

## Ecological site R047XC320UT Upland Shallow Loam (black sagebrush)

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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.

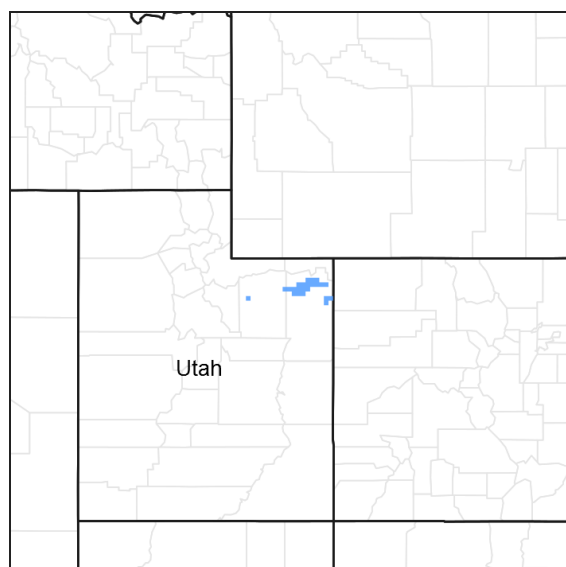


Figure 1. Mapped extent

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.

### MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 047X–Wasatch and Uinta Mountains

MLRA 47 occurs in Utah (86 percent), Wyoming (8 percent), Colorado (4 percent), and Idaho (2 percent). It encompasses approximately 23,825 square miles (61,740 square kilometers). The northern half of this area is in the Middle Rocky Mountains Province of the Rocky Mountain System. The southern half is in the High Plateaus of the Utah Section of the Colorado Plateaus Province of the Intermontane Plateaus. Parts of the western edge of this MLRA are in the Great Basin Section of the Basin and Range Province of the Intermontane Plateaus. The MLRA includes the Wasatch Mountains, which trend north and south, and the Uinta Mountains, which trend east and west. The steeply sloping, precipitous Wasatch Mountains have narrow crests and deep valleys. Active faulting and erosion are a dominant force in controlling the geomorphology of the area. The Uinta Mountains have a broad, gently arching, elongated shape. Structurally, they consist of a broadly folded anticline that has an erosion-resistant quartzite core. The Wasatch and Uinta Mountains have an elevation of 4,900 to about 13,500 feet (1,495 to 4,115 meters).

The mountains in this area are primarily fault blocks that have been tilted up. Alluvial fans at the base of the mountains are recharge zones for the basin fill aquifers. An ancient shoreline of historic Bonneville Lake is evident on the footslopes along the western edge of the area. Rocks exposed in the mountains are mostly Mesozoic and Paleozoic sediments, but Precambrian rocks are exposed in the Uinta Mountains. The Uinta Mountains are one of the few ranges in the United States that are oriented west to east. The southern Wasatch Mountains consist of

Tertiary volcanic rocks occurring as extrusive lava and intrusive crystalline rocks.

The average precipitation is from 8 to 16 inches (203 to 406 mm) in the valleys and can range up to 73 inches (1854 mm) in the mountains. In the northern and western portions of the MLRA, peak precipitation occurs in the winter months. The southern and eastern portions have a greater incidence of high-intensity summer thunderstorms; hence, a significant amount of precipitation occurs during the summer months. The average annual temperature is 30 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit (-1 to 15 C). The freeze-free period averages 140 days and ranges from 60 to 220 days, generally decreasing in length with elevation.

The dominant soil orders in this MLRA are Aridisols, Entisols, Inceptisols, and Mollisols. The lower elevations are dominated by a frigid temperature regime, while the higher elevations experience cryic temperature regimes. Mesic temperature regimes come in on the lower elevations and south facing slopes in the southern portion of this MLRA. The soil moisture regime is typically xeric in the northern part of the MLRA, but grades to ustic in the extreme eastern and southern parts. The mineralogy is generally mixed and the soils are very shallow to very deep, generally well drained, and loamy or loamy-skeletal.

LRU notes

E47C is the Uinta Mountains portion of MLRA 47 that run east and west which includes the Uinta Wilderness and The Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area and towns such as Evanston, Wyoming, Hanna and Tabiona, Utah. Structurally these mountains consist of a broadly folded anticline that has an erosion resistance quartzite core. The Duchesne River and many other tributaries to the Green River run through this range, as well as the headwaters of the Bear River.

Ecological site concept

The soils on this site were formed in slope alluvium derived from metamorphic, sedimentary rock and limestone. The soil is well drained with moderate permeability in the upper 10 inches of soil. The soil is also shallow with bedrock less than 20 inches beneath the soil surface. A lithic bedrock layer is found between 10 and 20 inches below the soil surface. The soil texture at the surface is very channery silt loam, sandy loam or gravelly loam. Surface gravels are 5 to 35 percent cover and surface rocks larger than 3 inches are 2 to 6 percent cover. Subsurface gravels are 10 to 45 percent volume and rocks over 3 inches in diameter are 0 to 25 percent volume. Available water capacity is between 1.1 and 2.0 in the upper 40 inches of soil. The soil pH is between 7.4 and 9.0. The soil temperature regime is frigid and soil moisture regime is ustic.

