

Ecological site R034AY210WY

Dense Clay Foothills and Basins West (DC)

Accessed: 05/12/2025

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.

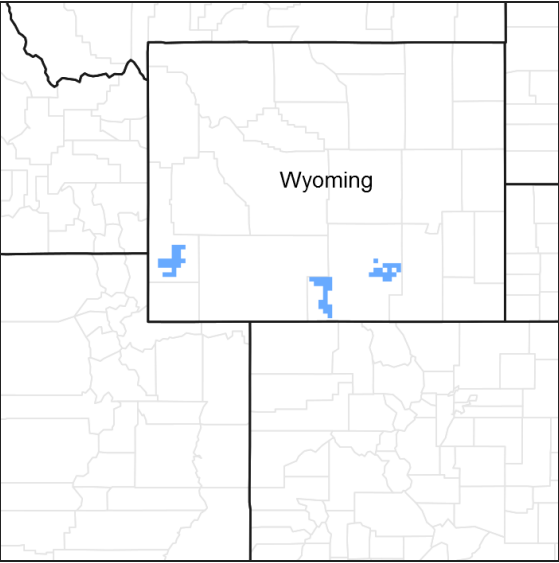


Figure 1. Mapped extent

Areas shown in blue indicate the maximum mapped extent of this ecological site. Other ecological sites likely occur within the highlighted areas. It is also possible for this ecological site to occur outside of highlighted areas if detailed soil survey has not been completed or recently updated.

Associated sites

R034AY204WY	Clayey Foothills and Basins West (Cy) Clayey
-------------	--

Similar sites

R034AY258WY	Shallow Clayey Foothills and Basins West (SwCy) Shallow Clayey (SwCy) 10-14W does not have extreme soil cracking and has early sagebrush instead of low sagebrush.
R034AY110WY	Dense Clay Green River and Great Divide Basins (DC) Dense Clay (DC) 7-9GR has lower production.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site will usually occur in a lowland position, on flat to moderately sloping land. It is found on all exposures. Slopes are mostly 5 to 40%. The elevations range from 6500 to 7500 feet, with most of the area above 7000 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Alluvial fan (2) Stream terrace
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	6,500–7,500 ft
Slope	0–60%
Ponding depth	0 in
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

Annual precipitation ranges from 10-14 inches per year. Wide fluctuations may occur in yearly precipitation and result in more dry years than those with more than normal precipitation. Temperatures show a wide range between summer and winter and between daily maximums and minimums. This is predominantly due to the high elevation and dry air, which permits rapid incoming and outgoing radiation. Cold air outbreaks in winter move rapidly from northwest to southeast and account for extreme minimum temperatures. Extreme storms may occur during the winter, but most severely affect ranch operations during late winter and spring.

Daytime winds are generally stronger than nighttime and occasional strong storms may bring brief periods of high winds with gusts to more than 50 mph.

Growth of native cool season plants begins about April 15 and continues to about August 15. Some green up of cool season plants usually occurs in September depending upon fall moisture occurrences.

For detailed information visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service National Water and Climate Center at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/cgibin/state.pl?state=wy> website. Other climate stations representative of this precipitation zone include "Border 3 N" and Kemmerer Wtr Trtmt" in Lincoln County; "Evanston 1 E" in Uinta County; and "Merna" in Sublette County.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	67 days
Freeze-free period (average)	97 days
Precipitation total (average)	14 in

Influencing water features

There are no water features associated with this site.

Soil features

The soils of this site are moderately deep to very deep (greater than 20" to bedrock), well to poorly drained soils formed in alluvium. These soils have slow to very slow permeability. The topsoil, except for thin ineffectual layers, will be heavy clays and/or soils that develop large cracks when dry and are very sticky when wet. These soils are not high in salinity and /or alkalinity.

Major Soil Series correlated to this site include: Kildor, Kissick, and Elkol.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Clay (2) Sandy clay
Family particle size	(1) Clayey
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Very slow to slow
Soil depth	20–60 in
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (0–40in)	3–4.5 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0–40in)	0–15%
Electrical conductivity (0–40in)	0–8 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0–40in)	0–5
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0–40in)	6.6–8.4
Subsurface fragment volume ≤3" (Depth not specified)	0%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0%

