USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ecological site F220XY447AK
Maritime Forest Loamy Organic Slopes

Last updated: 3/10/2025
Accessed: 05/11/2025

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.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 220X–Alexander Archipelago-Gulf of Alaska Coast

The Alexander Archipelago-Gulf of Alaska Coast area consists of a narrow arc of islands and lower elevation coastal mountains in the Southern Alaska Region. This area spans from the Alexander Archipelago in southeastern Alaska, north and west along the coast of the Gulf of Alaska and Prince William Sound, and further west to the southern tip of the Kenai Peninsula and the northeastern islands of the Kodiak Archipelago. The area makes up about 27,435 square miles (USDA 2006). The terrain primarily consists of low to moderate relief mountains that are deeply incised. Throughout the area glaciers, rivers, and streams have cut deep, narrow to broad valleys. The broader valleys have nearly level to strongly sloping flood plains and stream terraces. Alluvial and colluvial fans and short footslopes are common in the valleys along the base of the mountains. Rocky headlands, sea cliffs, estuaries, and beaches are common along the coast.

This area includes the Municipality of Juneau, Alaska's capital, and a number of smaller coastal towns and villages. Federally administered lands within this MLRA include Admiralty Island National Monument and part of Misty Fjords National Monument, Tongass National Forest, Chugach National Forest, and Glacier Bay, Wrangell-St. Elias, and Kenai Fjords National Parks and Preserves. The southern terminus of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline is in Valdez. During the late Pleistocene epoch, the entire area was covered with glacial ice. The numerous fjords of the Alexander Archipelago and Prince William Sound were formed chiefly as a result of glacial scouring and deepening of preglacial river valleys. Most glacial deposits have been eroded away or buried by mountain colluvium and alluvium, which cover about 90 percent of the present landscape. The remaining glacial and glaciofluvial deposits are generally restricted to coastal areas. During the Holocene epoch, volcanic activity within and adjacent to this area deposited a layer of volcanic ash of varying thickness on much of the landscape in the southeastern and northwestern parts of the area. Paleozoic, Mesozoic, and Lower Tertiary stratified sedimentary rocks and Cretaceous and Tertiary intrusive rocks underlie much of the area and are exposed on steep mountain slopes and ridges (USDA 2006).

The dominant soil orders in this MLRA are Spodosols, Histosols, and Entisols. Soils in the area typically have a cryic soil temperature regime, an udic moisture regime, and have mixed minerology. Spodosols are common on mountains and hills having been formed in gravelly or cobbly colluvium, glacial till, and varying amounts of silty volcanic ash. These Spodosols commonly range from shallow to deep, are well to somewhat poorly drained, and typically classify as Humicryods or Haplocryods. Histosols that are poorly to very poorly drained occur on footslopes, discharge slopes, and valley floors. These wet histosols commonly classify as Cryosaprists, Cryohemists, and Cryofibrists. Histosols that are well drained occur on steep mountainsides. These dry Histosols commonly classify as Cryofolists. Entisols are common on flood plains, stream terraces, and outwash plains having been formed in silty, sandy, and gravelly to cobbly alluvium. These Entisols are generally deep, range from well to somewhat poorly drained, and commonly classify as Cryaquents and Cryofluvents. Miscellaneous (non-soil) areas make up about 23 percent of the MLRA. The most common miscellaneous areas are avalanche chutes, rock outcrop, rubble land, beaches, river wash, and water.

This area represents the northern extent of the Pacific temperature rainforest and is characterized by productive

stands of conifers. Western hemlock and Sitka spruce are the dominant trees on mountains and hills at the lower elevations. Due to warmer temperatures, western red cedar and Alaska cedar are more prevalent in the southern part of the area. Black cottonwood and mixed forest types occur on flood plains. Areas of peat and other sites that are too wet for forest growth support sedge-grass meadows and low scrub. The transition to subalpine and alpine communities typically occurs at elevations between 1500 to 3000 feet (Boggs et al. 2010, Carstensen 2007, Martin et al. 1995), which characterize the vegetation of the Southern Alaska Coastal Mountains area.

For many decades, logging, commercial fishing, and mining have been the primary industrial land uses throughout much of the area. In recent years, changes in public interests, land use policies, and timber economics have contributed to a significant decline in the timber industry. Commercial fishing continues to be an important industry and most communities support a fleet of boats and fishing related facilities. A number of mines operate in the area and others have been prospected and proposed. Tourism and wildland recreation are becoming increasingly important. Subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering provide food and a variety of other resources to local residents and remain the principal economy for residents of remote villages.