Associated sites

R047XC332UT	Upland Stony Loam (black sagebrush)
R047XC326UT	Upland Shallow Loam (pinyon/Utah juniper)

Similar sites

R047XC332UT	Upland Stony Loam (black sagebrush)
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>artemisia nova</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>

Physiographic features

This site can be found on hills on slopes between 2 and 25 percent. It can occur at elevations between 6,700 to 8,000 feet. Flooding and ponding do not occur on this site.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Outwash fan
Runoff class	Low to high
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	2,042–2,438 m
Slope	2–25%
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

## Climatic features

The climate characterized by cool, moist summers and cold, snowy winters. Approximately 60 percent of the moisture comes as rain from May through October. On the average, January through April are the driest months and May through October are the wettest months. The soil moisture regime is ustic and soil temperatures are in the frigid regime.

**Table 3. Representative climatic features**

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	90-110 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	305-406 mm

## Influencing water features

This site is not influenced by water from a wetland or stream.

## Wetland description

N/A

## Soil features

The soils on this site were formed in slope alluvium derived from metamorphic, sedimentary rock and limestone. The soil is well drained with moderate permeability in the upper 10 inches of soil. The soil is also shallow with bedrock less than 20 inches beneath the soil surface. A lithic bedrock layer is found between 10 and 20 inches below the soil surface. The soil texture at the surface is very channery silt loam, sandy loam or gravelly loam. Surface gravels are 5 to 35 percent cover and surface rocks larger than 3 inches are 2 to 6 percent cover. Subsurface gravels are 10 to 45 percent volume and rocks over 3 inches in diameter are 0 to 25 percent volume. Available water capacity is between 1.1 and 2.0 in the upper 40 inches of soil. The soil pH is between 7.4 and 9.0. The soil temperature regime is frigid and soil moisture regime is ustic.

Soils associated with this site:

Uintah Area (UT047): Tyzut (236, 237, 238, 246, 247), Pensore (178)

Modal Soil: Tysak CNV-SiL, 8-25% — loamy-skeletal, mixed Lithic Calciborolls

**Table 4. Representative soil features**

Parent material	(1) Slope alluvium–metamorphic and sedimentary rock (2) Slope alluvium–limestone
Surface texture	(1) Very channery silt loam (2) Sandy loam (3) Gravelly loam

Family particle size	(1) Loamy-skeletal
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Moderate
Depth to restrictive layer	25–51 cm
Soil depth	25–51 cm
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	5–35%
Surface fragment cover >3"	2–6%
Available water capacity (Depth not specified)	2.79–5.08 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (Depth not specified)	0–45%
Electrical conductivity (Depth not specified)	0–3 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (Depth not specified)	0
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (Depth not specified)	7.4–9
Subsurface fragment volume ≤3" (Depth not specified)	10–45%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0–25%

## Ecological dynamics

It is impossible to determine in any quantitative detail the Historic Climax Plant Community (HCPC) for this ecological site because of the lack of direct historical documentation preceding all human influence. In some areas, the earliest reports of dominant plants include the cadastral survey conducted by the General Land Office, which began in the late 19th century for this area (Galatowitsch 1990). However, up to the 1870s the Shoshone Indians, prevalent in northern Utah and neighboring states, grazed horses and set fires to alter the vegetation for their needs (Parson 1996). In the 1860s, Europeans brought cattle and horses to the area grazing large numbers of them on unfenced parcels year-long (Parson 1996). Itinerant and local sheep flocks followed as the proportion of browse increased.

Below is a State and Transition Model diagram to illustrate the “phases” (common plant communities), and “states” (aggregations of those plant communities) that can occur on the site. Differences between phases and states depend primarily upon observations of a range of disturbance histories in areas where this ESD is represented. These situations include grazing gradients to water sources, fence-line contrasts, patches with differing dates of fire, herbicide treatment, tillage, etc. Reference State 1 illustrates the common plant communities that probably existed just prior to European settlement.

The major successional pathways within states, (“community pathways”) are indicated by arrows between phases. “Transitions” are indicated by arrows between states. The drivers of these changes are indicated in codes decipherable by referring to the legend at the bottom of the page and by reading the detailed narratives that follow the diagram. The transition between Reference State 1 and State 2 is considered irreversible because of the naturalization of exotic species of both flora and fauna, possible extinction of native species, and climate change. There may have also been accelerated soil erosion.

When available, monitoring data (of various types) were employed to validate more subjective inferences made in this diagram. See the complete files in the office of the State Range Conservationist for more details.

The plant communities shown in this State and Transition Model may not represent every possibility, but are probably the most prevalent and recurring plant communities. As more monitoring data are collected, some phases or states may be revised, removed, and/or 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 & Pasture Handbook (USDA-NRCS 2003), 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 descriptions of a plant community is to capture the current knowledge at the time of this revision.