Ecological dynamics

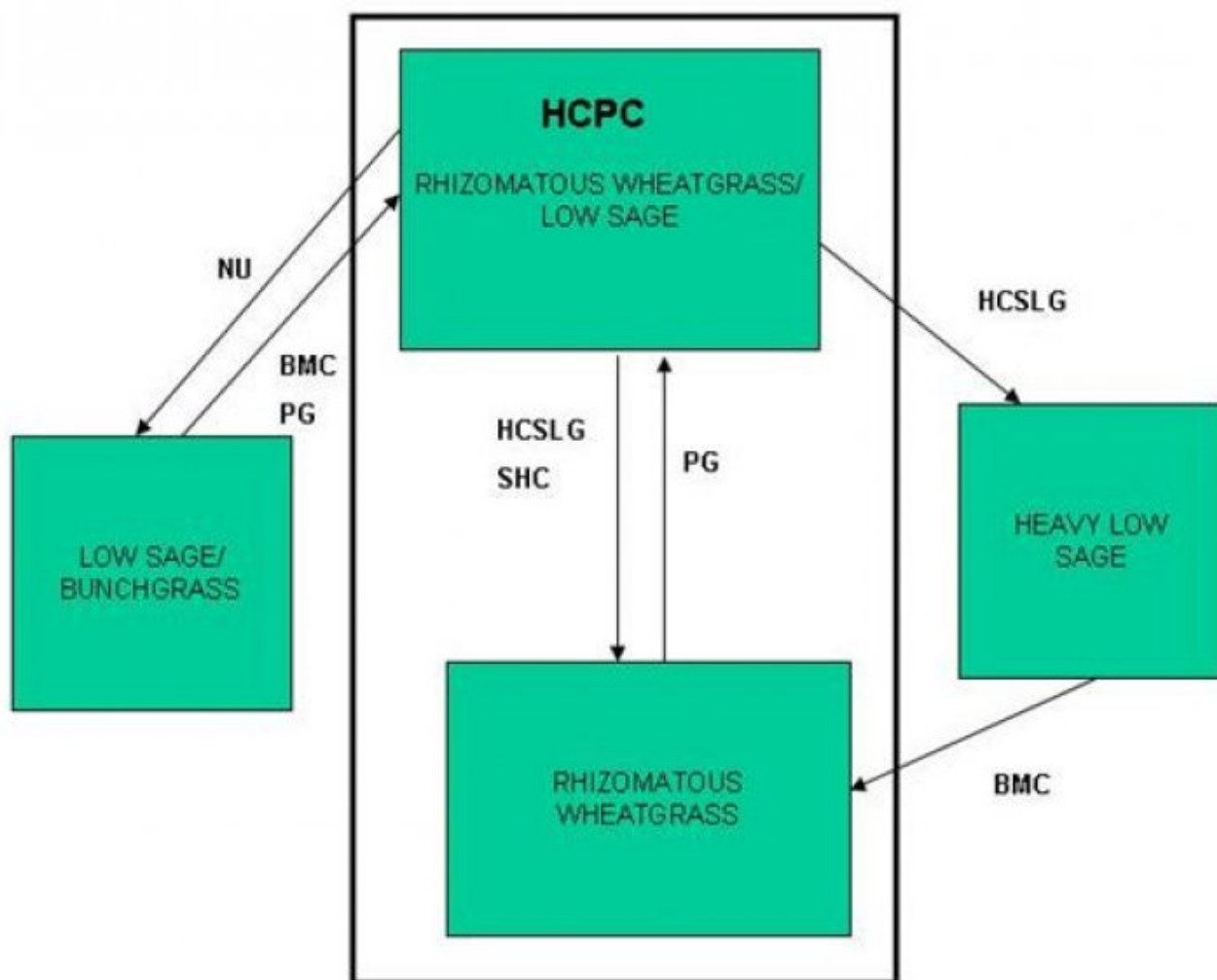
As this site deteriorates from improper grazing management, low sagebrush and green rabbitbrush will increase. Indian ricegrass will decrease in frequency and production.

These plant communities narratives may not represent every possibility, but they probably are the most prevalent and repeatable plant communities. The plant composition tables shown above have been developed from the best available knowledge at the time of this revision. As more data is collected, some of these plant communities may be revised or removed, and new ones may be added. None of these plant communities should necessarily be thought of as “Desired Plant Communities”. According to the USDA NRCS National Range and Pasture Handbook, Desired Plant Communities (DPC’s) will be determined by the decision-makers and will meet minimum quality criteria established by the NRCS. The main purpose for including any description of a plant community here is to capture the current knowledge and experience at the time of this revision.

