

Ecological site R010XA036ID North Slope Stony 12-16 PZ ARTRX/PSSPS

Last updated: 12/13/2023
Accessed: 04/12/2024

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): 010X–Central Rocky and Blue Mountain Foothills

This MLRA is characterized by gently rolling to steep hills, plateaus, and low mountains at the foothills of the Blue Mountains in Oregon and the Central Rocky Mountains in Idaho. The geology of this area is highly varied and ranges from Holocene volcanics to Cretaceous sedimentary rocks. Mollisols are the dominant soil order and the soil climate is typified by mesic or frigid soil temperature regimes, and xeric or aridic soil moisture regimes. Elevation ranges from 1,300 to 6,600 feet (395 to 2,010 meters), increasing from west to east. The climate is characterized by dry summers and snow dominated winters with precipitation averaging 8 to 16 inches (205 to 405 millimeters) and increasing from west to east. These factors support plant communities with shrub-grass associations with considerable acreage of sagebrush grassland. Big sagebrush, bluebunch wheatgrass, and Idaho fescue are the dominant species. Stiff sagebrush, low sagebrush, and Sandberg bluegrass are often dominant on sites with shallow restrictive layers. Western juniper is one of the few common tree species and since European settlement has greatly expanded its extent in Oregon. Nearly half of the MLRA is federally owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Most of the area is used for livestock grazing with areas accessible by irrigation often used for irrigated agriculture.

For further information, see "Land Resource Regions and Major Land Resource Areas of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin (U.S. Department of Agriculture Handbook 296, 2006)" available online at: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/survey/?cid=nrcs142p2_053624

Ecological site concept

- Site occurs on uplands
- Slopes greater than 30% on northerly aspects
- Site is in 12-16 PZ with elevation below 7000 ft
- Soils are moderately deep to deep stony loams.

Associated sites

R010XA030ID	South Slope Channery 11-13 PZ ARTRX/PSSPS Adjacent south slopes
R010XA033ID	Loamy 11-13 PZ ARTRX/PSSPS Adjacent low slope areas

Similar sites

R010XA008ID	North Slope Loamy 16-22 PZ Site occurs in 16-22" precipitation zone
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R010XA010ID	North Slope Fractured 16-22 PZ Site occurs in 16-22" precipitation zone
R010XA011ID	Clayey North 16-22 PZ Site occurs in 16-22" precipitation zone

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Artemisia tridentata ssp. xericensis</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata ssp. spicata</i>

Physiographic features

This site occurs on north aspects on hilly or steep slopes. Slopes range from 25 to 60 percent. The elevations range from 4400 to 5800 feet (1330 to 1770 meters).

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Mountain valleys or canyons > Canyon (2) Foothills > Escarpment
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	4,400–5,800 ft
Slope	25–60%
Water table depth	80 in
Aspect	NW, N, NE

Climatic features

The Big and Little Wood River Foot slopes and Plains, proposed as MLRA 10A, has a mean elevation of 5310 feet above sea level, and varies from 3600 to 9235 feet. In general, average annual precipitation is greatest on the western side, with the southeast area being the driest. The average annual precipitation, based on 7 long term climate stations located throughout the MLRA, is 15.39 inches, with a range of 12.5 to 18 inches. Monthly precipitation is generally greatest at the end of the year, diminishes steadily until a low in July and August, then increases rapidly in the autumn.

Monthly temperatures can vary considerably. Highs of up to 102° and lows down to -52° Fahrenheit have been recorded. The average annual temperature is 42.9°. The frost-free period ranges from 75 to 98 days. The freeze-free period is a bit longer: 106 to 133 days.

Both morning and afternoon average relative humidity values peak in the winter, and reach their low in July and August. The average number of sunny, cloud-free days is above average for the summer months, but below average for the period from November through February.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	75-98 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	106-133 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	12-16 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	
Freeze-free period (actual range)	
Precipitation total (actual range)	12-18 in
Frost-free period (average)	86 days
Freeze-free period (average)	120 days

Precipitation total (average)	15 in
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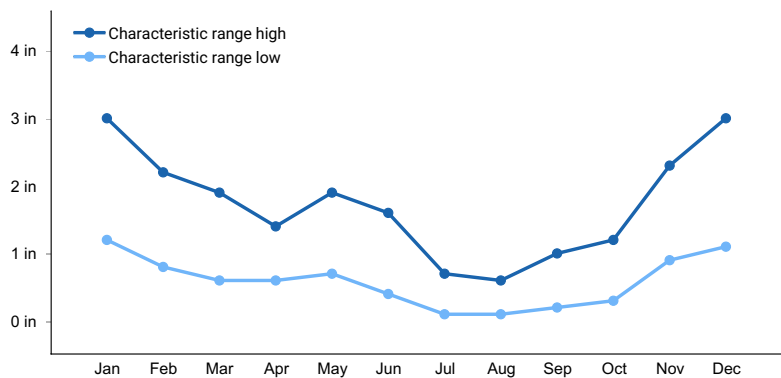


