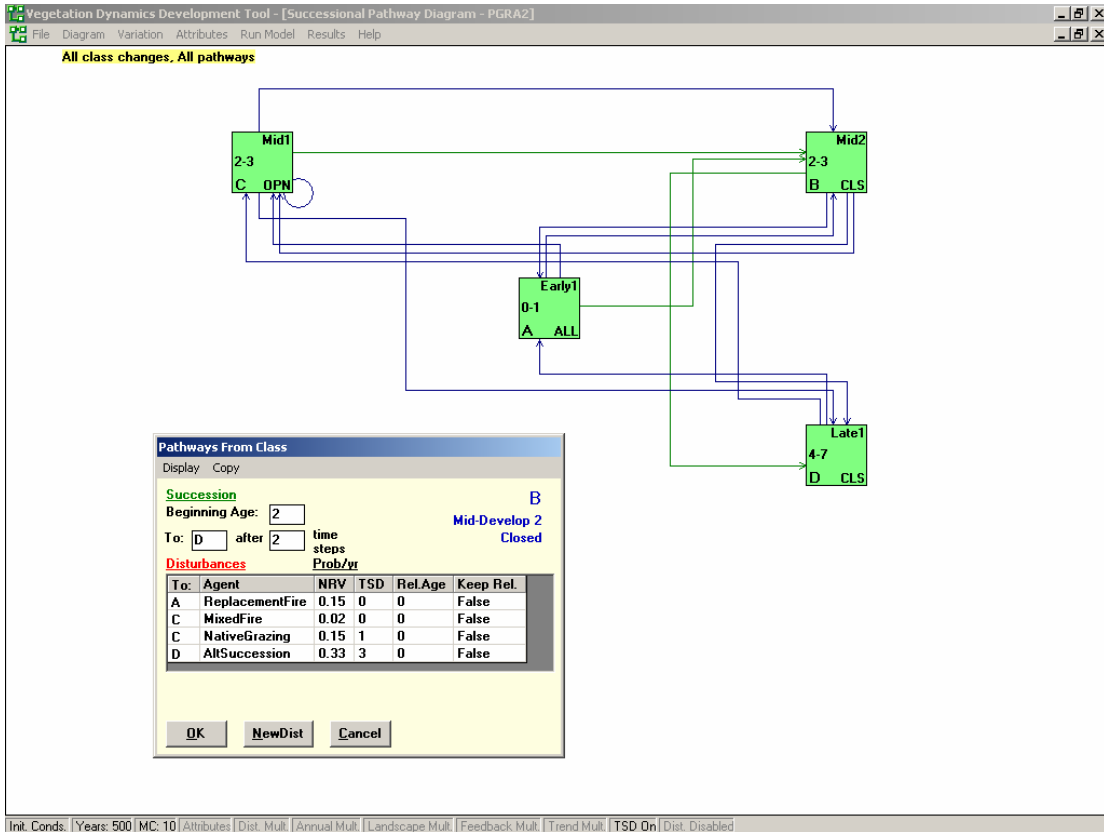
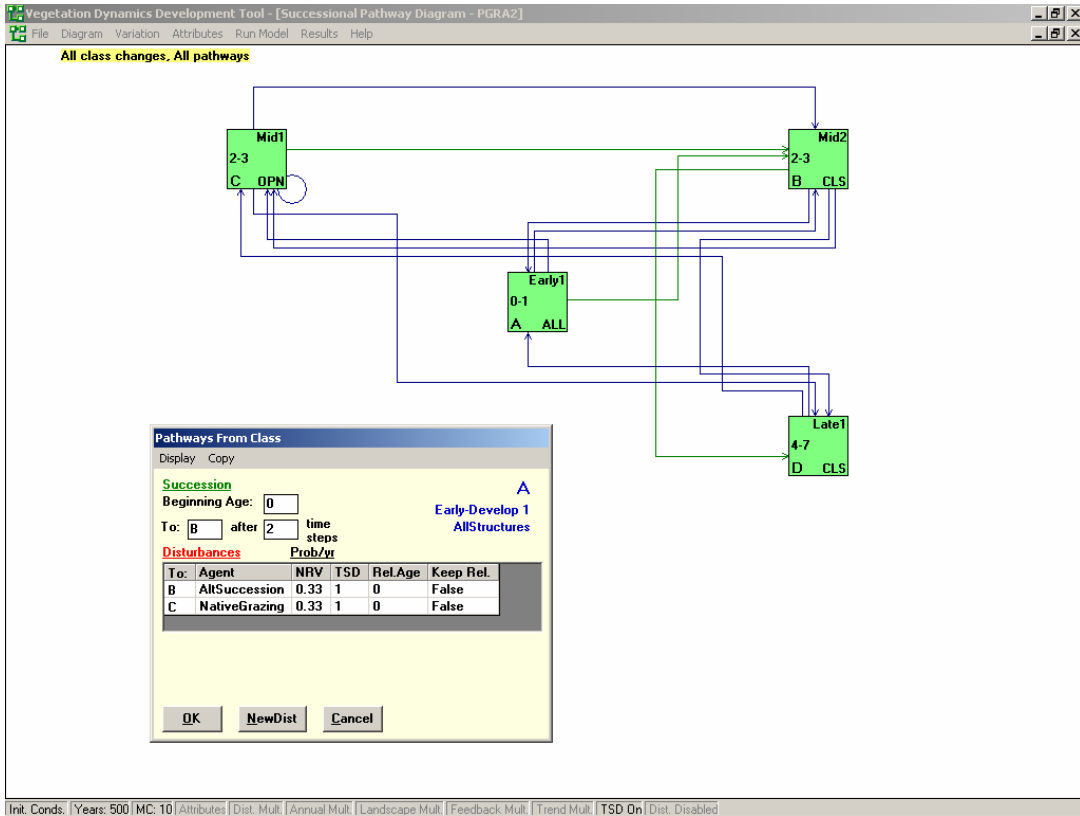


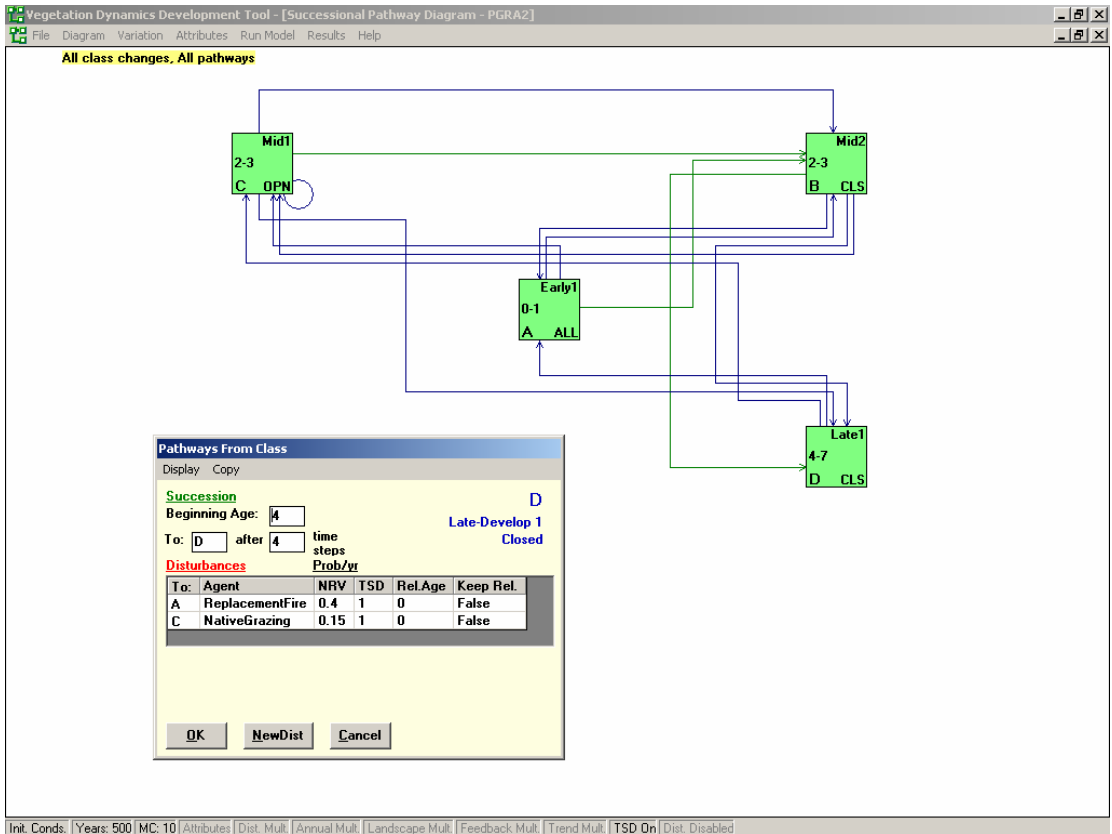