The Historic Climax Plant Community (description follows the plant community diagram) has been determined by study of rangeland relic areas, or areas protected from excessive disturbance. Trends in plant communities going from heavily grazed areas to lightly grazed areas, seasonal use pastures, and historical accounts have also been used.

The following is a State and Transition Model Diagram that illustrates the common plant communities (states) that can occur on the site and the transitions between these communities. The ecological processes will be discussed in more detail in the plant community narratives following the diagram.

State and transition model



BMA – Brush Management (all methods)
BMC – Brush Management (chemical)
BMF – Brush Management (fire)
BMM – Brush Management (mechanical)
CSP – Chemical Seedbed Preparation
CSLG – Continuous Season-long Grazing
DR – Drainage
CSG – Continuous Spring Grazing
HB – Heavy Browse
HCSLG – Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing
HI – Heavy Inundation
LPG – Long-term Prescribed Grazing
MT – Mechanical Treatment (chiseling, ripping, pitting)

NF – No Fire
NS – Natural Succession
NWC – Noxious Weed Control
NWI – Noxious Weed Invasion
NU – No Use
P&C – Plow & Crop (including hay)
PG – Prescribed Grazing
RPT – Re-plant Trees
RS – Re-seed
SGD – Severe Ground Disturbance
SHC – Severe Hoof Compaction
WD – Wildlife Damage (Beaver)
WF – Wildfire

State 1
Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Low Sagebrush (HCPC)

Community 1.1
Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Low Sagebrush (HCPC)

The interpretive plant community for this site is the Historic Climax Plant Community. This state evolved with grazing by large herbivores and is suited for grazing by domestic livestock. Potential vegetation is estimated at 70% grasses or grass-like plants, 10% forbs and 20% woody plants. The major grasses include rhizomatous wheatgrasses, bottlebrush squirreltail, and mutton bluegrass. Other grasses and grass-like plants may include prairie junegrass, Indian ricegrass, plains reedgrass, and Canby and Sandberg bluegrass. Low sagebrush is the major woody plant. Other woody plants that may occur include early sagebrush, green rabbitbrush, and winterfat. A typical plant composition for this state consists of rhizomatous wheatgrass 30-40%, bottlebrush squirreltail 5-15%, mutton bluegrass 5-10%, other grasses and grass-like plants 10-20%, perennial forbs 5-15%, low sagebrush 10-20%, and 5-10% other woody species. Ground cover, by ocular estimate, varies from 55-60%. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 750 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 450 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 1000 lbs./acre in above average years. This state is extremely stable and well adapted to the Cool Central Desertic Basins and Plateaus climatic conditions. The diversity in plant species allows for high drought resistance. This is a sustainable plant community (site/soil stability, watershed function, and biologic integrity). Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Nonuse will convert this plant community to the Low Sagebrush/Bunchgrass State. • Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing and/or Severe Hoof Compaction will convert this plant community to the Rhizomatous Wheatgrass State. • Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the Heavy Low Sagebrush State.

Table 5. Annual production by plant type

Plant Type	Low (Lb/Acre)	Representative Value (Lb/Acre)	High (Lb/Acre)
Grass/Grasslike	315	525	700
Shrub/Vine	90	150	200
Forb	45	75	100
Total	450	750	1000

Figure 5. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
WY0301, 34AC, Upland Sites. All Upland Sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			5	40	50			5			

State 2
Low Sagebrush/Bunchgrass

Community 2.1
Low Sagebrush/Bunchgrass

This plant community is the result of protection from grazing. Low sagebrush dominates with annual production often exceeding 20%, and herbaceous forage production is decreased. The understory of grass includes rhizomatous wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, and mutton bluegrass. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 650 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 400 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 900 lbs./acre in above average years. The site is not protected from erosion due to excessive amounts of bare ground. The biotic integrity of this plant community is not intact, due to the invasion of greasewood, cheatgrass, and excessive bare ground. The state is stable and protected from excessive erosion. The biotic integrity of this plant community is usually intact, however forage value will decrease and wildlife values will shift toward different species. The watershed is functioning. Transitional pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Chemical Brush Management followed by 1 to 2 years deferment as part of a Prescribed Grazing plan will result in a plant community very similar to the Historic Climax Plant Community (Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Low Sagebrush State).

