

Ecological site R043BY262WY

Shallow Loamy Foothills and Mountains West

Accessed: 05/10/2025

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

R043BY222WY	Loamy Foothills and Mountains West Loamy
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Similar sites

R034AY262WY	Shallow Loamy Foothills and Basins West (SwLy) Shallow Loamy (SwLy) 10-14W has lower production.
R043BY222WY	Loamy Foothills and Mountains West Loamy (Ly) 15-19W has higher production and higher shrub density.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site occurs on rolling to steep slopes and ridges.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Ridge (3) Escarpment
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	5,600–8,300 ft
Slope	5–60%
Ponding depth	0 in

Climatic features

Annual precipitation ranges from 15-19 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.

Prevailing winds are from the southwest, and strong winds are less frequent than over other areas of Wyoming. Occasional storms, however, can bring brief periods of high winds with gusts exceeding 50 mph.

Growth of native cool season plants begins about May 15 and continues to about August 15.

The following information is from the “Jackson” climate station:

Minimum Maximum 5 yrs. out of 10 between
 Frost-free period (days): 12 60 July 9 – August 12
 Freeze-free period (days): 42 100 June 20 – August 26

Annual Precipitation (inches): <11.98 >19.69 (2 years in 10)

Mean annual precipitation: 17.00 inches

Mean annual air temperature: 38.9°F (23.3°F Avg. Min. to 54.5°F Avg. Max.)

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 “Afton” in Lincoln County; and “Darwin Ranch” in Teton County.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	60 days
Freeze-free period (average)	100 days
Precipitation total (average)	19 in

Influencing water features

Soil features

The soils of this site are shallow (less than 20" to bedrock) well-drained soils formed in residuum. Textures range from very fine sandy loams to clay loams. Bedrock is commonly limestone, siltstone, or shale. This site may also include some deep gravelly and/or cobbly soils on south and west facing slopes which react like shallow soils.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Very gravelly loam (2) Cobbly clay loam (3) Channery sandy clay loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Well drained to moderately well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderate
Soil depth	10–20 in
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	0–20%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–10%
Available water capacity (0–40in)	1–4 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0–40in)	0–10%
Electrical conductivity (0–40in)	0–4 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0–40in)	0–5
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0–40in)	7.4–8.4
Subsurface fragment volume ≤3" (Depth not specified)	0–30%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0–15%

