

Ecological site R034AY258WY **Shallow Clayey Foothills and Basins West (SwCy)**

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.

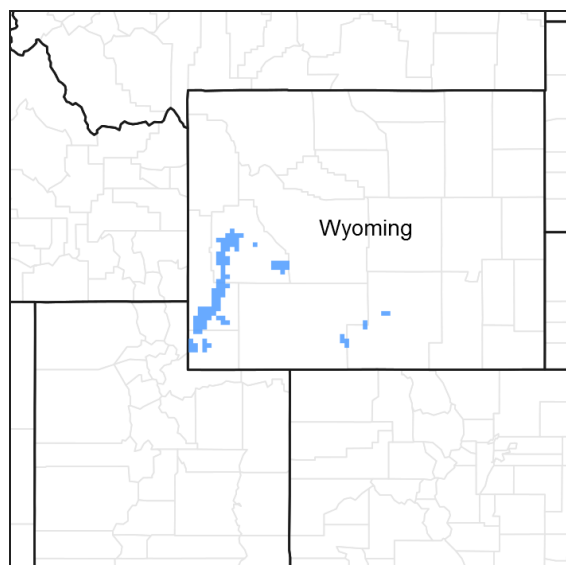


Figure 1. Mapped extent

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 |
| R034AY222WY | Loamy Foothills and Basins West (Ly) Loamy |
| R034AY250WY | Sandy Foothills and Basins West (Sy) Sandy |
| R034AY262WY | Shallow Loamy Foothills and Basins West (SwLy) Shallow Loamy |

Similar sites

| | |
|-------------|--|
| R034AY158WY | Shallow Clayey Green River and Great Divide Basins (SwCy) Shallow Clayey 7-9GR has lower production. |
| R034AY204WY | Clayey Foothills and Basins West (Cy) Clayey 10-14W has scattered big sagebrush instead of early sagebrush. |
| R034AY262WY | Shallow Loamy Foothills and Basins West (SwLy) Shallow Loamy (SwLy) 10-14W has a mixture of big sage and early sage. |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| R034AY222WY | Loamy Foothills and Basins West (Ly) Loamy 10-14W has big sagebrush instead of early sagebrush. |
|-------------|---|

Table 1. Dominant plant species

| | |
|------------|---------------|
| Tree | Not specified |
| Shrub | Not specified |
| Herbaceous | Not specified |

Physiographic features

This site usually occurs in an upland position on south and west facing slopes, but can be found on all slopes and positions. Elevations are mostly above 7000 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

| | |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Landforms | (1) Escarpment (2) Ridge |
| 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 shallow (10 to 20 inches to bedrock) well-drained soils formed in alluvium, residuum or colluvium with 35-50 percent clay overlying soft shale. They soils may have the soil texture modifier of channery.

Major soil series correlated to this site includes: Cundick, Moyerson, and some phases of Wiscow series.

Other soil series in MLRA 34A correlated to this site include: Waybe, Roxal and some phases of the Ralrod and Blazon series.

Table 4. Representative soil features

| | |
|--|---|
| Surface texture | (1) Clay loam (2) Clay (3) Silty clay |
| Family particle size | (1) Clayey |
| Drainage class | Well drained |
| Permeability class | Very slow to slow |
| Soil depth | 10–20 in |
| Surface fragment cover <=3" | 0–15% |
| Surface fragment cover >3" | 0–10% |
| Available water capacity (0-40in) | 1.8–3.2 in |
| Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-40in) | 5–15% |
| 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) | 0–20% |
| Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified) | 0–15% |

