USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Ecological site R025XY015NV
SOUTH SLOPE 8-12 P.Z.

Last updated: 4/24/2024
Accessed: 05/13/2025

Rangeland health reference sheet

Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health is a qualitative assessment protocol used to determine ecosystem condition based on benchmark characteristics described in the Reference Sheet. A suite of 17 (or more) indicators are typically considered in an assessment. The ecological site(s) representative of an assessment location must be known prior to applying the protocol and must be verified based on soils and climate. Current plant community cannot be used to identify the ecological site.

Author(s)/participant(s)	GK BRACKLEY
Contact for lead author	State Rangeland Management Specialist
Date	06/22/2006
Approved by	Kendra Moseley
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Rills are rare. A few can be expected on steeper slopes in areas recently subjected to summer convection storms or rapid spring snowmelt.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Water flow patterns are rare but can be expected in areas subjected to summer convection storms or rapid snowmelt.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Pedestals are rare. Occurrence is usually limited to areas of water flow patterns. Frost heaving of shallow rooted plants should not be considered a "normal" condition.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare Ground ± 50% depending on amount of surface rock fragments

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** None

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Fine litter (foliage from grasses and annual & perennial forbs) expected to move distance of slope length during intense summer convection storms or rapid snowmelt events. Persistent litter (large woody material) will remain in place except during large rainfall events.

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8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Soil stability values should be 3 to 6 on most soil textures found on this site. (To be field tested.)

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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Surface structure is typically thin to thick platy or massive. Soil surface colors are light and soils are typified by an ochric epipedon. Organic matter of the surface 2 to 3 inches is typically 1 to 1.5 percent dropping off quickly below. Organic matter content can be more or less depending on micro-topography.

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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Perennial herbaceous plants (especially deep-rooted bunchgrasses [i.e., bluebunch wheatgrass] slow runoff and increase infiltration. Shrub canopy and associated litter break raindrop impact and provide opportunity for snow catch and accumulation on site.

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11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** Compacted layers are none. Platy or massive sub-surface horizons or subsoil argillic horizons are not to be interpreted as compacted.

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12. **Functional/Structural Groups (list in order of descending dominance by above-ground annual-production or live foliar cover using symbols: >>, >, = to indicate much greater than, greater than, and equal to):**

    Dominant: Deep-rooted, cool season, perennial bunchgrasses

    Sub-dominant: tall shrubs (Wyoming big sagebrush)>>associated shrubs>shallow-rooted, cool season, perennial grasses>deep-rooted, cool season, perennial forbs=fibrous, shallow-rooted, cool season perennial and annual forbs

    Other:

    Additional:

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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Dead branches within individual shrubs common and standing dead shrub canopy material may be as much as 25% of total woody canopy; some of the mature bunchgrasses (<20%) have dead centers.

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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Reference Plant Community; under shrubs and between plant interspaces (30-50%) and litter depth is ±½ inch.

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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** For normal or average growing season (through mid-June) ± 700 lbs/ac; Spring moisture significantly

affects total production

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16. **Potential invasive (including noxious) species (native and non-native). List species which BOTH characterize degraded states and have the potential to become a dominant or co-dominant species on the ecological site if their future establishment and growth is not actively controlled by management interventions. Species that become dominant for only one to several years (e.g., short-term response to drought or wildfire) are not invasive plants. Note that unlike other indicators, we are describing what is NOT expected in the reference state for the ecological site:** Invaders include cheatgrass, snakeweed, Russian thistle and annual mustards.

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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All functional groups should reproduce in average (or normal) and above average growing season years

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