#### State 1: Reference State

The Reference State is a description of this ecological site just prior to Euro-American settlement but long after the arrival of Native Americans. The description of the Reference State was determined by NRCS Soil Survey Type Site Location information, and familiarity with rangeland relict areas where they exist. The least modified plant community (1.1) within the Reference State would have been a black sagebrush-dominated (*Artemisia nova*) stand with scattered prickly pear (*Opuntia polyacantha*) and associated bunch grasses as well as common forb species. The generally shallow and skeletal soils would have accentuated the effects of drought and reduced the chances of fire altering this state. The reference plant community (1.1) would have been relatively stable with occasional use by wildlife. However, heavy utilization by bison, elk, and Native American horses on these sites (1.1a) would have depleted the grasses creating a near monoculture of black sagebrush (1.2). Heavy browsing by deer during the dormant season of black sagebrush (1.1b) would have created an herbaceous variant (1.3). Occasional very wet years during El Nino-Southern Oscillation periods could have caused temporary soil anoxia (West 2000) (1.1c) killing the sagebrush and allowing the forbs and grasses to dominate for a short time (1.3). Infestation of some insects and pathogens on sagebrush (1.1c) could have led to a similar result where the herbaceous species become temporarily dominant (1.3). The interaction of an unusually dry period and heavy utilization by all grazers (e.g. deer, bison, elk, and horses used by native American) (1.1d) would have removed the palatable species from the plant community while allowing unpalatable, shorter-lived species such as yellow rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus* ssp. *viscidiflorus*), stemless mock goldenweed, and phlox to predominate (1.4). The depauperate black sagebrush (*Artemisia nova*) community (1.2) could have also shifted to the unpalatable short-lived shrub community phase (1.4) in areas that have sustained heavy browsing by deer (1.2b). Relatively rocky sites such as these typically would not have declined in overall cover or productivity. However, the portion that is palatable may have changed appreciably. Similarly, these soils would have been more resistant to erosion than other stone-free soils. Each of the phases within State 1 could have returned to Community Phase 1.1 if climate conditions were within the normal range of variability and there was a release from heavy grazing and browsing pressure (1.2a, 1.3a, 1.4a).

The least modified plant community within the Reference State would have been a black sagebrush-dominated stand with scattered prickly pear and associated bunch grasses and commonly associated forbs.

#### Community Phase Pathway 1.1a

Heavy continuous season-long grazing by bison, elk, and Native American horses would have converted the Reference State to a depauperate black sagebrush community.

#### Community Phase Pathway 1.1b

Heavy browsing by deer would have converted the Reference State to a plant community dominated by bunchgrasses and perennial forbs. An extremely wet period such as an El Nino-Southern Oscillation event and subsequent anoxic soil conditions would have converted the Reference State to a plant community dominated by bunchgrasses and perennial forbs. The same result would occur following a sudden insect (or other pathogen) outbreak on sagebrush.

#### Community Phase Pathway 1.1c

The interaction of exceptionally dry climatic influences compounded by heavy continuous season-long grazing by all grazers including deer, bison, elk, and Native American horses, would have converted the Reference State to an unpalatable short-lived shrub & perennial forb plant community.

#### Community Phase 1.2: Depauperate black sagebrush

This plant community would have developed under heavy continuous season-long grazing by bison, elk, and Native American horses. Heavy utilization of grasses would have created a near monoculture of black sagebrush.

#### Community Phase Pathway 1.2a

The absence of grazing would have allowed the native bunchgrasses and perennial forbs to return to the system converting it back to the Community Phase 1.1.

#### Community Phase Pathway 1.2b

Heavy browsing by deer would have converted the depauperate black sagebrush community to an unpalatable short-lived shrub community phase.

#### Community Phase 1.3: Bunch grasses & Perennial Forbs/Sparse black sagebrush

There are several environmental conditions that would have produced this plant community. Heavy browsing by deer would have resulted in an herbaceous-dominated variant because of the utilization of black sagebrush during the dormant season. Under the occasional very wet period associated with an El Niño-Southern Oscillation event, temporary soil anoxia could have developed (West 2000), killing the sagebrush and allowing the forbs and grasses to dominate for a short time. A similar plant community would have also developed following an outbreak of insects and pathogens where sagebrush was the dominant host.

#### Community Phase Pathway 1.3a

A return to normal climate conditions and the absence of heavy browsing would have allowed black sagebrush to re-establish and convert back to the Community Phase 1.1.

#### Community Phase 1.4: Short-lived Shrubs/Perennial Forbs

This plant community would have developed under the combined effect of unusual drought conditions and heavy grazing by all grazers including deer, bison, elk, and Native American horses. Focused utilization would have reduced the palatable species while allowing the noxious, unpalatable, and shorter-lived species such as yellow rabbitbrush, stemless mock goldenweed, and phlox to predominate.

#### Community Phase Pathway 1.4a

A return to normal climate conditions followed by a prolonged reduction in grazing pressure would have allowed black sagebrush and native bunchgrasses to re-establish returning to the reference plant community (1.1).