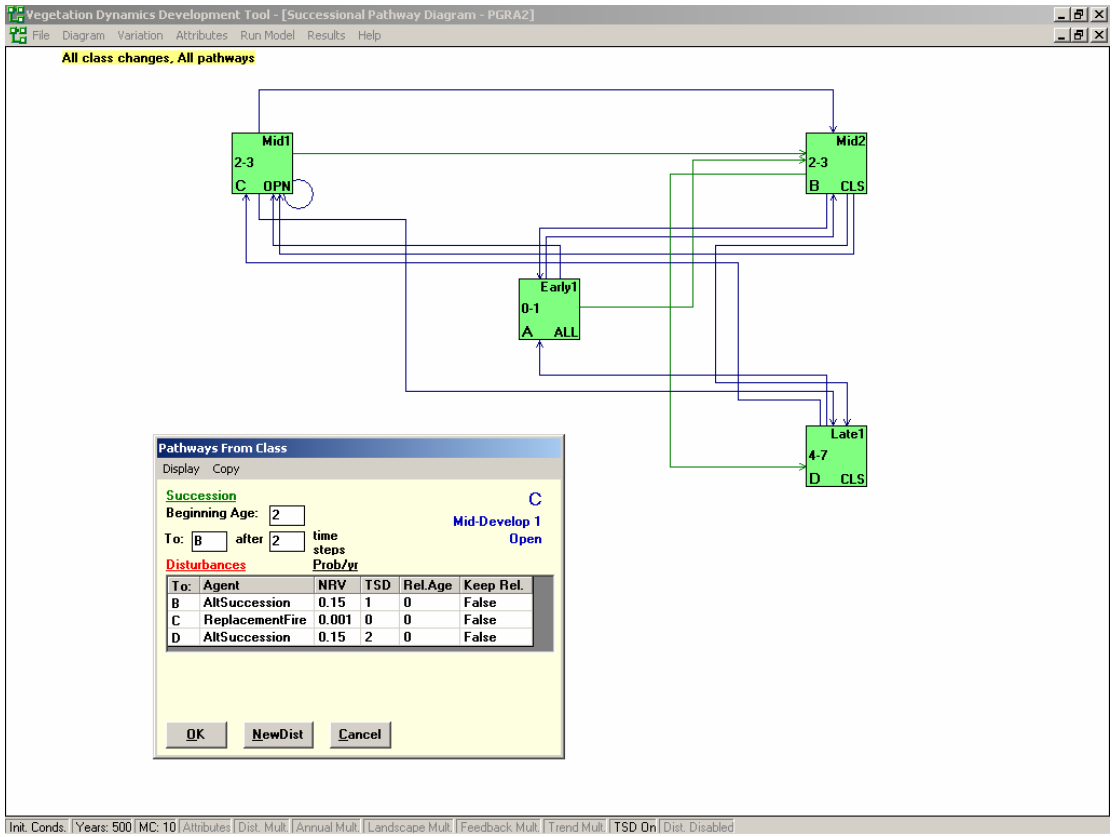


Init. Conds. | Years: 500 | MC: 10 | Attributes | Dist. Mult. | Annual Mult. | Landscape Mult. | Feedback Mult. | Trend Mult. | TSD On | Dist. Disabled











Bluestem prairie adapted from Kuchler 1964.