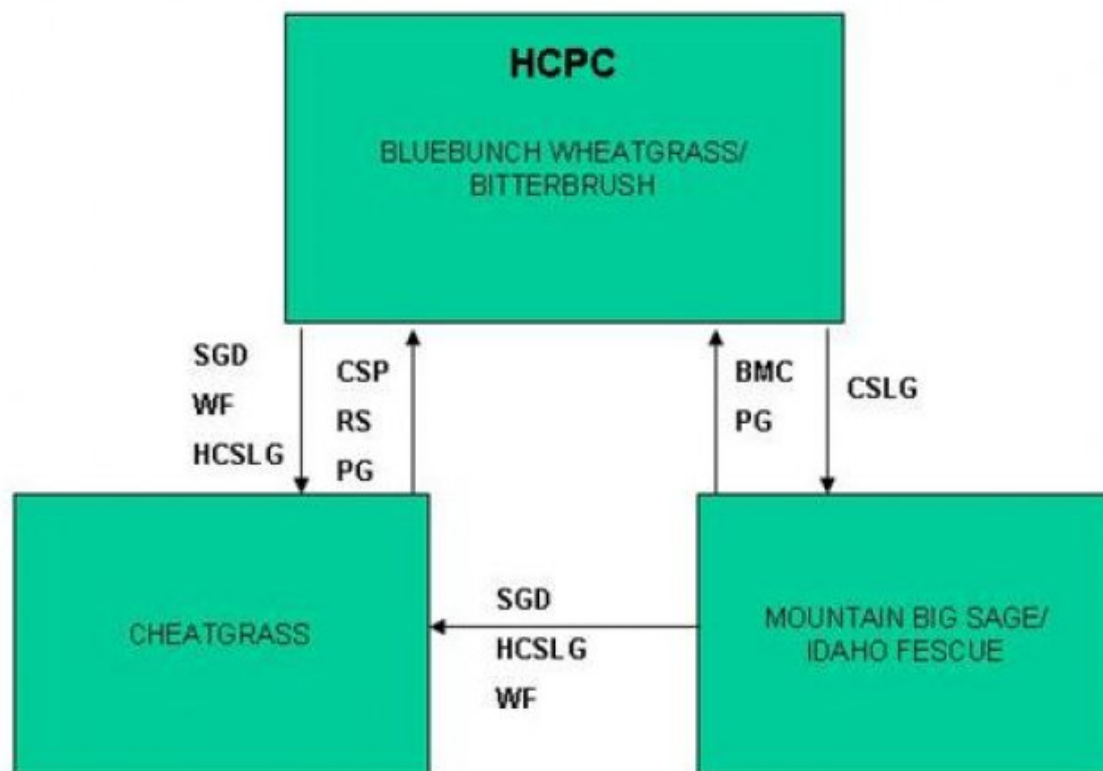
Ecological dynamics

As this site deteriorates, species such as thickspike wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, needleleaf sedge, snowbrush ceanothus, snowberry, rabbitbrush, and mountain big sagebrush will increase. Bitterbrush and cool season bunchgrasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass and spike fescue will decrease in frequency and production.

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
Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush Plant Community (HCPC)

Community 1.1
Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush Plant Community (HCPC)

The interpretive plant community for this site is the Historic Climax Plant Community. Potential vegetation is about 65% grasses or grass-like plants, 10% forbs, and 25% woody plants. The major grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, and spike fescue. Other grasses and grasslikes include Canby, mutton, big, and Sandberg bluegrass, Letterman, Columbia, and western needlegrass, needleleaf sedge, mountain brome, California and timber oatgrass, thickspike wheatgrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, oniongrass, spike trisetum, and prairie junegrass. Mountain big sagebrush and bitterbrush are the major woody plants. Other woody plants include mountain mahogany, snowbrush ceanothus, black sagebrush, rabbitbrush, snowberry, serviceberry, and chokecherry. A typical plant composition for this state consists of bluebunch wheatgrass 10-35%, Idaho fescue 10-20%, spike fescue 10-20%, other grasses and grass-like plants 10-20%, perennial forbs 5-10%, mountain big sagebrush 5-10%, bitterbrush 5-10%, and 5-15% other woody species. Ground cover, by ocular estimate, varies from 30-65%. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 1400 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 800 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 1700 lbs./acre in above average years. The following is the growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year: Growth curve number: WY0201 Growth curve name: 15-19W, UPLAND SITES Growth curve description: ALL UPLAND SITES JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC 0 0 0 0 10 35 30 20 5 0 0 0 (Monthly percentages of total annual growth) The state is extremely stable and well adapted to the Central Rocky Mountains 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: • Wildfire or Severe Ground Disturbance followed by Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the Cheatgrass State. • Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue State.

Figure 3. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
WY0201, 15-19W Upland sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
				10	35	30	20	5			

State 2
Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue Plant Community

Community 2.1
Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue Plant Community

This plant community is the result of continuous season-long grazing. Intermixed Mountain big and low sagebrush are a significant component of this plant community, often making up 15-40% of the annual production. Idaho fescue, thickspike wheatgrass, Letterman needlegrass, and unpalatable annual and perennial forbs dominate the herbaceous understory. Bitterbrush is present, but greatly suppressed by sage species. Green rabbitbrush and bare ground have increased. Western yarrow and phlox are often significant components of this site. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 950 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 500 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 1200 lbs./acre in above average years. The following is the growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year: Growth curve number: WY0201 Growth curve name: 15-19W, UPLAND SITES Growth curve description: ALL UPLAND SITES JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC 0 0 0 0 10 35 30 20 5 0 0 0 (Monthly percentages of total annual growth) 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 followed by deferment for 1 to 2 years as part of a Prescribed Grazing plan will return this state to near Historic Climax Plant Community (Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush State). Care should be taken when planning brush management to consider wildlife habitat and critical winter ranges. • Severe Ground Disturbance, Wildfire and/or Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the

Cheatgrass State.