#### Transition 1a

The simultaneous introduction of exotic species, both plants and animals, and possible extinctions of native flora and fauna, along with climate change, will cause State 1 to transition to State 2. A return pathway back to State 1 would be impracticable because of these issues.

#### State 2: Black Sagebrush/ Introduced Non-natives State

State 2 is identical to State 1 in form and function, with the exception of the presence of non-native plants and animals, possible extinctions of native species, and a different climate. State 2 is a description of the ecological site shortly following Euro-American settlement, which can be regarded as the current potential. The least modified plant community (2.1) within State 2 is a black sagebrush-dominated stand with scattered prickly pear and associated bunch grasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg bluegrass, and prairie junegrass. Forbs such as phlox, buckwheat, stemless mock goldenweed, and asters are common. The generally shallow and skeletal soils accentuate the effect of drought and reduce the chances of fires altering this state. This plant community is relatively stable under mixed use by wildlife and livestock. However, heavy utilization by bison, elk, horses, and domestic cattle on these sites during the growing season (2.1a) would deplete the grasses creating a near monoculture of black sagebrush (2.2). Heavy browsing by deer and sheep (2.1b) would create an herbaceous variant (2.3) because of year-round utilization of black sagebrush. Occasionally very wet years during El Niño-Southern Oscillation periods can cause temporary soil anoxia (West 2000) (2.1c) killing the sagebrush and allowing the forbs and grasses to dominate for a short time (2.3). Some insects and pathogens on sagebrush (2.1c) can lead to a similar result where the herbaceous species become temporarily dominant (2.3). The interaction of an unusually dry period and heavy utilization of grasses by bison, elk, horses, and domestic cattle (2.1d) would remove the palatable species from the plant community while allowing unpalatable, shorter-lived species such as yellow rabbitbrush, stemless mock goldenweed, and phlox to predominate. Species composition does not change, just their abundance (2.4). The depauperate black sagebrush community (2.2) may also shift to the unpalatable short-lived shrub community phase (2.4) with heavy utilization of browse by deer and sheep (2.2b). Relatively rocky sites such as these typically do not decline in overall cover or productivity, however, the portion that is palatable may change appreciably. Similarly, these soils are more resistant to erosion than associated stone-free soils. Each of the phases within State 2 can return to Community Phase 2.1 when climate conditions are within the normal range of variability and grazing pressure is moderated (2.2a, 2.3a, 2.4a).

#### Community Phase 2.1: Black sagebrush/Sparse bunchgrasses & Perennial forbs

The least modified plant community within the Black Sagebrush/ Introduced Non-natives State is a black sagebrush-dominated stand with scattered prickly pear and associated bunch grasses such as bluebunch

wheatgrass, Sandberg bluegrass, and prairie junegrass. Phlox, buckwheat, stemless mock goldenweed, and asters are commonly associated forbs.

#### Community Phase Pathway 2.1a

Heavy continuous season-long grazing by bison, elk, horses, and cattle would convert the Black sagebrush/ Sparse bunchgrasses & Perennial forbs phase to a depauperate black sagebrush community.

#### Community Phase Pathway 2.1b

Heavy browsing by deer and sheep would convert the Black sagebrush/ Sparse bunchgrasses & Perennial forbs phase to a plant community dominated by bunchgrasses and perennial forbs. An extremely wet period such as an El Nino-Southern Oscillation event and subsequent anoxic soil conditions would convert the Black sagebrush/ Sparse bunchgrasses & Perennial forbs phase to a plant community dominated by bunchgrasses and perennial forbs. The same result would be seen following a sudden insect (or other pathogen) outbreak on sagebrush.

#### Community Phase Pathway 2.1c

The interaction of exceptionally dry climatic influences and heavy continuous season-long grazing by all grazers would convert the Black sagebrush/ Sparse bunchgrasses & Perennial forbs phase to an unpalatable short-lived shrub and perennial forb plant community.

#### Community Phase 2.2: Depauperate Black sagebrush

This plant community is developed under heavy continuous season-long grazing by bison, elk, cattle, and horses. Heavy utilization of grasses creates a near monoculture of black sagebrush.

#### Community Phase Pathway 2.2a

This plant community can move back towards the Black sagebrush/ Sparse bunchgrasses & Perennial forbs phase when grazing management, particularly of sheep, and use by deer, take place only during the non-growing season of the herbaceous component, along with broadcast re-seeding with native perennial forbs and grasses.

#### Community Phase Pathway 2.2b

Heavy browsing by deer and sheep would convert the depauperate black sagebrush phase to the unpalatable short-lived shrub and perennial forb community

#### Community Phase 2.3: Bunch grasses & perennial forbs/ Sparse black sagebrush

There are several environmental conditions that would produce this plant community. Heavy year-round browsing by deer and sheep would result in an herbaceous-dominated variant because of the utilization of black sagebrush. Following the occasional very wet period associated with an El Nino-Southern Oscillation event, temporary soil anoxia could develop, (West 2000) killing the sagebrush and allowing the forbs and grasses to dominate for a short time. A similar plant community would also develop following an outbreak of insects and pathogens where sagebrush is the dominant host.

