

## **Ecological site R026XF042CA Steep Rocky Loam (BLM)**

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### **General information**

**Provisional.** A provisional ecological site description has undergone quality control and quality assurance review. It contains a working state and transition model and enough information to identify the ecological site.

### **MLRA notes**

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 026X—Carson Basin and Mountains

The area lies within western Nevada and eastern California, with about 69 percent being within Nevada, and 31 percent being within California. Almost all this area is in the Great Basin Section of the Basin and Range Province of the Intermontane Plateaus. Isolated north-south trending mountain ranges are separated by aggraded desert plains. The mountains are uplifted fault blocks with steep side slopes. Most of the valleys are drained by three major rivers flowing east across this MLRA. A narrow strip along the western border of the area is in the Sierra Nevada Section of the Cascade-Sierra Mountains Province of the Pacific Mountain System. The Sierra Nevada Mountains are primarily a large fault block that has been uplifted with a dominant tilt to the west. This structure leaves an impressive wall of mountains directly west of this area. This helps create a rain shadow affect to MLRA 26. Parts of this eastern face, but mostly just the foothills, mark the western boundary of this area. Elevations range from about 3,806 feet (1,160 meters) on the west shore of Pyramid Lake to 11,653 feet (3,552 meters) on the summit of Mount Patterson in the Sweetwater Mountains.

Valley areas are dominantly composed of Quaternary alluvial deposits with Quaternary playa or alluvial flat deposits often occupying the lowest valley bottoms in the internally drained valleys, and river deposited alluvium being dominant in externally drained valleys. Hills and mountains are dominantly Tertiary andesitic flows, breccias, ash flow tuffs, rhyolite tuffs or granodioritic rocks. Quaternary basalt flows are present in lesser amounts, and Jurassic and Triassic limestone and shale, and Precambrian limestone and dolomite are also present in very limited amounts. Also of limited extent are glacial till deposits along the east flank of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the result of alpine glaciation.

The average annual precipitation in this area is 5 to 36 inches (125 to 915 millimeters), increasing with elevation. Most of the rainfall occurs as high-intensity, convective storms in spring and autumn. Precipitation is mostly snow in winter. Summers are dry. The average annual temperature is 37 to 54 degrees F (3 to 12 degrees C). The freeze-free period averages 115 days and ranges from 40 to 195 days, decreasing in length with elevation.

The dominant soil orders in this MLRA are Aridisols and Mollisols. The soils in the area dominantly have a mesic soil temperature regime, an aridic or xeric soil moisture regime, and mixed or smectitic mineralogy. They generally are well drained, are clayey or loamy and commonly skeletal, and are very shallow to moderately deep.

This area supports shrub-grass vegetation characterized by big sagebrush. Low sagebrush and Lahontan sagebrush occur on some soils. Antelope bitterbrush, squirreltail, desert needlegrass, Thurber needlegrass, and Indian ricegrass are important associated plants. Green ephedra, Sandberg bluegrass, Anderson peachbrush, and several forb species also are common. Juniper-pinyon woodland is typical on mountain slopes. Jeffrey pine, lodgepole pine, white fir, and manzanita grow on the highest mountain slopes. Shadscale is the typical plant in the drier parts of the area. Sedges, rushes, and moisture-loving grasses grow on the wettest parts of the wet flood plains and terraces. Basin wildrye, alkali sacaton, saltgrass, buffaloberry, black greasewood, and rubber rabbitbrush grow on the drier sites that have a high concentration of salts.

Some of the major wildlife species in this area are mule deer, coyote, beaver, muskrat, jackrabbit, cottontail, raptors, pheasant, chukar, blue grouse, mountain quail, and mourning dove. The species of fish in the area include trout and catfish. The Lahontan cutthroat trout in the Truckee River is a threatened and endangered species.

LRU notes

The Mono-Adobe-Long Valleys LRU is comprised of the basins surrounding Mono Lake, Adobe Valley, and Long Valley to the southeast. Pleistocene and Holocene age alluvium and lacustrine deposits predominate. Ash layers occur from eruptions of the numerous volcanic domes that are mostly in adjacent LRUs. Soil temperature regimes are mesic and soil moisture regimes are aridic. Elevations range from 1310 to 2680 meters and slopes are typically less than 10 percent, however there are some ecological sites within the Mono-Adobe-Long Valleys LRU that are greater than 10 percent. Frost free days (FFD) range from 97-125.

Ecological site concept

The Steep Rocky Loam (BLM) site is found on mountains at slopes between 15 and 50 percent. The soil is shallow and well drained. The surface soil texture is very cobbly loamy sand or very bouldery coarse sandy loam. The dominant plants are big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), and needlegrasses (*Achnatherum* spp.).