Ecological site concept

This site occurs on mountain slopes and glacially affected hillslopes where soil parent material is typically organic matter and volcanic ash over colluvial deposits. Soils associated with this site are generally poorly-drained but no ponding or flooding occurs. The persistence of a shallow water table (within the first 12 inches) during the growing season influences plant community dynamics on this site.

This site supports a reference state with a community phase characterized as an open needleleaf forest. It is composed of mixed conifers, including mountain hemlock, Alaska cedar, Sitka spruce, and western hemlock. No other community phases have been observed on this site.

Associated sites

F220XY439AK	**Maritime Stunted Woodland Shallow Organic Slopes** Ecological site F220XY439AK occurs on mountain backslope muskegs.
F220XY447AK	**Maritime Forest Loamy Organic Slopes** Ecological site F220XY447AK occurs on mountain backslopes with moderate well to well drained soils and support more productive forests.

Similar sites

W1220X433	**Maritime Forest Loamy Slopes** Ecological site F220XY433AK supports a similar plant community but occurs on well-drained steep mountain slopes.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) *Tsuga heterophylla* (2) *Tsuga mertensiana*
Shrub	(1) *Menziesia ferruginea*
Herbaceous	(1) *Hylocomium splendens* (2) *Sphagnum*

Physiographic features

This site primarily occurs on concave slopes of mountain slopes and glacially modified hillslopes. Flooding and ponding are not associated with this site. A shallow (within 12 inches) water table persists during the growing season. Elevations of this site range from sea level to 800 feet with slopes of 5-40%.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Slope shape across	(1) Concave

Slope shape up-down	(1) Linear (2) Concave
Landforms	(1) Mountains > Mountain slope (2) Hills > Hillslope
Runoff class	Medium
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	0–800 ft
Slope	5–40%
Water table depth	4–12 in
Aspect	W, NW, N, NE, E, SE, S, SW

Table 3. Representative physiographic features (actual ranges)

Runoff class	Medium
Flooding frequency	None to frequent
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	0–820 ft
Slope	5–60%
Water table depth	4–22 in

Climatic features

Cloudy skies, moderate temperatures, and abundant rainfall characterize the temperate maritime climate of this site. Frequent winter storms may consist of snow or heavy rainfall. Moderate to strong winds from the south and southeast are common before and during storms throughout the year. Annual precipitation ranges from 44-94 inches, and annual snowfall ranges from 30-70 inches along the coast and up to 200 inches at higher elevations (USDA 2006). The average annual temperature at lower elevations ranges from about 38-43 degrees F (3-6 degrees C). The frost-free period ranges from about 90-140 days, and the freeze-free period ranges from about 125-180 days.

Table 4. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	95-142 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	147-183 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	55-145 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	84-170 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	119-218 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	35-172 in
Frost-free period (average)	120 days
Freeze-free period (average)	168 days
Precipitation total (average)	97 in

