

Ecological site R067AY138WY Saline Lowland (SL)

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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)	Dave Cook, Kristin Dickinson, George Gamblin, John Hartung, Nadine Bishop
Contact for lead author	
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Approved by	Kirt Walstad
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

- Number and extent of rills:** None. Rills are not expected on the site.
- Presence of water flow patterns:** None. Water flow patterns are not expected on this site.
- Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** None. Erosional pedestals and terracettes are not expected on this site. Alkali sacaton tends to have a hummocky growth form that may appear pedestalled. Essentially non-existent
- Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground is 10-20 percent occurring in small areas throughout site. The areas of bare ground may have high amounts of salt crusting.
- Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** None. Gullies should not be present on this site.
- Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None. Wind-scoured and/or depositional areas are not

present on the site.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Litter should fall in place. Slight amount of movement of fine litter from water is possible, but not normal. Litter movement from wind is not expected.
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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 aggregate stability ratings are typically 3 or greater. Surface organic matter adheres to the soil surface. Soil surface peds will typically retain structure for at least short periods when dipped in distilled water. Some peds will dissolve in less than 1 minute.
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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** The surface layer ranges from 3 to 11 inches (7.6-27.9 cm) thick. Soil colors range from light brownish gray to grayish brown (values of 5 to 6) when dry and dark grayish brown to very dark grayish brown (values of 3 to 4). Soil surface structure is typically granular.
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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** The functional/structural groups provide a combination of rooting depths and structure which positively influences infiltration. Combination of shallow and deep rooted species (mid & tall rhizomatous and tufted perennial cool season grasses) with fine and coarse roots positively influences infiltration.

The expected composition of the plant community is 75 to 90 percent perennial grasses and grass-likes, 0 to 5 percent forbs, and 0 to 20 percent shrubs. The grass and grass-like component is made up of warm-season, tall, bunch grasses (25-30%); cool-season, rhizomatous grasses (15-20%); cool-season, bunch grasses (5-10%); warm-season, tall, rhizomatous grasses (5-10%); grass-likes (0-5%).

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** None. A compaction layer is not expected on this site.
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12. **Functional/Structural Groups (list in order of descending dominance by above-ground annual-production or live foliar cover using symbols: >>, >, = to indicate much greater than, greater than, and equal to):**

Dominant: 1. Native, C4, tall, bunch grasses – 375-450 #/ac (25-30%), 1 species minimum

Sub-dominant: 2. Native, C3, rhizomatous grasses – 225-300 #/ac (15-20%), 1 species minimum

3. Native, C4, short grasses – 225-300 #/ac (15-20%), 1 species minimum

4. Shrubs, vines, cacti – 15-300 #/ac (1-20%), 1 species minimum **

Other: Minor Groups:

5. Native, C4, tall, rhizomatous grasses – 75-150 #/ac (5-10%)

6. Native, C3, bunch grasses – 75-150 #/ac (5-10%)

7. Native, Perennial and Annual Forbs – 15-75 #/ac (1-5%)

8. Grass-likes – 0-75 #/ac (0-5%)

Additional: 12a. Relative Dominance:

Community 1.1: Native, C4, bunch grasses > Native, C3, rhizomatous grasses = Native, C4, short grasses >

Shrubs, Cacti, Vine > Native, C4, rhizomatous, tall grasses = Native, C3, bunch grasses > Native, Annual or Perennial Forbs
= Grass-likes

12b. F/S Groups not expected for the site: Introduced annual grasses, perennial introduced and naturalized grasses, trees.

12c. Number of F/S Groups: 8

12d. Species number in Dominant and Sub-dominant F/S Groups: 4

** On some locations the shrub group may be at minor or trace levels. The plant community should be evaluated carefully before determining whether this is a departure.

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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Very little evidence of decadence or mortality. Bunch grasses have strong, healthy centers with less than 3 percent mortality and shrubs have few dead stems.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Plant litter cover is evenly distributed throughout the site and is expected to be 50 to 70 percent. Litter depth ranges from of 0.25-0.50 inch (0.65-1.3 cm).
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** Annual production ranges from 1,100 to 1,900 pounds per acres on an air dry basis. Average annual production is 1,500 pounds per acre under normal precipitation and weather conditions.
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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:** Annual bromes, curlycup gumweed, kochia, Russian thistle, whitetop, knapweeds, Russian olive and salt cedar (tamarisk) and others as they become known.

See:

Department of Agriculture Invasive Species Website:

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/agconservation/noxious-weed-species>

Wyoming Weed and Pest Council Website: <https://wyoweed.org/>

Nebraska Invasive Species website: <https://neinvasives.com/plants>.

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All perennial species exhibit high vigor relative to recent weather conditions. Perennial grasses should have vigorous rhizomes or tillers; vegetative and reproductive structures are not stunted. All perennial species should be capable of reproducing annually.
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