Associated sites

R026XF003CA	<b>Sandy 8-12" P.Z.</b> The Sandy 8-12
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Similar sites

R026XF613CA	<b>Rocky Upland Loam (BLM)</b> The Rocky Upland Loam (BLM) is found higher on the landscape.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Artemisia tridentata</i> (2) <i>Purshia tridentata</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Achnatherum</i>

Physiographic features

The Steep Rocky Loam (BLM) site is found on mountains at slopes between 15 and 50 percent. The elevation ranges from 5500 and 8800 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Mountain
Runoff class	Low to very high
Elevation	1,676–2,682 m
Slope	15–50%

Climatic features

The climate is characterized by cold winters (20 to 40 degrees F) and warm, mostly dry summers (45 to 80 degrees F). The average annual precipitation ranges from 8 to 12 inches, with most falling as snow from November to March.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	203-305 mm
Frost-free period (average)	108 days
Freeze-free period (average)	135 days
Precipitation total (average)	254 mm

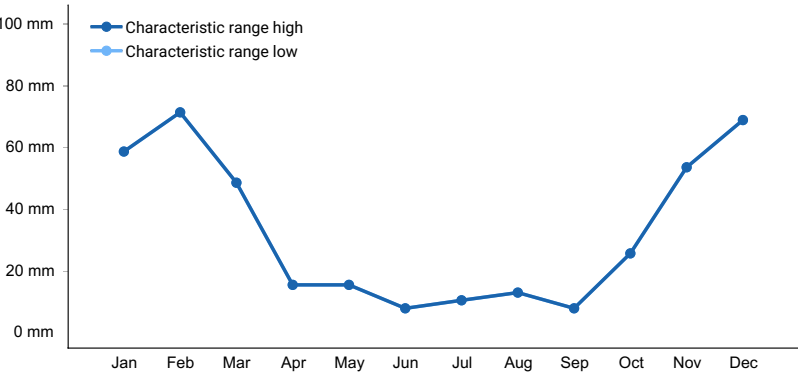


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

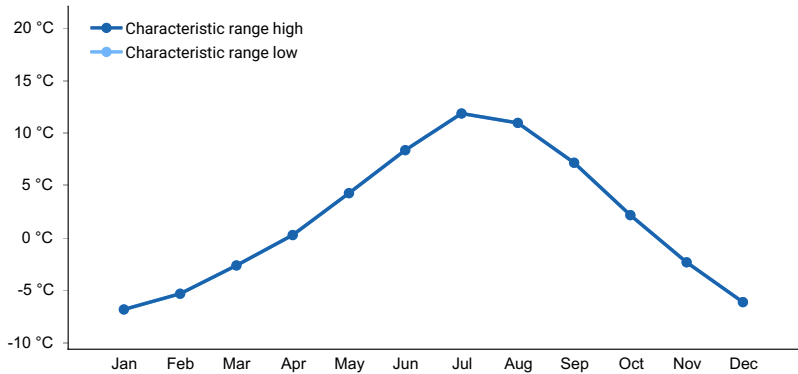


Figure 2. Monthly minimum temperature range

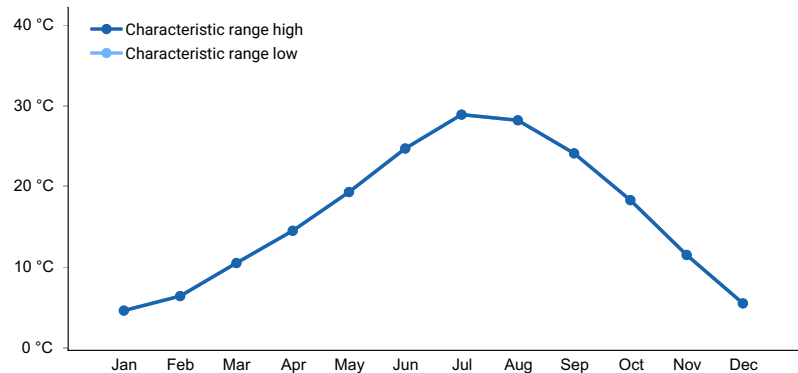


Figure 3. Monthly maximum temperature range

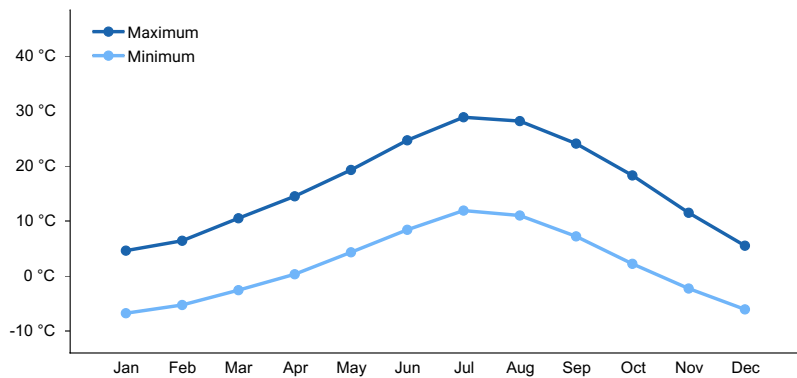


Figure 4. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

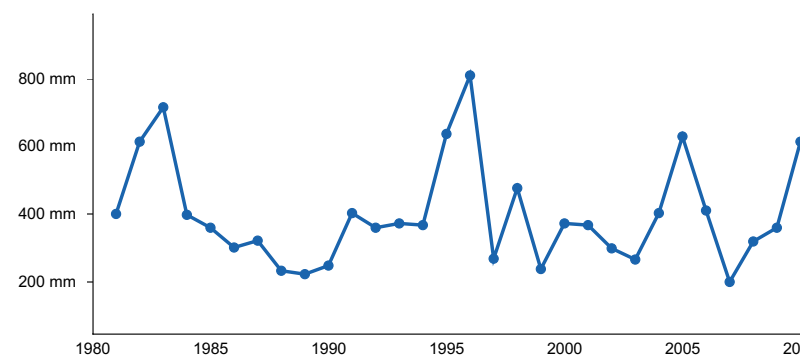


Figure 5. Annual precipitation pattern

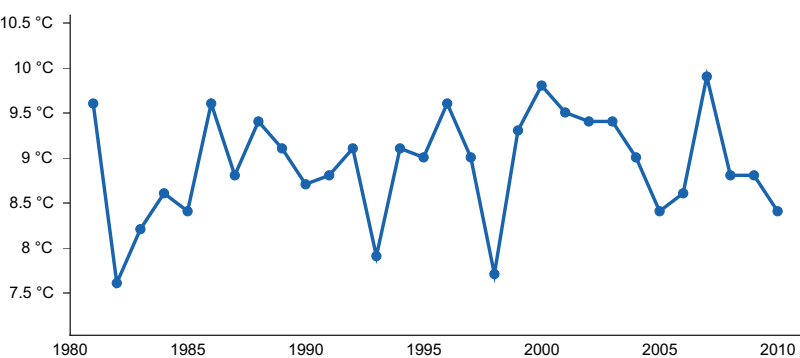


Figure 6. Annual average temperature pattern

### Climate stations used

- (1) LEE VINING [USC00044881], Lee Vining, CA

### Influencing water features

The Steep Rocky Loam (BLM) site is not influenced by water features.

### Soil features

The soil is shallow and well drained. It was formed in residuum or colluvium from granite. The soil surface is very cobbly loamy sand or very bouldery coarse sandy loam. The soil has over 20 percent rock cover on the soil surface and over 20 percent rock volume in the soil subsurface.

Soil Survey Area: Component (Mapunit symbol)  
 CA732: Avalmount (342bo); Cashbaugh (161bo); Pass Canyon family (280bo); Vitrandic Torripsamments (342bo); Xeric Torriorthents (280bo)  
 CA802: Avalmount (342); Cashbaugh (161); Pass Canyon family (280); Vitrandic Torripsamments (342); Xeric Torriorthents (280)

**Table 4. Representative soil features**

Parent material	(1) Residuum–granite (2) Colluvium–granite
Surface texture	(1) Very cobbly loamy sand (2) Very bouldery coarse sandy loam
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Moderately rapid to rapid
Depth to restrictive layer	25–102 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	12–21%
Surface fragment cover >3"	12–18%
Available water capacity (Depth not specified)	2.29–8.89 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (Depth not specified)	0%
Electrical conductivity (Depth not specified)	0 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (Depth not specified)	0
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (Depth not specified)	6.6–8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	15–27%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	7–17%