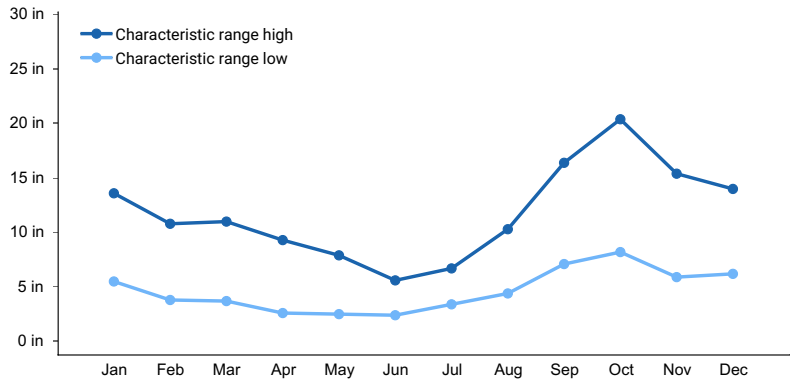

Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

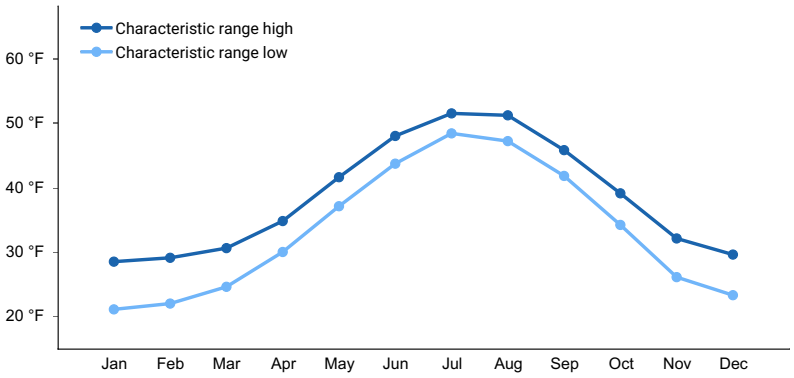

Figure 2. Monthly minimum temperature range

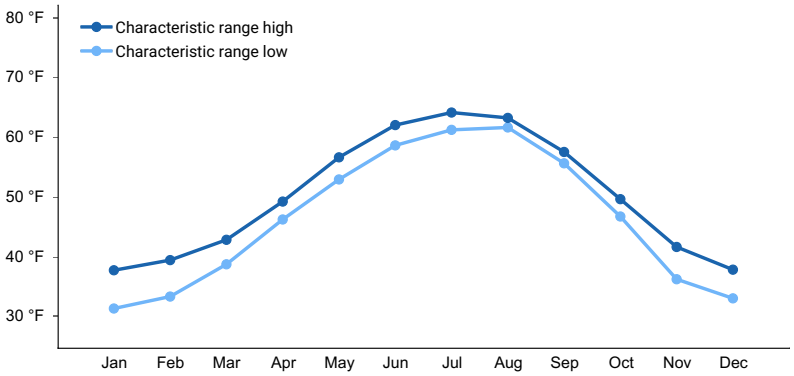

Figure 3. Monthly maximum temperature range

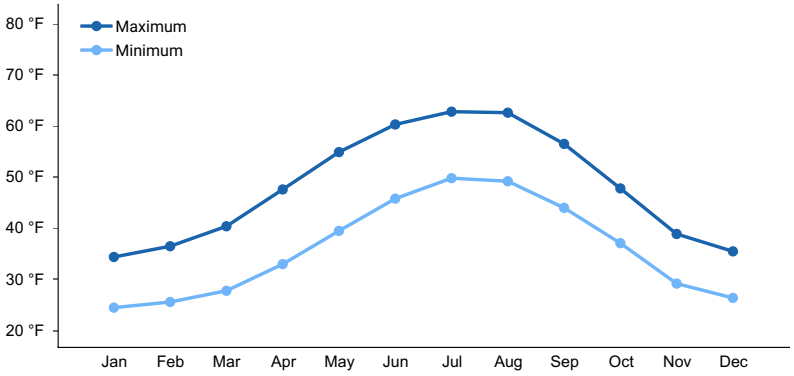

Figure 4. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

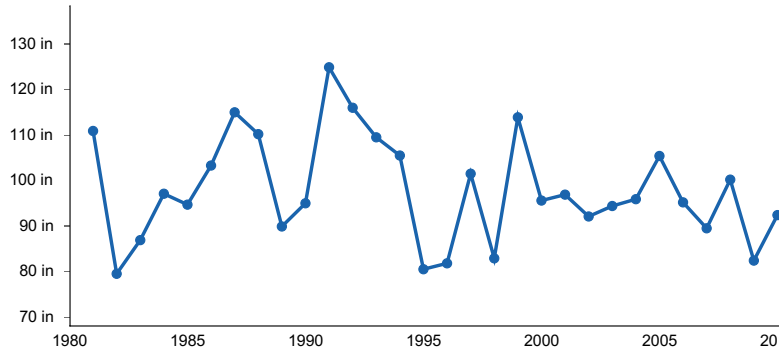

Figure 5. Annual precipitation pattern

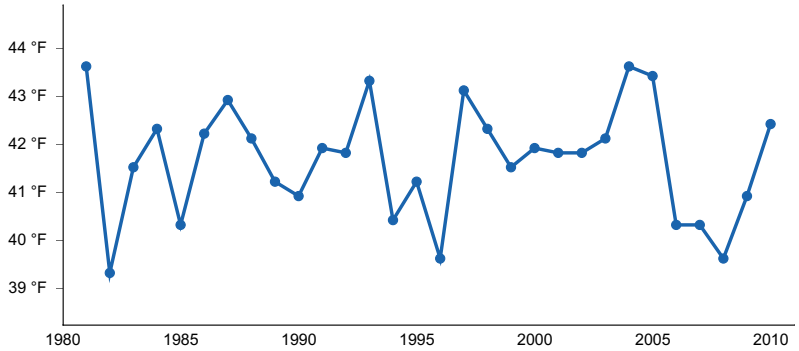

Figure 6. Annual average temperature pattern

Climate stations used

- (1) GUSTAVUS [USW00025322], Gustavus, AK
- (2) GLACIER BAY [USC00503294], Gustavus, AK
- (3) YAKUTAT STATE AP [USW00025339], Yakutat, AK
- (4) SKAGWAY AP [USW00025335], Skagway, AK
- (5) HAINES AP [USW00025323], Haines, AK
- (6) SELDOVIA AP [USW00025516], Homer, AK
- (7) MAIN BAY [USC00505604], Valdez, AK
- (8) CORDOVA M K SMITH AP [USW00026410], Cordova, AK
- (9) SITKA AIRPORT [USW00025333], Sitka, AK
- (10) JUNEAU INTL AP [USW00025309], Juneau, AK
- (11) ANNETTE ISLAND AP [USW00025308], Metlakatla, AK
- (12) PETERSBURG 1 [USW00025329], Petersburg, AK
- (13) KETCHIKAN INTL AP [USW00025325], Ketchikan, AK
- (14) PELICAN [USC00507141], Hoonah, AK

Influencing water features

Due to its landscape position, this site is not influenced by streams or wetlands, however, a shallow, seasonal water table may affect plant community dynamics.

Soil features

The soils of this site formed in moderately to very deep organic material and volcanic ash over colluvial deposits. Soil textures are generally silt loams, very fine sandy loams, and muck. Soil moisture regime is aquic udic or aquic and soils are typically poorly-drained. A water table within the first 12 inches is present during the growing season.

Figure 7. Typical soil profile associated with Kutskloh soils in Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve-Gustavus Area, Alaska.

Table 5. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Organic material (2) Colluvium (3) Volcanic ash (4) Glaciofluvial deposits (5) Residuum
Surface texture	(1) Gravelly silt loam (2) Medial very fine sandy loam (3) Muck (4) Peat (5) Loam (6) Very fine sandy loam (7) Sandy loam (8) Mucky peat
