

Ecological site R069XY046CO Shaly Plains

Last updated: 12/09/2024

Accessed: 05/12/2025

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.

Author(s)/participant(s)	Ben Berlinger, Daniel Nosal, Kimberly Diller
Contact for lead author	Ben Berlinger, Area Rangeland Management Specialist, La Junta, CO,
Date	01/12/2005
Approved by	Kirt Walstad
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** None

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Typically none, if present, water flow patterns are short and not connected, with numerous debris dams or vegetative barriers.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** None to slight.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** This site has 5-10 percent or less bare ground, with bare patches generally less than 2-3 inches in diameter. Extended drought can cause bare ground to increase upwards to 15-25 percent with bare patches reaching upwards to 12-18 inches in diameter.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** None

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None to slight.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Litter should be uniformly distributed with little movement.
-
8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Stability class rating is anticipated to be 4-6 in interspaces at soil surface. These values need verification at reference site.
-
9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Average SOM is 1-2 percent. Soils are typically shallow but include some that are moderately deep. The A horizon is grayish-brown, very fine granular structure, approximately 0-2 inches in depth.
-
10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Raindrop impact is reduced by the diverse grass, forb, shrub functional/structural groups and root structure. This slows overland flow and provides increased time for infiltration to occur. Extended drought, wildfire or both may reduce basal density, canopy cover, and litter amounts (primarily from tall, warm-season bunch and rhizomatous grasses), resulting in decreased infiltration and increased runoff on steep slopes following intense rainfall events.
-
11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** None
-
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: warm-season mid bunchgrass >> cool-season mid rhizomatous >
- Sub-dominant: warm-season short bunchgrass = shrubs > warm-season mid rhizomatous > cool-season mid bunchgrass >
- Other: warm-season forbs > leguminous forbs > cool-season forbs > sedges > warm-season short stoloniferous
- Additional:
-
13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Typically minimal. Expect short and mid bunchgrass mortality and decadence during and following drought.
-
14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter cover during and following extended drought ranges from 10-15 percent.
-
15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 250 lbs./ac. low precipitation years; 600 lbs./ac. average precipitation years; 1000 lbs./ac. above average

precipitation years. After extended drought or the first growing season following wildfire, production may be significantly reduced by 100 – 250 lbs./ac.

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: Invasive plants should not occur in reference plant community. Cheatgrass, Russian thistle, burningbush, other non-native annuals may invade following extended drought or fire if a seed source is available. Oneseed juniper may invade from adjacent sites with lack of fire.
-

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** The only limitations are weather related, wildfire, and natural disease that may temporarily reduce reproductive capability.
-