## Ecological dynamics

Disturbance Response Group (DRG) 9 consists of 10 ecological sites R026XY010NV, R026XY103NV, R026XY017NV, R026XY008NV, R026XY018NV, R026XY015NV, R026XY026NV, R026XF004CA, R026XF070CA, and R026XF069CA (Stringham et al. 2021). The Steep Rocky Loam (BLM) site is similar to sites found in DRG 9. Precipitation for these sites ranges from 10 to 14 inches. Slopes range from 0 to 75 percent but slopes from 2 to 50 percent are typical. Elevations range from 4,500 to 7,900 feet. Soil on these sites range from shallow to very deep and are usually modified by high volumes of rock fragments on the soil surface and throughout the profile. These soils are typically well to excessively drained and have low available water capacity. These sites are dominated by big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) and/or antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*) with an understory of needlegrasses (*Achnatherum* spp.) or needle and thread grass (*Hesperostipa comata*). This site exists in the transition zone between the droughty Wyoming and Lahontan sagebrush sites and the productive mountain big sagebrush sites. Three subspecies of big sagebrush may be present on this site: Wyoming (*A. tridentata* ssp. *wyomingensis*), mountain (*A. tridentata* ssp. *vaseyana*), and/or basin (*A. tridentata* ssp. *tridentata*). This site exists in the transition zone between the droughty Wyoming and Lahontan sagebrush sites and the productive mountain big sagebrush sites. Indian ricegrass (*Achnatherum hymenoides*), bluegrasses (*Poa* spp.) and other perennial grasses are also common. Other shrubs include spiny hopsage (*Grayia spinosa*), ephedra (*Ephedra* spp.) and rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus* spp. and *Ericameria* spp.). Average annual production ranges from 450 to 800 lb/ac.

## General State and Transition Model Narrative for Group 9

Reference State 1.0: The Reference State 1.0 is a representative of the natural range of variability under pristine conditions. The reference state has three general community phases; a shrub-grass dominant phase, a perennial grass dominant phase and a shrub dominant phase. State dynamics are maintained by interactions between climatic patterns and disturbance regimes. Negative feedbacks enhance ecosystem resilience and contribute to the stability of the state. These include the presence of all structural and functional groups, low fine fuel loads, and retention of organic matter and nutrients. Plant community phase changes are primarily driven by fire, periodic drought and/or insect or disease attack.

Community Phase 1.1: Thurber's needlegrass is codominant with big sagebrush. Sagebrush may be a mix of Wyoming big sagebrush, basin big sagebrush, and mountain big sagebrush. Pinyon and/or juniper may be present.

Community Phase Pathway 1.1a, from Phase 1.1 to 1.2: Low severity fire creates a sagebrush/grass mosaic. High severity fire significantly reduces sagebrush cover and leads to early/mid-seral community dominated by grasses and forbs. In reference condition, fires would typically be small and patchy due to low fuel loads. A severe infestation of Aroga moth could also cause a large decrease in sagebrush within the community, giving a competitive advantage to the perennial grasses and forbs.