#### Community Phase Pathway 2.3a

This plant community can move back to the Black sagebrush/ Sparse bunchgrasses & Perennial forbs phase with a return to normal climate conditions and when grazing by both livestock and wildlife is concentrated during the spring to put pressure on the herbaceous component, allowing the native woody component to re-establish.

#### Community Phase 2.4: Short-lived shrubs/perennial forbs

This plant community is developed under extreme drought conditions combined with heavy continuous season-long grazing. Such disturbances will reduce the palatable species and allow the unpalatable, shorter-lived species such as yellow rabbitbrush, stemless mock goldenweed, and phlox to predominate. Because of the prevalence of historic unrestricted ungulate grazing, this is the most likely of the phases within State 2 to transition to States 3 or 4.

#### Community Phase Pathway 2.4a

A return to the Black sagebrush/ Sparse bunchgrasses & Perennial forbs phase is possible with a return to normal (or wetter) climate conditions and high intensity short duration grazing management to allow the native woody component to re-establish and decrease the competition by herbaceous species.

#### Transition 2a

The Black Sagebrush/ Introduced Non-natives State will transition to the Introduced Annuals/Biennials State

following a sustained period of eutrophication caused by excessive year-long livestock grazing, trampling and bedding, especially by large flocks of domestic sheep. Sheep bedding, salting, watering, and handling locations involve intensive trampling, urination, defecation, and consequent eutrophication, which can be influential in this type of transition. It is also common to see accelerated soil erosion in such locations.

#### Transition 2b

The Black Sagebrush/ Introduced Non-natives State will transition to the Cushion Plant State under conditions marked by accelerated soil erosion and soil compaction caused by mechanical damage from trail and road development, excessive trail/foot traffic, or jeep/ATV impacts resulting in permanent reduction of plant cover.

#### State 3: Introduced Annuals/Biennials State

Invasive annuals and biennial forbs such as cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), knapweeds (*Centaurea* spp.), and horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) are favored by an increase in nutrient build-up in old, eutrophicated sheep bedgrounds. Where fire return intervals are frequent (3.2a) annuals such as cheatgrass and Russian thistle will predominate (3.1). Longer intervals between fire events (3.1a) will result in a plant community dominated by biennial forbs (3.2). The soil profiles of the plant communities within this state are mainly intact.

Although there have been previous attempts to apply tillage and chemicals to improve the composition and productivity in areas where the ESD has developed into this state (see files in the State Range Conservationist Office for details), the biological responses may be too low to justify the economic investment. Therefore, currently available rangeland manipulations are not recommended.

#### Community Phase 3.1: Annual grass/annual forb

This plant community will develop where fire return intervals are frequent and annual species such as cheatgrass and Russian thistle predominate.

#### Community Phase Pathway 3.1a

When intervals between fire events are prolonged, biennial forbs will dominate the plant community.

#### Community Phase 3.2: Annual forb/biennial forb

This plant community will develop when intervals between fires are longer, allowing biennial species such as knapweeds, tumble mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), and Dyer's woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) to become established.

#### Community Phase Pathway 3.2a

When fire return intervals are frequent, annual forbs and grasses will dominate the plant community.

#### State 4: Cushion Plant State

Curlycup gumweed (*Grindelia squarrosa*) and other cushion plants such as spiny phlox (*Phlox hoodii*), prickly phlox (*Leptodactylon* spp.), etc. are found on highly eroded sites, where accelerated soil erosion and soil compaction caused by mechanical damage has removed the fine soil particles and compacted the soils leaving a rocky self-armored surface (4.1).

As with State 3, although there have been previous attempts to apply tillage and chemicals to improve the composition and productivity in areas where the ESD has developed into this state (see files in the State Range Conservationist Office for details), the biological responses may be too low to justify the economic investment. Therefore, currently available rangeland manipulations are not recommended.

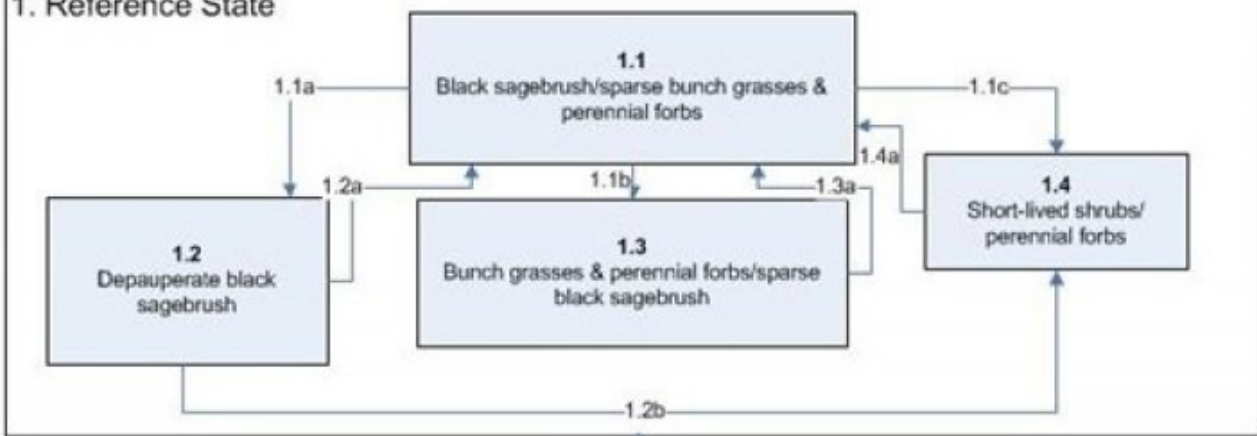
#### Community Phase 4.1: Cushion Plant/annual forb