Figure 6. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
WY0301, 34AC, Upland Sites. All Upland Sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			5	40	50			5			

State 3
Rhizomatous Wheatgrass

Community 3.1
Rhizomatous Wheatgrass

This plant community is the result of brush management and/or improper grazing techniques involving severe hoof compaction of heavy clay soils. Shrubs have been removed, and rhizomatous wheatgrass is the dominant and sometime the only species present. There is a substantial amount of bare ground. Phlox is a common forb on this site. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 500 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 300 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 700 lbs./acre in above average years. The soil is not protected and erosion will increase if management is not changed. The biotic integrity may be reduced due to low vegetative production and plant diversity. The watershed is functioning at risk. Transitional pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Prescribed Grazing will result in a plant community very similar to the Historic Climax Plant Community (Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Low Sagebrush State).

Figure 7. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
WY0301, 34AC, Upland Sites. All Upland Sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			5	40	50			5			

State 4
Heavy Low Sagebrush

Community 4.1
Heavy Low Sagebrush

This plant community is the result of improper grazing. Low sagebrush dominates with annual production often exceeding 30-60%. There is mostly bare ground between sagebrush plants with an understory of grass and forbs limited to the protected areas under shrubs. The major grasses include Sandberg bluegrass and rhizomatous wheatgrass. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 300 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 100 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 400 lbs./acre in above average years. Soil erosion is accelerated because of increased bare ground. The biotic community has been compromised, but is relatively stable. The watershed is functioning, but is at risk of further degradation. Water flow patterns and pedestals are obvious. Infiltration is reduced and runoff is increased. Transitional pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Chemical Brush Management will convert this plant community to the Rhizomatous Wheatgrass State.

Figure 8. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
WY0301, 34AC, Upland Sites. All Upland Sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			5	40	50			5			

Additional community tables

Table 6. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Lb/Acre)	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1				225–300	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	225–300	–
2				38–75	
	muttongrass	POFE	<i>Poa fendleriana</i>	38–75	–
3				38–113	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	38–113	–
4				75–150	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0–38	–
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	0–38	–
	plains reedgrass	CAMO	<i>Calamagrostis montanensis</i>	0–38	–
	needle and thread	HECO26	<i>Hesperostipa comata</i>	0–38	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	0–38	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	0–38	–
Forb					
5				38–113	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0–38	–
	common yarrow	ACMI2	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	0–38	–
	textile onion	ALTE	<i>Allium textile</i>	0–38	–
	rosy pussytoes	ANRO2	<i>Antennaria rosea</i>	0–38	–
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	0–38	–
	bastard toadflax	COUM	<i>Comandra umbellata</i>	0–38	–
	tapertip hawksbeard	CRAC2	<i>Crepis acuminata</i>	0–38	–
	fleabane	ERIGE2	<i>Erigeron</i>	0–38	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	0–38	–
	aster	EUCEP2	<i>Eucephalus</i>	0–38	–
	desertparsley	LOMAT	<i>Lomatium</i>	0–38	–
	bluebells	MERTE	<i>Mertensia</i>	0–38	–
	phlox	PHLOX	<i>Phlox</i>	0–38	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	0–38	–
	groundsel	TEPHR3	<i>Tephrosieris</i>	0–38	–
Shrub/Vine					
6				75–150	
	little sagebrush	ARAR8	<i>Artemisia arbuscula</i>	75–150	–
7				38–75	
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	0–38	–
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	0–38	–

Animal community

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations

Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Low Sagebrush Plant Community (HCPC): Suitable thermal and escape cover for mule deer may be limited due to the low height and density of woody plants. However, sagebrush, which can approach

15% protein and 40-60% digestibility, provides important winter forage for mule deer and antelope. Year-round habitat is provided for sage grouse and many other sagebrush obligate species such as the sage sparrow, sage thrasher, pygmy rabbit, sagebrush vole, horned lizard, and pronghorn antelope. Open spaces in the sagebrush canopy are potential sage grouse lek locations. Other birds that would frequent this plant community include horned larks and golden eagles.

Low Sagebrush/Bunchgrass Plant Community: This plant community may be beneficial for the same wildlife that would use the Historic Climax Plant Community. However, the plant community composition is less diverse, and thus, less apt to meet the seasonal needs of these animals.

Rhizomatous Wheatgrass Plant Community: This plant community has a low level of diversity. Due to the dominance of grasses, feed for browsing animals is limited. Areas of bare ground may provide lek locations for sage grouse.

Heavy Low Sagebrush Plant Community: This plant community may be beneficial for the same wildlife that would use the Historic Climax Plant Community. However, the plant community composition is less diverse, and thus, less apt to meet the seasonal needs of these animals.