Community Phase Pathway 1.1b, from Phase 1.1 to 1.3: Time and lack of disturbance such as fire or drought allows shrubs to become dominant and may reduce grass production. Excessive herbivory and/or long-term drought may also reduce the perennial understory.

Community Phase 1.2: This community phase is characteristic of a post-disturbance, early to mid-seral community. Bitterbrush, ephedra, and spiny hopsage may be sprouting and may become the dominant shrubs in this phase. Big sagebrush is killed by fire and is reduced within the burned community but may be present in unburned patches. Thurber's needlegrass can experience high mortality from fire and may be reduced in the community for several years. With low fire severity, Thurber's needlegrass may dominate the site post-fire.

Community Phase Pathway 1.2a, from Phase 1.2 to 1.1: Time and lack of disturbance allows for shrubs to reestablish.

Community Phase 1.3: Big sagebrush increases in the absence of disturbance. Thurber's needlegrass and other perennial grasses reduced. Decadent sagebrush dominates the overstory and the deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses in the understory are reduced either from competition with shrubs or from herbivory. Bluegrass (*Poa*) species will likely increase in the understory and may be the dominant grass on the site. Pinyon and/or juniper may be present but constitute less than 2 percent of production on the site.

Community Phase Pathway 1.3a, from Phase 1.3 to 1.2: Fire would decrease or eliminate the overstory of sagebrush and allow for the perennial bunchgrasses to dominate the site. Fires would typically be small and patchy due to low fuel loads. A fire following an unusually wet spring or a change in management may be more severe and reduce sagebrush cover to trace amounts. A severe infestation of Aroga moth could also cause a large decrease in sagebrush within the community, giving a competitive advantage to the perennial grasses and forbs.

Community Phase Pathway 1.3b, from Phase 1.3 to 1.1: Aroga moth infestation and/or release from growing season herbivory may reduce sagebrush dominance and allow recovery of the perennial bunchgrass understory.

T1A: Transition from Reference State 1.0 to Current Potential State 2.0: Trigger: This transition is caused by the introduction of non-native annual weeds, such as cheatgrass, mustards and Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*). Slow variables: Over time the annual non-native plants will increase within the community decreasing organic matter inputs from deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses resulting in reductions in soil water availability for perennial bunchgrasses. Threshold: Any amount of introduced non-native species causes an immediate decrease in the resilience of the site. Annual non-native species cannot be easily removed from the system and have the potential to significantly alter disturbance regimes from their historic range of variation.

Current Potential State 2.0: This state is similar to the Reference State 1.0. Ecological function has not changed; however the resiliency of the state has been reduced by the presence of invasive weeds. This state has the same three general community phases. Negative feedbacks enhance ecosystem resilience and contribute to the stability of the state. These include the presence of all structural and functional groups, low fine fuel loads and retention of organic matter and nutrients. Positive feedbacks decrease ecosystem resilience and stability of the state. These include the non-natives high seed output, persistent seed bank, rapid growth rate, ability to cross-pollinate and adaptations for seed dispersal. Additionally, the presence of highly flammable, non-native species reduces state resilience because these species can promote fire where historically fire has been infrequent leading to positive feedbacks that further the degradation of the system.

Community Phase 2.1: Thurber's needlegrass is codominant with big sagebrush. Sagebrush may be a mix of Wyoming big sagebrush, basin big sagebrush, and mountain big sagebrush. Pinyon and/or juniper may be present.

Non-native annual species are present in minor amounts.

Community Phase Pathway 2.1a, from Phase 2.1 to 2.2: Fire would decrease or eliminate the overstory of sagebrush and allow for the perennial bunchgrasses to dominate the site. Fires would typically be small and patchy due to low fuel loads. A fire following an unusually wet spring or a change in management may be more severe and reduce sagebrush cover to trace amounts. A severe infestation of Aroga moth could also cause a large decrease in sagebrush within the community, giving a competitive advantage to the perennial grasses and forbs. Annual non-native species generally respond well after fire and may be stable or increasing within the community.

Community Phase Pathway 2.1b, from Phase 2.1 to 2.3: Time, long-term drought, grazing management that favors shrubs or combinations of these would allow the sagebrush overstory to increase and dominate the site, causing a reduction in the perennial bunchgrasses. However, Sandberg bluegrass and/or squirreltail may increase in the understory depending on the grazing management. Heavy spring grazing will favor an increase in sagebrush. Annual non-native species may be stable or increasing within the understory.

Community Phase 2.2: This community phase is characteristic of a post-disturbance, early to mid-seral community. Bitterbrush, ephedra, and spiny hopsage may be sprouting and may become the dominant shrubs in this phase. Big sagebrush is killed by fire and is reduced within the burned community but may be present in unburned patches. Thurber's needlegrass can experience high mortality from fire and may be reduced in the community for several years. With low fire severity, Thurber's needlegrass may dominate the site post-fire. Annual non-native species generally respond well after fire and may be stable or increasing within the community.

Community Phase Pathway 2.2a, from Phase 2.2 to 2.1: Absence of disturbance over time allows for the sagebrush to recover may be combined with grazing management that favors shrubs.