Family particle size	(1) Loamy-skeletal (2) Medial (3) Loamy (4) Fine-loamy
Drainage class	Poorly drained
Permeability class	Moderate to rapid
Depth to restrictive layer	39–59 in
Soil depth	39–59 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (0-10in)	0.9–2.8 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-40in)	0%
Clay content (0-20in)	6–8%
Electrical conductivity (0-40in)	0 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-40in)	0
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-40in)	4.3–6.4

Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (0-60in)	1–10%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (0-60in)	20–65%

Table 6. Representative soil features (actual values)

Drainage class	Poorly drained
Permeability class	Moderate to rapid
Depth to restrictive layer	4–60 in
Soil depth	4–60 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0–18%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–2%
Available water capacity (0-10in)	0.4–5.2 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-40in)	0%
Clay content (0-20in)	5–15%
Electrical conductivity (0-40in)	0 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-40in)	0
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-40in)	3.2–7.5
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (0-60in)	0–70%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (0-60in)	0–65%

Ecological dynamics

This site is associated with hills and mountains slops in the coastal mountains along the Gulf of Alaska. Until about 10,000 years ago, this area had many large continental-scale glacial ice sheets that advanced and retreated many times over the millennia (Chapin 1994). In Glacier Bay, glaciers reached maximum extent about 1750 AD when the glaciers terminated into the Icy Strait (Hall et al. 1994). Since then, glaciers of Glacier Bay have thinned and retreated nearly 65 miles up the bay. Numerous tidewater glaciers still exist in this area, including Johns Hopkins Glacier, Grand Pacific Glacier, Lamplugh Glacier, McBride Glacier, and Muir Glacier (Lawson 2015). The 250-year glacial retreat is attributed to less regional snowfall in the mountains, rising winter temperatures, and decreased cloud cover and lower precipitation during the growing season in summer (Hall et al. 2003).

