

Ecological site R067AY152WY Sandy Lowland (SyL)

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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.

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Approved by	Kirt Walstad
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** None. Rills are not expected on the site.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Typically, none. None, or barely visible. Evidence of water flow may be present after high overland flow events or flooding from adjacent streams, but vegetation normally remains intact.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** None. Erosional pedestals or terracettes are not expected on the site.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground is typically less than 10 percent. occurring in small areas (less than 2 to 3 inches in diameter) scattered throughout site.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** None. Gullies should not be present on this site.

6. **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 should typically be 4 or greater. Surface organic matter adheres to the soil surface. Soil surface peds will typically retain structure indefinitely when dipped in distilled water.
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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 8 inches (7.2-20.3 cm) thick. Soil colors range from yellowish brown to light brownish gray (values of 5 to 6) when dry and dark grayish brown, brown, to dark brown (values of 3 to 4) when moist. Soil surface structure is typically granular or single grain but may be massive or weak subangular blocky. Soils typically contain carbonates at the surface, but on some sites, they may be leached to 8 inches (20.3 cm).
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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 65 to 85 percent perennial grasses and grass-likes, 5 to 10 percent forbs, and 5 to 10 percent shrubs. Trees can make up 5 to 15 percent of the total annual production.
- The grass and grass-like component is made up of cool-season, bunch grasses (15-40%); warm-season, tall, rhizomatous grasses (10-35%); warm-season mid-grasses (10-30%); warm-season, short grasses (5-15%); cool-season, rhizomatous grasses (5-10%) and grass-likes (1-10%).
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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. No compaction layer should be present.
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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, C3, bunch grasses – 375-1000 #/ac (15-40%), 1 species minimum
2. Native, C4, tall, rhizomatous grasses – 250-875 #/ac (10-35%), 2 species minimum
3. Native, C4, mid-grasses – 250-750 (10-30%), 1 species minimum
- Sub-dominant: 4. Native Trees – 125-375 #/ac (5-15%), 1 species minimum
5. Shrubs, Vines, Cacti – 125-375 #/ac (5-15%), 1 species minimum
- Other: MInor:
6. Native, C3, rhizomatous grasses – 125-250 #/ac (5-10%)
7. Native, C4, short grasses – 125-250 #/ac (5-10%)
8. Native, Perennial and Annual Forbs – 125-250 #/ac (5-10%)
9. Grass-likes – 25-250 #/ac (1-10%)

Additional: Community 1.1:

12a. Relative Dominance:

Native, C3 bunch grasses > Native, C4, tall, rhizomatous grasses > Native, C4, mid-grasses > Trees = = Shrubs, Cacti, Vines > Native, C3, rhizomatous grasses = Native, C4, short grasses > Native, Perennial and Annual Forbs > Grass-likes

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

12c. Number of F/S Groups: 9

12d. Species number in Dominant and Sub-dominant F/S Groups: 6

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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 70 to 90 percent. Litter depth is expected to be 0.50-1.0 inch (1.3-2.5 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 2,000 pounds per acre during unfavorable years to 3,000 pounds per acre in above average years on an air dry basis. Average annual production is 2,500 pounds per acre under normal precipitation and weather conditions. No significant reduction is expected the growing season following wildfire.
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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:** Spreading buckwheat, kochia, Russian thistle, pricklypear, Canada thistle, musk thistle, hound's tongue, Russian olive, saltcedar (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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