Community Phase Pathway 2.2b, from Phase 2.2 to 2.4: Higher than normal spring precipitation favors annual non-native species such as cheatgrass. Non-native annual species will increase in production and density throughout the site. Perennial bunchgrasses may also increase in production.

Community Phase 2.3(At Risk): Big sagebrush increases in the absence of disturbance. Thurber's needlegrass and other perennial grasses reduced. Decadent sagebrush dominates the overstory and the deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses in the understory are reduced either from competition with shrubs or from herbivory. Bluegrass (Poa) species will likely increase in the understory and may be the dominant grass on the site. Pinyon and/or juniper may be increasing. Annual non-native species are present. This phase may be at risk of transitioning to the Shrub State 3.0 or the Tree State 5.0.

Community Phase Pathway 2.3a, from Phase 2.3 to 2.2: Fire would decrease or eliminate the overstory of sagebrush and allow for the perennial bunchgrasses to dominate the site. Fires would typically be small and patchy due to low fuel loads. A fire following an unusually wet spring or a change in management may be more severe and reduce sagebrush cover to trace amounts. A severe infestation of Aroga moth could also cause a large decrease in sagebrush within the community, giving a competitive advantage to the perennial grasses and forbs.

Community Phase Pathway 2.3b, from Phase 2.3 to 2.1: Low severity fire or Aroga moth infestation creates sagebrush/grass mosaic. Other disturbances/practices include brush management with minimal soil disturbance; late-fall/winter grazing causing mechanical damage to sagebrush.

Community Phase Pathway 2.3c, from Phase 2.3 to 2.4: Fall, winter, and spring precipitation and temperatures mediate the ability for annual grasses and perennial grasses to germinate and/or survive. Higher than normal spring precipitation creates high annual production of annual grasses (Bradley et al. 2016). Non-native annual species increase in production and density throughout the site. Perennial bunchgrasses may also increase in production.

Community Phase 2.4 (At Risk): This community is at risk of crossing into an annual state. Native bunchgrasses dominate; however, annual non-native species such as cheatgrass may be sub or co-dominant in the understory. Annual production and abundance of these annuals may increase drastically in years with heavy spring precipitation. Seeded species may be present. Sagebrush may be present if coming from phase 2.3. This site is susceptible to further degradation from grazing, drought, and fire. Pinyon and/or juniper may be present.

Community Phase Pathway 2.4a, from phase 2.4 to 2.3: Rainfall patterns favoring perennial bunchgrasses. Less than normal spring precipitation followed by higher than normal summer precipitation will increase perennial bunchgrass production.

Community Phase Pathway 2.4b, from phase 2.4 to 2.2: Fall, winter, and spring precipitation and temperatures mediate the ability for annual grasses and perennial grasses to germinate and/or survive. Depending on temperatures and precipitation in winter and spring, annual grass production may be reduced in favor of perennial bunchgrasses.

T2A: Transition from Current Potential State 2.0 to Shrub State 3.0: Trigger: Inappropriate, long-term grazing of perennial bunchgrasses during growing season would favor shrubs and initiate transition to Community Phase 3.1. Fire would cause a transition to Community Phase 3.2. Slow variables: Long term decrease in deep-rooted perennial grass density resulting in a decrease in organic matter inputs and subsequent soil water decline. Threshold: Loss of deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses changes spatial and temporal nutrient cycling and redistribution and reduces soil organic matter.

T2B: Transition from Current Potential State 2.0 to Annual State 4.0: Trigger: Fire or a failed range seeding leads to plant community phase 4.1. Inappropriate grazing management that favors shrubs in the presence of non-native annual species leads to community phase 4.2. Slow variables: Increased production and cover of non-native annual species. Threshold: Cheatgrass or other non-native annuals dominate understory.

T2C: Transition from Current Potential State 2.0 to Tree State 5.0: Trigger: Lack of fire allows for trees to dominate site; may be coupled with inappropriate grazing management that reduces fine fuels. Slow variables: Increased establishment and cover of juniper/pinyon trees, reduction in organic matter inputs. Threshold: Trees overtop Wyoming big sagebrush and out-compete shrubs for water and sunlight. Shrub skeletons exceed live shrubs with minimal recruitment of new cohorts.

Shrub State 3.0: This state has two community phases; a big sagebrush dominated phase and a sprouting shrub dominated phase. This state is a product of many years of heavy grazing during time periods harmful to perennial bunchgrasses. Sandberg bluegrass will increase with a reduction in deep rooted perennial bunchgrass competition and become the dominant grass. Sagebrush dominates the overstory and sprouting shrubs may be a significant component. Sagebrush canopy cover is high and sagebrush may be decadent, reflecting stand maturity and lack of seedling establishment due to competition with mature plants. The shrub overstory and Sandberg bluegrass understory dominate site resources such that soil water, nutrient capture, nutrient cycling and soil organic matter are temporally and spatially redistributed.

Community Phase 3.1(At Risk): Big sagebrush dominates overstory. Thurber's needlegrass and other perennial grasses are reduced, with bluegrass species dominant in the understory. Pinyon and juniper may be present. Annual non-native species may be present. Bare ground may be significant. Seeded species may be present. Pinyon and/or juniper may be present or increasing.