This plant community will develop following prolonged mechanical damage caused by trail and road development, excessive trail/foot traffic, or jeep/ATV impacts resulting in permanent reduction of plant cover. The only plants remaining are those tolerant of drought, infertile soil, and mechanical disturbances.

### State and transition model

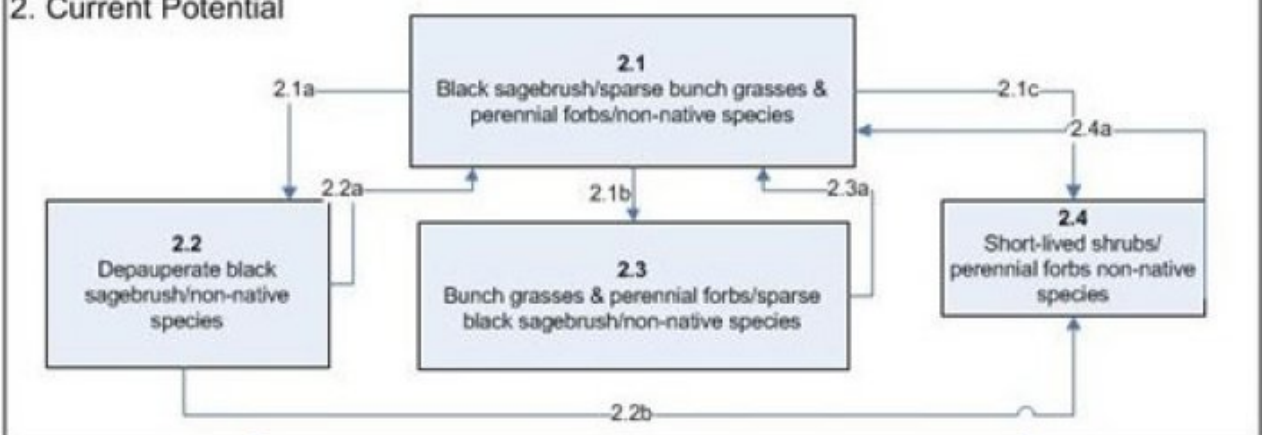


## 1. Reference State



T1a

## 2. Current Potential



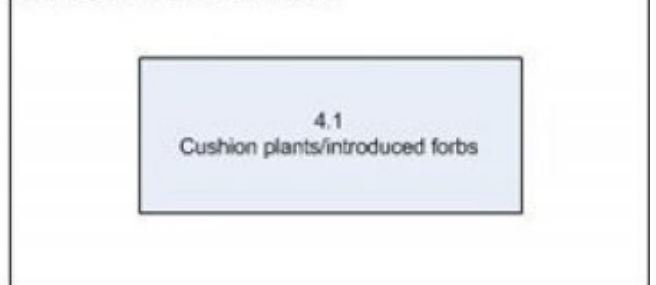
T2a

T2b

## 3. Introduced Annual State



## 4. Cushion Plant State



Community Phase Pathway 1.1a  
Heavy continuous season-long grazing by bison, elk, and Native American horses.

Community Phase Pathway 1.1b  
Heavy browsing by deer.

Community Phase Pathway 1.1c  
The interaction of exceptionally dry climatic influences compounded by heavy continuous season-long grazing.

Community Phase Pathway 1.2a  
The absence of grazing .

Community Phase Pathway 1.2b  
Heavy browsing by deer.

Community Phase Pathway 1.3a  
A return to normal climate conditions and the absence of heavy browsing.

Community Phase Pathway 1.4a  
A return to normal climate conditions followed by a prolonged reduction in grazing pressure.

Transition 1a  
Introduction of exotic species.

Community Phase Pathway 2.1a  
Heavy continuous season-long grazing by bison, elk, horses, and cattle.

Community Phase Pathway 2.1b  
Heavy browsing by deer and sheep.

Community Phase Pathway 2.1c  
The interaction of exceptionally dry climatic influences and heavy continuous season-long grazing.

Community Phase Pathway 2.2a  
Grazing management.

Community Phase Pathway 2.2b  
Heavy browsing by deer and sheep.

Community Phase Pathway 2.3a  
Return to normal climatic conditions and grazing management.

Community Phase Pathway 2.4a  
Return to normal climatic conditions and grazing management.

Transition 2a  
Sustained period of eutrophication

Transition 2b  
Accelerated soil erosion and soil compaction.