Figure 4. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
WY0201, 15-19W Upland sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
				10	35	30	20	5			

State 3
Cheatgrass Plant Community

Community 3.1
Cheatgrass Plant Community

This plant community is the result of severe ground disturbance, including very severe grazing on south and west facing slopes in particular. Dominant species include green rabbitbrush and thickspike wheatgrass. Cheatgrass often invades, on south and west facing slopes in particular, effectively decreasing the fire interval (fewer years between fire events) and limiting the ability for non-sprouting woody plants to reestablish. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 500 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 200 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 800 lbs./acre in above average years. The following is the growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year: Growth curve number: WY0201 Growth curve name: 15-19W, UPLAND SITES Growth curve description: ALL UPLAND SITES JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC 0 0 0 0 10 35 30 20 5 0 0 0 (Monthly percentages of total annual growth) The state is vulnerable to excessive erosion. The biotic integrity of this plant community is at risk depending on how far a shift has occurred in plant composition toward cheatgrass and annual forbs. The watershed is at risk as bare ground increases. Transitional pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Chemical Seedbed Preparation and Re-seeding followed by deferment for 1 to 2 years as part of a Prescribed Grazing plan will return this plant community to near Historic Climax Plant Community (Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Big Sage State) although cheatgrass will remain a part of the plant community. Additional deferment may be necessary and should be prescribed on an individual site basis.

Figure 5. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
WY0201, 15-19W Upland sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
				10	35	30	20	5			

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Lb/Acre)	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1				140–490	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	140–490	–
2				140–280	
	Idaho fescue	FEID	<i>Festuca idahoensis</i>	140–280	–
3				140–280	
	spike fescue	LEK12	<i>Leucopoa kingii</i>	140–280	–
4				140–280	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0–70	–
	Letterman's needlegrass	ACLE9	<i>Achnatherum lettermanii</i>	0–70	–
	Columbia needlegrass	ACNE9	<i>Achnatherum nelsonii</i>	0–70	–
	western needlegrass	ACOC3	<i>Achnatherum occidentale</i>	0–70	–

	mountain brome	BRMA4	<i>Bromus marginatus</i>	0–70	–
	needleleaf sedge	CADU6	<i>Carex duriuscula</i>	0–70	–
	threadleaf sedge	CAFI	<i>Carex filifolia</i>	0–70	–
	California oatgrass	DACA3	<i>Danthonia californica</i>	0–70	–
	timber oatgrass	DAIN	<i>Danthonia intermedia</i>	0–70	–
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	0–70	–
	thickspike wheatgrass	ELLAL	<i>Elymus lanceolatus</i> ssp. <i>lanceolatus</i>	0–70	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	0–70	–
	oniongrass	MEBU	<i>Melica bulbosa</i>	0–70	–
	muttongrass	POFE	<i>Poa fendleriana</i>	0–70	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	0–70	–
	spike trisetum	TRSP2	<i>Trisetum spicatum</i>	0–70	–

Forb

5				70–140	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0–70	–
	common yarrow	ACMI2	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	0–70	–
	pussytoes	ANTEN	<i>Antennaria</i>	0–70	–
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	0–70	–
	arrowleaf balsamroot	BASA3	<i>Balsamorhiza sagittata</i>	0–70	–
	sego lily	CANU3	<i>Calochortus nuttallii</i>	0–70	–
	Indian paintbrush	CASTI2	<i>Castilleja</i>	0–70	–
	scrambled eggs	COAU2	<i>Corydalis aurea</i>	0–70	–
	fleabane	ERIGE2	<i>Erigeron</i>	0–70	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	0–70	–
	aster	EUCEP2	<i>Eucephalus</i>	0–70	–
	false goldenaster	HETER8	<i>Heterotheca</i>	0–70	–
	stoneseed	LITHO3	<i>Lithospermum</i>	0–70	–
	lupine	LUPIN	<i>Lupinus</i>	0–70	–
	creeping barberry	MARE11	<i>Mahonia repens</i>	0–70	–
	bluebells	MERTE	<i>Mertensia</i>	0–70	–
	owl's-clover	ORTHO	<i>Orthocarpus</i>	0–70	–
	locoweed	OXYTR	<i>Oxytropis</i>	0–70	–
	ragwort	PACKE	<i>Packera</i>	0–70	–
	phlox	PHLOX	<i>Phlox</i>	0–70	–
	buttercup	RANUN	<i>Ranunculus</i>	0–70	–
	stonecrop	SEDUM	<i>Sedum</i>	0–70	–
	Townsend daisy	TOWNS	<i>Townsendia</i>	0–70	–
	clover	TRIFO	<i>Trifolium</i>	0–70	–
	American vetch	VIAM	<i>Vicia americana</i>	0–70	–
	meadow deathcamas	ZIVE	<i>Zigadenus venenosus</i>	0–70	–