Community Phase Pathway 3.1a, from Phase 3.1 to 3.2: Fire would decrease or eliminate the overstory of sagebrush. A severe infestation of Aroga moth could also cause a large decrease in sagebrush within the community, giving a competitive advantage to bluegrasses, forbs and sprouting shrubs. Heavy fall grazing causing mechanical damage to shrubs, and/or brush treatments with minimal soil disturbance, would greatly reduce the overstory shrubs and allow for bluegrasses to dominate the site.

Community Phase 3.2(At Risk): Bluegrass species dominate the understory. Sprouting shrubs may be present. Perennial grasses trace or missing. Annual non-native species dominate understory. Bare ground may be significant. Seeded species may be present.

Community Phase Pathway 3.2a, from Phase 3.2 to 3.1: Absence of disturbance over time would allow for sagebrush and other shrubs to recover.

T3A: Transition from Shrub State 3.0 to Annual State 4.0: Trigger: Fire or inappropriate grazing management can eliminate the Sandberg bluegrass understory and transition to community phase 4.1 or 4.2. Slow variable: Increased seed production and cover of annual non-native species. Threshold: Increased, continuous fine fuels modify the fire regime by changing intensity, size and spatial variability of fires. Changes in plant community



composition and spatial variability of vegetation due to the loss of perennial bunchgrasses and sagebrush truncate energy capture and impact the nutrient cycling and distribution.

T3B: Transition from Shrub State 3.0 to Tree State 5.0: Trigger: Lack of fire allows for trees to dominate site; may be coupled with inappropriate grazing management that reduces fine fuels. Slow variables: Increased establishment and cover of juniper/pinyon trees, reduction in organic matter inputs. Threshold: Trees overtop Wyoming big sagebrush and out-compete shrubs for water and sunlight. Shrub skeletons exceed live shrubs with minimal recruitment of new cohorts.

R3A: Restoration from Shrub State 3.0 to Seeded State 6.0: Brush management, herbicide, and seeding of crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*) and/or other desired species.

Annual State 4.0: This state has two community phases; one dominated by annual non-native species and the other is a shrub dominated state. This state is characterized by the dominance of annual non-native species such as cheatgrass in the understory. Sagebrush and/or sprouting shrubs may dominate the overstory.

Community Phase 4.1: Annual non-native plants such as cheatgrass dominate the site. Perennial plants are a minor component or missing from the site. This phase may have seeded species present if resulting from a failed seeding attempt.

Community Phase Pathway 4.1a, from Phase 4.1 to 4.2: Time and lack of disturbance allows for shrubs to reestablish. Sprouting shrubs such as ephedra, desert peach and rabbitbrush will be the first to reappear after fire. Probability of sagebrush establishment is extremely low.

Community Phase 4.2: Annual non-native species dominate understory. Sagebrush or sprouting shrubs dominate the overstory. Perennial bunchgrasses are a minor component. This phase may have seeded species present if resulting from a failed seeding attempt.

Community Phase Pathway 4.2a, from Phase 4.2 to 4.1: Fire kills shrubs and allows for annual non-native species to dominate the site.

R4A: Restoration from Annual State 4.0 to Seeded State 6.0: Application of herbicide and seeding of desired species. Probability of success is best immediately following fire.

Tree State 5.0: This state has two community phases that are characterized by the dominance of Utah juniper and/or singleleaf pinyon in the overstory. Wyoming big sagebrush and perennial bunchgrasses may still be present, but they are no longer controlling site resources. Soil moisture, soil nutrients, soil organic matter distribution and nutrient cycling have been spatially and temporally altered.

Community Phase 5.1: Utah juniper and/or singleleaf pinyon dominate overstory. Big sagebrush is subdominant and may be decadent. Thurber's needlegrass and other perennial grasses are reduced. Annual non-native may be present. Bare ground areas are large and connected.

Community Phase Pathway 5.1a, from Phase 5.1 to 5.2: Absence of disturbance over time allows for tree cover and density to further increase and out-compete the herbaceous understory species.

Community Phase 5.2 (At Risk): Utah juniper and/or singleleaf pinyon dominates the site and tree leader growth is minimal; annual non-native species may be the dominant understory species and will typically be found under the tree canopies. Trace amounts of sagebrush may be present, however dead shrub skeletons will be more numerous than living sagebrush. Bunchgrasses may or may not be present. Bottlebrush squirreltail or mat forming forbs may be present in trace amounts. Bare ground interspaces are large and connected. Soil redistribution is evident.

Community Phase Pathway 5.2a, from phase 5.2 to 5.1: Manual or mechanical thinning of trees allows understory regrowth due to less competition for resources. This treatment is typically done for fuel management.

T5A: Transition from Tree State 5.0 to Annual State 4.0: Trigger: Catastrophic crown fire would reduce or eliminate trees to transition the site to 4.1. Tree removal when annual non-natives such as cheatgrass are present would also transition the site to state 4.0. Slow variable: Increased seed production and cover of annual non-native species.

Threshold: Increased, continuous fine fuels modify the fire regime by changing intensity, size and spatial variability of fires. Changes in plant community composition and spatial variability of vegetation due to the loss of perennial bunchgrasses and sagebrush truncate energy capture and impact the nutrient cycling and distribution.

R5A: Restoration from Tree State 5.0 to Shrub State 3.0: Tree removal with no seeding. Treatments done in phase 5.1 will be more successful. Tree removal practices that minimize soil disturbance are recommended. Probability of success declines with increased presence of nonnative annual species.