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

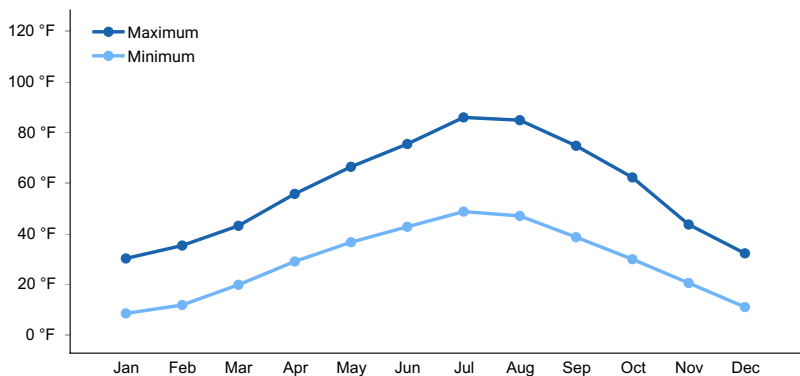


Figure 2. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

Influencing water features

This site is not influenced by adjacent streams or run on.

Wetland description

This site is not influenced by adjacent wetlands.

Soil features

The soils on this site are characterized by very stony loams. They are well drained, with slow permeability and very low available water holding capacity. Runoff is very high. The erosion hazard is severe or very severe by water. These soils are characterized by a xeric moisture regime. Soil temperature regime is mesic.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Colluvium–volcanic rock
Surface texture	(1) Very stony loam
Family particle size	(1) Fine-loamy
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Slow
Soil depth	40–60 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0–6%
Surface fragment cover >3"	15–25%

Available water capacity (0-40in)	2.1 in
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-40in)	6.1–7.3
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (4-60in)	5–25%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (4-60in)	10–25%

Ecological dynamics

This site is dominated by foothills sagebrush in the overstory and bluebunch wheatgrass in the understory. The composition by weight is 55 to 65 percent grasses, 10 to 15 percent forbs, and 25 to 35 percent shrubs.

During the last few thousand years, this site has evolved in a semi-arid climate characterized by dry summers and cold, wet winters. Herbivory has historically occurred on this site at low levels of utilization. Herbivores include mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, pronghorn antelope, and lagomorphs.

Fire has historically occurred on the site at intervals of 20 to 50 years.

The Reference State (State 1), previously referred to as the Historic Climax Plant Community (HCPC), moves through many phases depending on the natural and man-made forces that impact the community over time. State 1, described later, indicates some of these phases.

FUNCTION:

This site is best suited for late spring, summer, and fall grazing by livestock. The site can be used by big game in the spring, summer, and fall for food and cover. It is also suited for recreation use in the spring, summer, and fall.

Due to the amount of surface stones and limited access on steeper slopes, most areas of this site are not easily degraded. Lower footslopes in proximity to bottoms or drainages are most likely to degrade due to access by animals from adjoining lands. Infiltration is good where the plant community has a good shrub component. A mixed stand of shrubs and perennial grasses is necessary to reach the potential of the site.

Impacts on the Plant Community.

Influence of fire:

In the absence of normal fire frequency, foothills sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, and some other shrubs can gradually increase on the site. Grasses and forbs decrease as shrubs increase. With the continued absence of fire, shrubs can displace most of the primary understory species.

When fire frequency is greater than historic levels, foothills sagebrush and bitterbrush are reduced significantly. Rabbitbrushes and other root sprouting shrubs can increase slightly. With continued short fire frequency, foothills sagebrush and bitterbrush can be completely eliminated along with many of the desirable understory species such as bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, and Thurber's needlegrass. These species may be replaced by Sandberg bluegrass and bulbous bluegrass along with a variety of annual and perennial forbs including noxious and invasive plants. Cheatgrass, bulbous bluegrass, and medusahead will invade the site. These fine fuels will increase the fire frequency.

Influence of improper grazing management:

Season-long grazing and/or excessive utilization can be very detrimental to this site. This type of management leads to reducing vigor of the bunchgrasses. With reduced vigor, recruitment of these species declines. As these species decline, the plant community becomes susceptible to increase in tall shrubs and noxious and invasive plants.

Continued improper grazing management influences fire frequency by increasing fine fuels that carry fires. As cheatgrass and medusahead increase and become co-dominant with Sandberg bluegrass and other annuals, fires become more frequent.