This ecological site is associated with the Outer Coast and Excursion Inlet, which are older landscapes within Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve. Although the Outer Coast and Excursion Inlet areas were historically glaciated, they were not glaciated during the Little Ice Age and thus are older landscapes than those of Glacier Bay Inlet. Mountain backslopes are associated with these older landscapes and are very common along the Outer Coast and Excursion Inlet. Mountain backslopes within these areas exhibit different communities based on the degree of slope and slope shape. These landform attributes influence drainage class. This ecological site occurs on mountain backslopes with a slope range of 5 to 60 percent with concave slope shape. Associated soils have a very shallow water table (less than 12 inches) and are poorly drained.

State and transition model

Maritime Forest Loamy Organic Slopes **F220XY447AK**

1. Reference State

Community Phase 1.1
Western hemlock-mountain hemlock/American skunkcabbage-fernleaf goldthread/splendid feathermoss-*Sphagnum*

***Alaska vegetation classification*: Open needleleaf forest**

State 1
Reference State

The reference state supports one community and is represented by an open needleleaf forest. All community phases in this report are characterized using the Alaska Vegetation Classification System (Viereck et al. 1992).

Resilience management. This state has been observed to be resilient and/or resistant to current disturbance drivers, lacking alternative states and at-risk communities.

Dominant plant species

- western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), tree
- mountain hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*), tree
- Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), tree
- Alaska cedar (*Callitropsis nootkatensis*), tree
- rusty menziesia (*Menziesia ferruginea*), shrub
- splendid feather moss (*Hylocomium splendens*), other herbaceous
- sphagnum (*Sphagnum*), other herbaceous

Community 1.1

Western hemlock-mountain hemlock/American skunkcabbage-fernleaf goldthread/splendid feathermoss-sphagnum

Figure 8. Typical plant community associated with community 1.1.

Community phase 1.1 is characterized by an open needleleaf forest (Viereck et al. 1992). It is composed primarily of western hemlock, mountain hemlock, Sitka spruce, and Alaska cedar. This community phase illustrates lower production levels of trees due the persistent high water table. It supports species more tolerant of wetter conditions. The most common understory species include American skunkcabbage, rusty menziesia, fernleaf goldthread, stairstep moss, and sphagnum. The vegetative stratum that characterizes this community phase is tall trees, medium shrubs, and medium forbs.

Dominant plant species

- western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), tree
- mountain hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*), tree
- Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), tree
- Alaska cedar (*Callitropsis nootkatensis*), tree
- rusty menziesia (*Menziesia ferruginea*), shrub
- splendid feather moss (*Hylocomium splendens*), other herbaceous
- sphagnum (*Sphagnum*), other herbaceous

Table 7. Soil surface cover

Tree basal cover	0-70%
Shrub/vine/liana basal cover	0-60%
Grass/grasslike basal cover	0-20%
Forb basal cover	0-50%
Non-vascular plants	0-90%
Biological crusts	0%
Litter	10-30%
Surface fragments >0.25" and <=3"	0-2%
Surface fragments >3"	0%
Bedrock	0%
Water	0-10%
Bare ground	0-1%

Additional community tables

Table 8. Community 1.1 forest overstory composition

Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Nativity	Height (Ft)	Canopy Cover (%)	Diameter (In)	Basal Area (Square Ft/Acre)

Table 9. Community 1.1 forest understory composition

Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Nativity	Height (Ft)	Canopy Cover (%)

Inventory data references

NASIS ID Plant community
14NP01302 Community 1.1
14JP00901 Community 1.1
14JP01302 Community 1.1
14NP02001 Community 1.1
14NP02003 Community 1.1
14NP02004 Community 1.1
14DM00802 Community 1.1
14DM00804 Community 1.1
14JP01901 Community 1.1
14JP01904 Community 1.1
14JP01906 Community 1.1
13TD00102 Community 1.1
13TD03703 Community 1.1
13NP00501 Community 1.1
13NP01001 Community 1.1

Other references

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Contributors

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Approval

Marji Patz, 3/10/2025

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)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	05/11/2025
Approved by	Marji Patz
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:**

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:**

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:**

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):**

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:**

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:**

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):**

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):**

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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):**

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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:**

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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):**

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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:

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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):**

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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):**

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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):**

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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:**

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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:**