R5B: Restoration from Tree State 5.0 to Seeded State 6.0: Tree removal and seeding of desired species. Tree removal practices that minimize soil disturbance are recommended. Probability of success declines with increased presence of nonnative annual species.

Seeded State 6.0: This state has three community phases; a grass-dominated phase, and grass-shrub dominated phase, and a shrub dominated phase. This state is characterized by the dominance of seeded introduced wheatgrass species in the understory. Forage kochia (*Bassia prostrata*) and other desired seeded species including Wyoming big sagebrush, native and non-native forbs may be present.

Community Phase 6.1: Seeded wheatgrass and/or other seeded species dominate the community. Non-native annual species are present. Trace amounts of big sagebrush may be present, especially if seeded.

Community Phase Pathway 6.1a, from Phase 6.1 to 6.2: Time and lack of disturbance allow shrubs to increase. Pathway may be coupled with inappropriate grazing management.

Community Phase 6.2: Big sagebrush increases and may be codominant with seeded wheatgrass species. Annual non-native species may be present in trace amounts.

Community Phase Pathway 6.2a, from Phase 6.2 to 6.1: Fire and/or brush management allows seeded grasses to return to dominance.

Community Phase Pathway 6.2b, from Phase 6.2 to 6.3: Inappropriate grazing reduces bunchgrasses and increases density of sagebrush. This is usually a slow transition.

Community Phase 6.3: Sagebrush and/or sprouting shrubs dominate. Seeded wheatgrass species decrease. Annual non-native species may be present. Pinyon and /or juniper may be present.

Community Phase Pathway 6.3a, from Phase 6.3 to 6.1: Fire or brush management with minimal soil disturbance.

## **State and transition model**

#### Reference State 1.0 Community Phase Pathways

- 1.1a: Low severity fire creates sagebrush/grass mosaic; high severity fire significantly reduces sagebrush cover and leads to early/mid-seral community, dominated by grasses and forbs.
- 1.1b: Time and lack of disturbance such as fire or drought. Excessive herbivory and/or long-term drought may also reduce perennial understory.
- 1.2a: Time and lack of disturbance allows for shrub regeneration.
- 1.3a: High severity fire significantly reduces sagebrush cover leading to early or mid-seral community.
- 1.3b: Low severity fire creates sagebrush/grass mosaic. Brush management with minimal soil disturbance reduces sagebrush.

Transition T1A: Introduction of non-native annual species.

#### Current Potential State 2.0 Community Phase Pathways

- 2.1a: Low severity fire creates sagebrush/grass mosaic; high severity fire significantly reduces sagebrush cover and leads to early/mid-seral community dominated by grasses and forbs; non-native annual species present.
- 2.1b: Time and lack of disturbance. Inappropriate grazing management and/or long-term drought may also reduce perennial understory.
- 2.2a: Time and lack of disturbance allows for regeneration of sagebrush.
- 2.2b: Fall and spring growing conditions that favors the germination and production of non-native, annual grasses. Pathway typically occurs 3 to 5 years post-fire and 2.4 may be a transitory plant community.
- 2.3a: High severity fire significantly reduces sagebrush cover leading to early or mid-seral community. Brush management with minimal soil disturbance reduces sagebrush.
- 2.3b: Low severity fire creates sagebrush/grass mosaic. Brush management with minimal soil disturbance reduces sagebrush.
- 2.3c: Fall and spring growing season conditions that favors the germination and production of non-native annual grasses. 2.4 may be a transitory plant community.
- 2.4a: Growing season conditions favoring perennial bunchgrass production and reduced cheatgrass production.
- 2.4b: Growing season conditions favoring perennial bunchgrass production and reduced cheatgrass production.

Transition T2A: Inappropriate grazing management (to 3.1), or fire, if coming from phase 2.3 or 2.4 (to 3.2).

Transition T2B: Severe fire and/or multiple fires, or brush management causing severe soil disturbance.

Transition T2C: Time and lack of fire allows pinyon and/or juniper to establish and dominate site resources; may be coupled with inappropriate grazing management that reduces perennial grass density and increases tree establishment.

#### Shrub State 3.0 Community Phase Pathways

- 3.1a: Low severity fire, non-native annual species increase with higher than normal spring precipitation.
- 3.2a: Time and lack of disturbance.

Transition T3A: Catastrophic fire or multiple fires, and/or treatments that disturb the existing plant community (to 4.1). Transition to 4.2 caused by continued inappropriate grazing management in the presence of annual grasses.

Transition T3B: Time and lack of fire allows pinyon and/or juniper to establish and dominate site resources; may be coupled with inappropriate grazing management that reduces perennial grass density and increases tree establishment.

Restoration R3A: Brush management combined with seeding of desired species.

#### Annual State 4.0 Community Phase Pathways

- 4.1a: Time and lack of disturbance. Big sagebrush is unlikely to reestablish and may take many years.
- 4.2a: Fire.

Restoration R4A: Application of herbicide and seeding of desired species (probability of success best immediately following fire).

#### Tree State 5.0 Community Phase Pathways

- 5.1a: Time and lack of disturbance allows for maturation of tree community.
- 5.2a: Tree thinning treatment (typically for fuels management).