Ecological dynamics

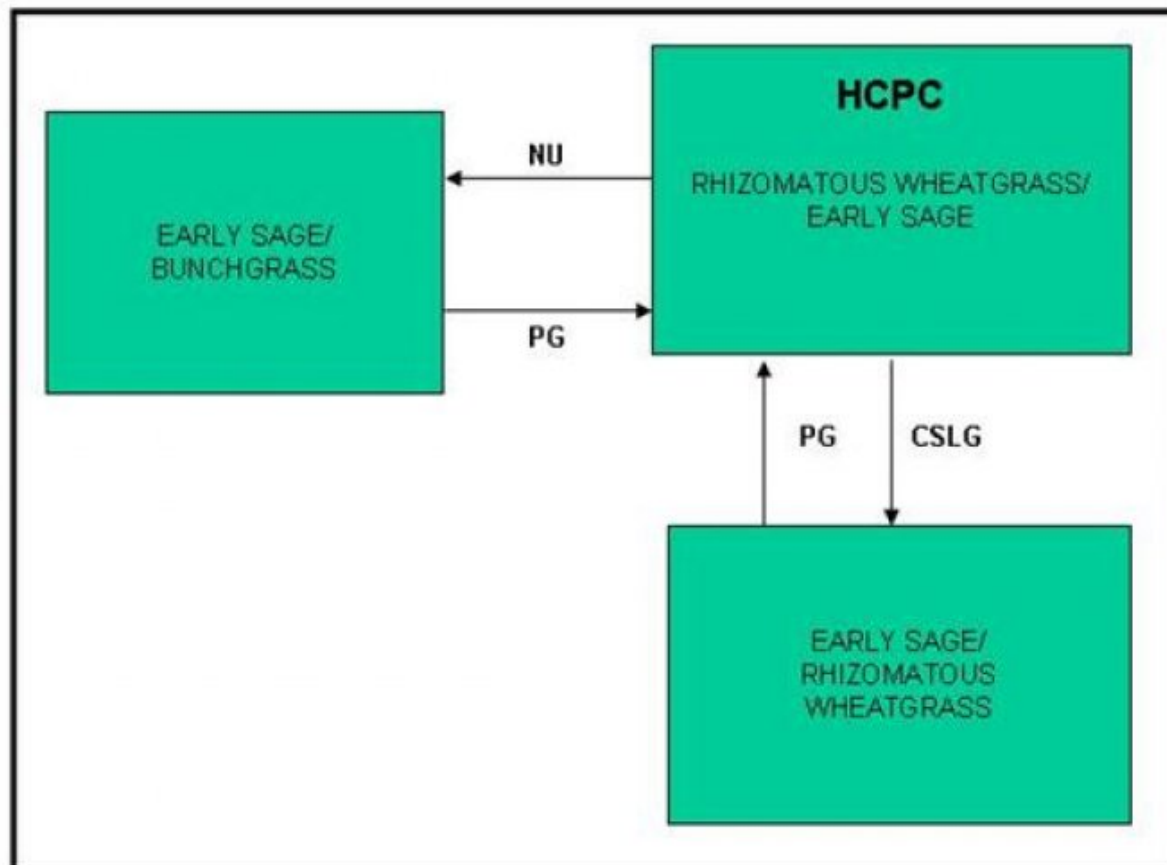
As this site deteriorates, species such as early sagebrush and unpalatable forbs will increase. Cool season bunchgrasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass and Indian ricegrass will decrease in frequency and production. This site has relatively low productivity potential, and is not well suited to grazing improvement practices unless treated as part of a larger unit containing more productive areas.

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 – Nonuse
 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/Early Sagebrush (HCPC)

Community 1.1
Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Early Sagebrush (HCPC)

The interpretive plant community for this site is the Historic Climax Plant Community. Potential vegetation is about 75% grasses or grass-like plants, 5% forbs, and 20% woody plants. The major grasses include rhizomatous wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, and mutton bluegrass. Other grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg and Canby bluegrass, prairie junegrass, needleleaf sedge, and plains reedgrass. Early sagebrush and winterfat are the dominant woody plants. Other woody plants include green rabbitbrush, greenmolly summercypress, and Gardner’s saltbush. A typical plant composition for this state consists of rhizomatous wheatgrass 25-40%, Indian ricegrass 5-10%, bottlebrush squirreltail 1-10%, mutton bluegrass 1-10%, other grasses and grass-like plants 20-30%, perennial forbs 1-5%, early sagebrush 5-10%, winterfat 5-15%, and 5-10% other woody species. Ground cover, by ocular estimate, varies from 40-50%. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 750 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 500 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 1000 lbs./acre in above average years. The 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 Early Sagebrush/Bunchgrass State. • Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert the plant community to the Early Sagebrush/Rhizomatous Wheatgrass State.

Table 5. Annual production by plant type

| Plant Type | Low (Lb/Acre) | Representative Value (Lb/Acre) | High (Lb/Acre) |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Grass/Grasslike | 375 | 562 | 750 |
| Shrub/Vine | 100 | 150 | 200 |
| Forb | 25 | 38 | 50 |
| Total | 500 | 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
Early Sagebrush/Bunchgrass

Community 2.1
Early Sagebrush/Bunchgrass

This plant community is the result of protection from grazing and fire. Early sagebrush dominates this plant community with annual production often exceeding 30-60%. The understory of grass includes rhizomatous wheatgrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, Indian ricegrass, and bluebunch wheatgrass. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 500 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 400 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 800 lbs./acre in above average years. 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: • Prescribed Grazing will return this state to near Historic Climax Plant Community (Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Early 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