Animal Community – Grazing Interpretations

The following table lists suggested stocking rates for cattle under continuous season-long grazing under normal growing conditions. These are conservative estimates that should be used only as guidelines in the initial stages of the conservation planning process. Often, the current plant composition does not entirely match any particular plant community (as described in this ecological site description). Because of this, a field visit is recommended, in all cases, to document plant composition and production. More precise carrying capacity estimates should eventually be calculated using this information along with animal preference data, particularly when grazers other than cattle are involved. Under more intensive grazing management, improved harvest efficiencies can result in an increased carrying capacity.

Plant Community Production (lb./ac) and Carrying Capacity* (AUM/ac)

Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Low Sagebrush (HCPC) 450-1000 lb./ac and .2 AUM/ac

Low Sagebrush/Bunchgrass 400-900 lb./ac and .18 AUM/ac

Rhizomatous Wheatgrass 300-700 lb./ac and .16 AUM/ac

Heavy Low Sagebrush 100-400 lb./ac and .03 AUM/ac

* - Continuous, season-long grazing by cattle under average growing conditions.

Grazing by domestic livestock is one of the major income-producing industries in the area. Rangeland in this area may provide yearlong forage for cattle, sheep, or horses. During the dormant period, the forage for livestock use needs to be supplemented with protein because the quality does not meet minimum livestock requirements.

Hydrological functions

Water is the principal factor limiting forage production on this site. This site is dominated by soils in hydrologic group D. Infiltration is very slow. Runoff potential for this site is very high depending on ground cover. Areas where ground cover is less than 50% have the greatest potential to have reduced infiltration and higher runoff (refer to Part 630, NRCS National Engineering Handbook for detailed hydrology information).

Rills and gullies should not typically be present. Water flow patterns should be barely distinguishable if at all present. Pedestals are only slightly present in association with bunchgrasses. Litter typically falls in place, and signs of movement are not common. Chemical and physical crusts are rare to non-existent. Cryptogammic crusts are present, but only cover 1-2% of the soil surface.

Recreational uses

This site provides limited hunting opportunities.

Wood products

No appreciable wood products are present on the site.

Other products

None noted.

Inventory data references

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS clipping data and other inventory data. Field observations from range trained personnel were also used. Those involved in developing this site include: Bill Christensen, Range Management Specialist, NRCS; Karen Clause, Range Management Specialist, NRCS; and Everet Bainter, Range Management Specialist, NRCS. Other sources used as references include: USDA NRCS Water and Climate Center, USDA NRCS National Range and Pasture Handbook, and USDA NRCS Soil Surveys from various counties.

Contributors

Karen Clause

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)	K. Clause, E. Bainter
Contact for lead author	karen.clause@wy.usda.gov or 307-367-2257
Date	03/16/2007
Approved by	E. Bainter
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Rare to nonexistent. Where present, short and widely spaced.

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

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

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground can range from 20-45%.
-
5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Active gullies should not be present.
-
6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Rare to nonexistent.
-
7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Herbaceous litter expected to move only in small amounts (to leeward side of shrubs) due to wind. Large woody debris from sagebrush will show no movement.
-
8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Soil Stability Index ratings range from 3 (interspaces) to 6 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 4.0 or greater.
-
9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Soil data is limited for this site. Described A-horizons are around 4 inches (10 cm) with OM of .5 to 1%.
-
10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Plant community consists of 60-80% grasses, 10% forbs, and 10-30% shrubs. Evenly distributed plant canopy (45-70%) and litter, despite very slow to slow infiltration rates result in slight to minimal runoff. Basal cover is typically less than 5% for this site and does very little to effect runoff on this site.
-
11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** None, but some soil cracking and crusting in dry conditions is typical.
-
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: cool season rhizomatous grasses>> perennial shrubs>Mid-size, cool season bunchgrasses>short cool season bunchgrasses=perennial forbs
-
13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Some decadence, typically associated with shrub component.

-
14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter ranges from 5-20% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 20-50% expected. Herbaceous litter depth typically ranges from 3-10mm. Woody litter can be up to a couple inches (4-6 cm).
-
15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** English: 450-1000 lb/ac (750 lb/ac average); Metric 504-1120 kg/ha (840 kg/ha average).
-
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:** Bare ground greater than 60% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Rabbitbrush, low sage, Sandberg bluegrass, mutton bluegrass, and phlox are common increasers. Annual weeds such as kochia, mustards, lambsquarter, and Russian thistle are common invasive species in disturbed sites.
-
17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing, except in drought years.
-