Community Phase Pathway 3.1a  
When intervals between fire events are prolonged.

Community Phase Pathway 3.2a  
When fire return intervals are frequent.

## State 1

### Reference State

## Community 1.1

### Reference Plant Community

The general view of this area is black sagebrush and bluebunch wheatgrass. The composition by air-dry weight of the potential natural plant community is 60 percent perennial grasses, 5 percent forbs, and 35 percent shrubs.

Table 5. Annual production by plant type

Plant Type	Low (Kg/Hectare)	Representative Value (Kg/Hectare)	High (Kg/Hectare)
Grass/Grasslike	219	286	370
Shrub/Vine	128	167	215
Forb	18	24	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>616</b>

**Table 6. Ground cover**

Tree foliar cover	0%
Shrub/vine/liana foliar cover	14-16%
Grass/grasslike foliar cover	39-41%
Forb foliar cover	4-6%
Non-vascular plants	0%
Biological crusts	0%
Litter	0%
Surface fragments >0.25" and <=3"	0%
Surface fragments >3"	0%
Bedrock	0%
Water	0%
Bare ground	0%

**Table 7. Canopy structure (% cover)**

Height Above Ground (M)	Tree	Shrub/Vine	Grass/ Grasslike	Forb
<0.15	—	—	—	—
>0.15 <= 0.3	—	—	—	4-6%
>0.3 <= 0.6	—	14-16%	39-41%	—
>0.6 <= 1.4	—	—	—	—
>1.4 <= 4	—	—	—	—
>4 <= 12	—	—	—	—
>12 <= 24	—	—	—	—
>24 <= 37	—	—	—	—
>37	—	—	—	—

## Additional community tables

**Table 8. Community 1.1 plant community composition**

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Kg/Hectare)	Foliar Cover (%)
<b>Shrub/Vine</b>					
0	<b>Dominant Shrub</b>			127–177	
	black sagebrush	ARNO4	<i>Artemisia nova</i>	127–177	–
3	<b>Sub-Dominant Shrubs</b>			38–89	
	Shrub (>.5m)	2SHRUB	<i>Shrub (&gt;.5m)</i>	16–26	–
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVIL4	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus ssp. lanceolatus</i>	6–16	–
	longleaf cupgrass	ERMI3	<i>Eriochloa michauxii</i>	6–16	–
	broom snakeweed	GUSA2	<i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i>	6–16	–
	plains pricklypear	OPPO	<i>Opuntia polyacantha</i>	6–16	–
<b>Grass/Grasslike</b>					
0	<b>Dominant Grasses</b>			203–304	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	127–177	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	50–76	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	26–50	–
1	<b>Sub-Dominant Grasses</b>			48–99	
	Grass, annual	2GA	<i>Grass, annual</i>	16–26	–
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	16–26	–
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	6–16	–
	needle and thread	HECO26	<i>Hesperostipa comata</i>	6–16	–
<b>Forb</b>					
0	<b>Dominant Forbs</b>			16–26	
	stemless mock goldenweed	STAC	<i>Stenotus acaulis</i>	16–26	–
2	<b>Sub-Dominant Forbs</b>			93–163	
	Forb, annual	2FA	<i>Forb, annual</i>	16–26	–
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	16–26	–
	littleleaf pussytoes	ANMI3	<i>Antennaria microphylla</i>	6–10	–
	western mountain aster	SYSPS	<i>Symphyotrichum spathulatum var. spathulatum</i>	6–10	–
	sego lily	CANU3	<i>Calochortus nuttallii</i>	6–10	–
	tapertip hawksbeard	CRAC2	<i>Crepis acuminata</i>	6–10	–
	Eaton's fleabane	EREA	<i>Erigeron eatonii</i>	6–10	–
	low beardtongue	PEHU	<i>Penstemon humilis</i>	6–10	–
	rock goldenrod	PEPU7	<i>Petradoria pumila</i>	6–10	–
	spiny phlox	PHHO	<i>Phlox hoodii</i>	6–10	–
	spearleaf stonecrop	SELA	<i>Sedum lanceolatum</i>	6–10	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	6–10	–

## Animal community

This site provides grazing for cattle and sheep in spring, summer and fall.

The site provides food and habitat for a few species of wildlife. Wildlife species using this site include sage grouse,

rabbit, coyote, mule deer and elk.

## Hydrological functions

The soil is in hydrologic group D and the hydrologic curve number is 80 when the vegetation is in good condition

## Recreational uses

This site offers color and aesthetic appeal during the growing season of blooming plants

## Wood products

None

## 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.

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## Contributors

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## Approval

Sarah Quistberg, 2/11/2025

## Rangeland health reference sheet

Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health is a qualitative assessment protocol used to determine ecosystem

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

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Date	12/10/2012
Approved by	Sarah Quistberg
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

## Indicators

- 1. Number and extent of rills:** None to very few. Some minor rill development may occur on steeper slopes or on areas located below exposed bedrock or other water shedding areas where increased runoff may occur. Any rills present should be <1 inch deep, fairly short (<8 feet long) and somewhat widely spaced (6-8 feet). Minor rill development may be observed following major thunderstorm or spring runoff events but should heal during the next growing season.