Early Sagebrush/Rhizomatous Wheatgrass

Community 3.1

Early Sagebrush/Rhizomatous Wheatgrass

This plant community is the result of frequent and severe grazing. Early sagebrush is a significant component of this plant community, often exceeding 40% of the annual production. Thickspike wheatgrass, Letterman needlegrass, and unpalatable annual and perennial forbs dominate the herbaceous understory. Green rabbitbrush and bare ground have increased. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 150 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 50 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 300 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: • Prescribed Grazing will result in a plant community very similar to the Historic Climax Plant Community (Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Early 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 | | | |

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 | | | | 150–300 | |
| | western wheatgrass | PASM | <i>Pascopyrum smithii</i> | 150–300 | – |
| 2 | | | | 8–75 | |
| | muttongrass | POFE | <i>Poa fendleriana</i> | 8–75 | – |
| 3 | | | | 8–75 | |
| | squirreltail | ELEL5 | <i>Elymus elymoides</i> | 8–75 | – |
| 4 | | | | 38–75 | |
| | Indian ricegrass | ACHY | <i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i> | 38–75 | – |
| 5 | | | | 150–225 | |
| | Grass, perennial | 2GP | <i>Grass, perennial</i> | 0–38 | – |
| | Letterman's needlegrass | ACLE9 | <i>Achnatherum lettermanii</i> | 0–38 | – |
| | needleleaf sedge | CADU6 | <i>Carex duriuscula</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 | – |
| | bluebunch wheatgrass | PSSP6 | <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i> | 0–38 | – |
| Forb | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | 8–38 | |
| | 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 | – |
| | 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 | – |
| | tufted evening primrose | OECA10 | <i>Oenothera caespitosa</i> | 0–38 | – |
| | phlox | PHLOX | <i>Phlox</i> | 0–38 | – |
| | scarlet globemallow | SPCO | <i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i> | 0–38 | – |
| Shrub/Vine | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | 38–75 | |
| | little sagebrush | ARARL | <i>Artemisia arbuscula ssp. longiloba</i> | 38–75 | – |
| 8 | | | | 38–113 | |
| | winterfat | KRLA2 | <i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i> | 38–113 | – |
| 9 | | | | 38–75 | |
| | little sagebrush | ARAR8 | <i>Artemisia arbuscula</i> | 0–38 | – |
| | Gardner's saltbush | ATGA | <i>Atriplex gardneri</i> | 0–38 | – |
| | green molly | BAAM4 | <i>Bassia americana</i> | 0–38 | – |
| | yellow rabbitbrush | CHVI8 | <i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i> | 0–38 | – |

Animal community

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations

Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Early Sagebrush Plant Community (HCPC): Suitable thermal and escape cover for most wildlife is limited due to the low height of woody plants. However, early sagebrush and winterfat provide important winter forage for mule deer and antelope. When found proximal to taller sagebrush, these sites are suitable locations for sage grouse leks. Year-round habitat is provided for sage grouse and many other sagebrush obligate species such as the sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, sage thrasher, pygmy rabbit, sagebrush vole, horned lizard, and pronghorn antelope. Other birds that would frequent this plant community include horned larks and golden eagles.

Early Sagebrush/Bunchgrass Plant Community: This plant community may be beneficial for the same wildlife that would use the Historic Climax Plant Community.

Early Sagebrush/Rhizomatous Wheatgrass 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/Early Sagebrush (HCPC) 500-1000 lb./ac and .2 AUM/ac

Early Sagebrush/Bunchgrass 400-800 lb./ac and .15 AUM/ac

Early Sagebrush/Rhizomatous Wheatgrass 50-300 lb./ac and .05 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 low when soils are wet due to shallow depth to bedrock and/or impervious subsurface layer. Runoff potential for this site varies from high to moderate depending on soil depth, bedrock type (impervious vs. permeable) and ground cover (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 hunting opportunities for upland game species. Wildflowers that bloom in spring have esthetic values that appeal to visitors.

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 |
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| 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 20-50%.
-
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.
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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 1 (interspaces) to 5 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 3.0 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. Soil OM usually varies from .5 to 1.5%.
-
10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Plant community consists of 60-85% grasses, 5% forbs, and 10-35% shrubs. Evenly distributed plant canopy (30-50%) and litter plus slow to moderate 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.
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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):** None, but some soil crusting and cracking is expected during dry conditions.
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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: 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):** Minimal decadence, typically associated with shrub component.

-
14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter ranges from 20-30% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 30-50% 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: 500-1000 lb/ac (750 lb/ac average); Metric 560-1120 kg/ha (840 kg/ha average).
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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:** Bare ground greater than 75% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Rabbitbrush, Sandberg bluegrass, buckwheat, and phlox are common increasers. Annual weeds such as kochia, mustards, lambsquarter, and Russian thistle are common invasive species in disturbed sites.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing, except in drought years.
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