Shrub/Vine

6				70–140	
	big sagebrush	ARTR2	<i>Artemisia tridentata</i>	70–140	–

/				70–140	
	antelope bitterbrush	PUTR2	<i>Purshia tridentata</i>	70–140	–
8				70–210	
	Saskatoon serviceberry	AMAL2	<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	0–70	–
	black sagebrush	ARNO4	<i>Artemisia nova</i>	0–70	–
	mountain mahogany	CERCO	<i>Cercocarpus</i>	0–70	–
	snowbrush ceanothus	CEVE	<i>Ceanothus velutinus</i>	0–70	–
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	0–70	–
	singlehead goldenbush	ERSU13	<i>Ericameria suffruticosa</i>	0–70	–
	chokecherry	PRVI	<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	0–70	–
	western snowberry	SYOC	<i>Symphoricarpos occidentalis</i>	0–70	–

Animal community

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations

Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush Plant Community (HCPC): Suitable thermal and escape cover for most wildlife is limited due to the low height and density of woody plants. However, sagebrush and bitterbrush provide important winter forage for mule deer and elk. Year-round habitat is provided for many sagebrush obligate species such as the sage grouse, 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.

Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue 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.

Cheatgrass Plant Community: This plant community exhibits a low level of plant species diversity. In most cases it is not a desirable plant community to select as a wildlife habitat management objective.

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. If distribution problems occur, stocking rates must be reduced to maintain plant health and vigor.

Plant Community Production Carrying Capacity*

(lb./ac) (AUM/ac)

Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush (HCPC) 800-1700 .4

Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue 500-1200 .3

Cheatgrass 200-800 .15

* - 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. Cryptogamic crusts are present, but only cover 1-2% of the soil surface.

Recreational uses

This site provides hunting opportunities for upland game species.

Wood products

No appreciable wood products are present on the site.

Inventory data references

Inventory Data References (narrative)

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.

Inventory Data References

Data Source Number of Records Sample Period State County
SCS-RANGE-417 58 1966-1986 WY Lincoln & others

Contributors

K. 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, J. Haverkamp, 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.

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2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Barely observable.
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3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Rare to nonexistent.
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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 0-30%.
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5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Active gullies should not be present.
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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 and large woody litter not expected to move.
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8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Soil Stability Index ratings range from 2 (interspaces) to 6 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 3.5 or greater.
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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Described A-horizons are greater than 6 inches (15 cm) with weak subangular blocky structure and brown in color (10YR 5/3). Soil OM is typically 2 to 3%.
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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Plant community consists of 55-80% grasses, 10% forbs, and 10-35% shrubs. Evenly distributed plant canopy (50-75%) and litter plus moderate infiltration rates result in minimal runoff. Basal cover is typically less than 10% and marginally affects runoff on this site. Surface rock fragments of 5-30% provide stability to the site, but reduce infiltration.
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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.
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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: Mid-size, cool season bunchgrasses>> perennial shrubs>>perennial forbs>cool season rhizomatous grasses=short cool season bunchgrasses

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.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter ranges from 15-20% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 50-80% expected. Herbaceous litter depth typically ranges from 3-10mm. Woody litter can be up to a couple inches (4-6 cm).
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** English: 800-1700 lb/ac (1400 lb/ac average); Metric 896-1904 kg/ha (1568 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 50% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Rabbitbrush, Sandberg bluegrass, buckwheat, and phlox are common increasers. Annual weeds such as cheatgrass and mustards are common invasive species in disturbed sites.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing, except in extreme drought years.
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