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- 2. Presence of water flow patterns:** Some very minor evidence of water flow patterns may be found around perennial plant bases. They show little evidence of current erosion. They are expected to be somewhat short (4-8 feet), stable, sinuous and not connected. There may be very minor evidence of deposition. Evidence of water flow may increase somewhat with slope.

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- 3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Perennial vegetation shows little evidence of erosional pedestalling (2 to 3% of individual plants). Plant roots are covered and litter remains in place around plant crowns. Terracettes should be absent or, if present, stable. A slight increase in both pedestal and terracette development may occur with increasing slope.

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- 4. Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** 5-15% bare ground. Soil surface is typically covered by approximately 30 to 70% coarse fragments. Bare ground spaces should not be greater than 2 to 3 feet in diameter.

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- 5. Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** None to very few gullies present on site. A few gullies may be present in landscape settings where they transport runoff from areas of greater water flow such as exposed bedrock. These gullies will be limited to slopes exceeding 15% slope and adjacent to sites where this runoff accumulation occurs. Any gullies present should show little sign of accelerated erosion and should be stabilized with perennial vegetation.

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- 6. Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None. No evidence of wind generated soil movement is present. Wind caused blowouts and deposition are not present.

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- 7. Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Most litter resides in place with some

redistribution caused by water movement. Minor litter removal may occur in flow channels with deposition occurring within 1 to 2 feet at points of obstruction. The majority of litter accumulates at the base of plants. Some grass leaves and small twigs (grass stems) may accumulate in soil depressions adjacent to plants. Woody stems are not likely to move. However, some litter movement is expected (up to 6 feet) with increases in slopes >15% and/or increased runoff resulting from heavy thunderstorms.

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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):** This site should have a soil stability rating of 4 or 5 under the plant canopies, and a rating of 3 to 4 in the interspaces. The average rating should be a 4. Soil surface texture is typically a very gravelly loam.
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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** (Tyzut) Soil surface 0-4 inches. Texture is a very channery loam; color is brown (7.5YR 5/4); and structure is moderate thin platy parting to moderate very fine granular. Mollic epipedon ranges to 7 inches. Use the specific information for the soil you are assessing found in the published soil survey to supplement this description.
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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Perennial vegetation produces sufficient cover and spatial arrangement to intercept most raindrops and reduce raindrop splash erosion. Litter on soil surface and cryptogamic crusting, where present, also protects soil from splash erosion and encourages a higher rate of infiltration. Plant spatial distribution should slow runoff, allowing additional time for infiltration. Bare spaces are expected to be small and irregular in shape and are usually not connected. Vegetative structure is usually adequate to capture snow and ensure that snowmelt occurs in a controlled manner, allowing maximum time for infiltration, and reducing runoff and erosion in all but the most extreme storm events.
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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. Unweathered limestone occurs at approximately 17 inches which is not a compaction layer.
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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: Perennial bunchgrasses (bluebunch wheatgrass, Nevada bluegrass) > Sprouting shrubs (black sagebrush, slender wild buckwheat).

Sub-dominant: Other perennial bunchgrasses (Indian ricegrass, prairie junegrass) >> Rhizomatous grasses (western wheatgrass) > Sprouting shrubs (green rabbitbrush >> Perennial forbs (stemless mock goldenweed).

Other: A wide variety of other perennial grasses and both perennial and annual forbs can be expected to occur in the plant community.

Additional: Natural disturbance regimes include fire, drought, and insects. Assumed fire cycle of 30 to 40+ years. Functional/structural groups may appropriately contain non-native species if their ecological function is the same as the native species in the reference state. Following a disturbance such as fire, drought, rodents or insects that remove woody vegetation, forbs and perennial grasses (herbaceous species) may dominate the community for a period of time. If a disturbance has not occurred for an extended period of time, woody species may continue to increase. These conditions could reflect different functional community phases within the reference state.

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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** All age classes of perennial grasses should be present under average to above average growing conditions with age class expression likely subdued during periods of extended drought. Slight decadence in the principle shrubs could occur near the end of the fire cycle or during periods of extended drought, or insect infestations. In general, a mix of age classes should be expected with some dead and decadent plants present.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth ( in):** Litter cover will be heavier under plants. Most litter will be herbaceous and depths of 1/4 to 1/2 inch would be considered normal. Perennial vegetation should be well distributed on the site.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** Annual production in air-dry herbage should be approximately 400 - 450#/acre on an average year, but could range from 300 to 600#/acre during periods of prolonged drought or above average precipitation.
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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:** Cheatgrass, Russian thistle, Utah juniper, and non-native invasive annual forbs such as alyssum.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All perennial plants should have the ability to reproduce in all years, except in extreme drought years. Green rabbitbrush sprouts vigorously following fire. There are no restrictions on either seed or vegetative reproduction. Some seedling recruitment of major species is present during average and above average growing years.
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