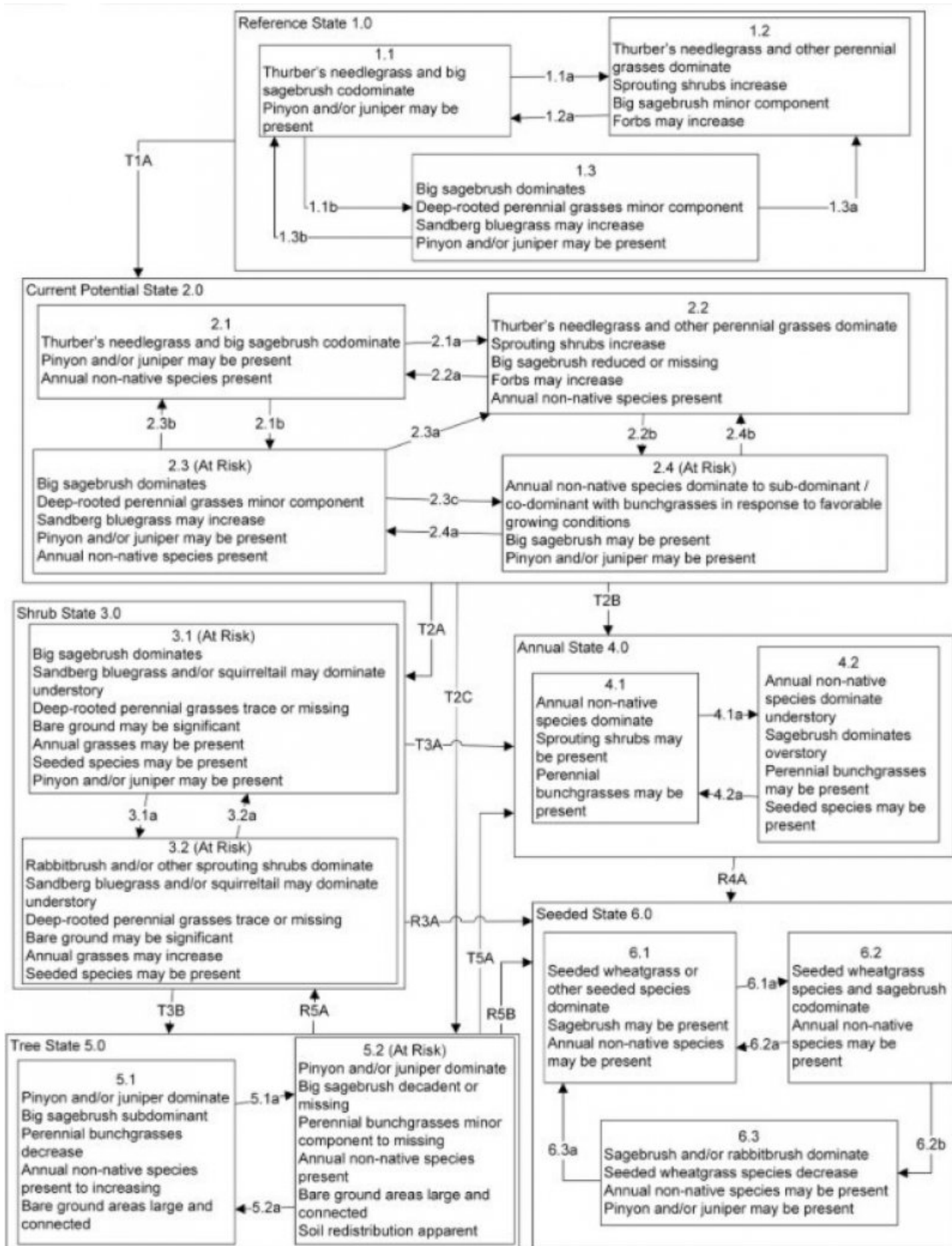
Transition T5A: Catastrophic fire (to 4.1).

Restoration R5A: Tree removal with no seeding from Phase 5.1.

Restoration R5B: Tree management coupled with seeding of desired species.

#### Seeded State 6.0 Community Phase Pathways

- 6.1a: Time and lack of disturbance, coupled with repeated spring grazing allows shrubs to regenerate.
- 6.2a: Fire and/or brush management allows seeded grasses to return to dominance.
- 6.2b: Inappropriate grazing management reduces bunchgrasses and increases density of sagebrush; usually a slow transition.
- 6.3a: Fire or brush treatment with minimal soil disturbance.



State 1

Community 1.1

# Reference Community Phase 1.1

## Dominant plant species

- big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), shrub
- antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), shrub
- Nevada jointfir (*Ephedra nevadensis*), shrub
- Indian ricegrass (*Achnatherum hymenoides*), grass
- desert needlegrass (*Achnatherum speciosum*), grass
- western needlegrass (*Achnatherum occidentale*), grass

## Additional community tables

### Inventory data references

NASIS data for surveys CA732 and CA802.

## References

Stringham, T.K., D. Snyder, P. Novak-Echenique, K. O'Neill, A. Lyons, and M. Johns. 2021. Great Basin Ecological Site Development Project: State-and-Transition Models for Major Land Resource Area 26, Nevada and Portions of California..

## Contributors

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## Approval

Kendra Moseley, 4/10/2024

## 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)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	05/13/2025
Approved by	Kendra Moseley
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

## Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:**  

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2. **Presence of water flow patterns:**

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3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:**

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4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):**

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5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:**

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6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:**

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7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):**

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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):**

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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):**

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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:**

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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):**

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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:

Sub-dominant:

Other:

Additional:

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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):**

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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth ( in):**

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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-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:**

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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:**

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