Proper grazing management that addresses frequency, duration, and intensity of grazing can also keep fine fuels from developing, thereby reducing fire frequency. This can lead to gradual increases in foothills sagebrush and tall shrubs. A planned grazing system can be developed to intentionally accumulate fine fuels in preparation for a prescribed burn.

Due to the shrub species on this site, any brush management efforts should be carefully planned. Antelope bitterbrush is very important as a browse species for wildlife and needs to be protected with any brush control practices applied. A reduction in shrubs without a suitable understory of perennial grasses can lead to an increase in fine fuels which will lead to a more frequent fire regime. Loss of shrub species on this site can have very negative impacts on wildlife.

Weather influences:

Above normal precipitation in April, May, and June can dramatically increase total annual production of the plant community. These weather patterns can also increase viable seed production of desirable species to provide for recruitment. Likewise, below normal precipitation during these spring months can significantly reduce total annual production and be detrimental to viable seed production. Overall plant composition is normally not affected when perennials have good vigor.

Below normal temperatures in the spring can have an adverse impact on total production regardless of the precipitation. An early, hard early freeze can occasionally kill some plants.

Prolonged drought adversely affects this plant community in several ways. Vigor, recruitment, and production are usually reduced. Mortality can occur. Prolonged drought can lead to a reduction in fire frequency.

Influence of Insects and disease:

Outbreaks can affect vegetation health. Bitterbrush can be severely affected by the western tent caterpillar (*Malacosoma fragilis*). Two consecutive years of defoliation by the tent caterpillar can cause mortality in bitterbrush. It seldom kills the entire stand. Mormon cricket and grasshopper outbreaks occur periodically. Outbreaks seldom cause plant mortality since defoliation of the plant occurs only once during the year of the outbreak.

Influence of noxious and invasive plants:

Many of these species add to the fine-fuel component and lead to increased fire frequency. Annual and perennial invasive species compete with desirable plants for moisture and nutrients. The result is reduced production and change in composition of the understory.

Influence of wildlife:

Big game animals use this site in the spring, summer, and fall. Their numbers are seldom high enough to adversely affect the plant community. Herbivory can be detrimental to bitterbrush when livestock grazing and browsing by big game occurs at the same time and season. This will occur when both kinds of animal are using the plant in the late summer or fall. The adverse impact is excessive use of the current year's leader growth. The deer mouse is beneficial to this site as it is the principal vector for planting bitterbrush seed.

Watershed:

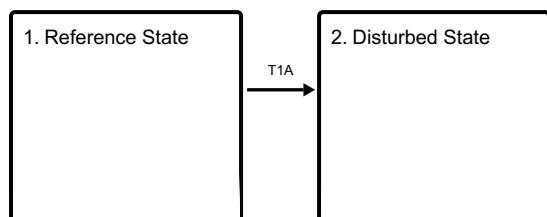
Decreased infiltration and increased runoff occur with an increase in foothills sagebrush. Desired understory species can be reduced. This composition change can affect nutrient and water cycles. Increased runoff also causes sheet and rill erosion. Abnormally short fire frequency also gives the same results, but to a lesser degree. The long-term effect is a transition to a different state.

Practice Limitations:

Severe limitations exist for brush control and seeding on this site with ground moving equipment due to steep slopes and stoniness.

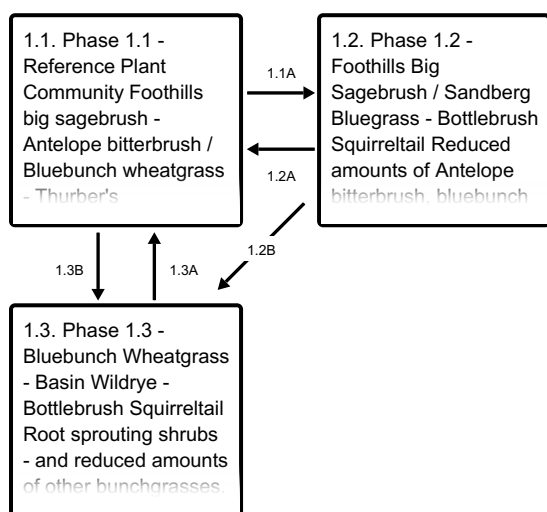
State and transition model

Ecosystem states



T1A - Frequent fire, improper grazing management

State 1 submodel, plant communities



1.1A - Improper grazing management, no fire

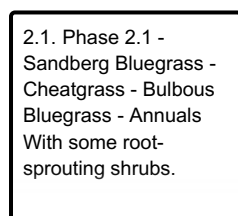
1.3B - Fire

1.2A - Prescribed grazing, brush management

1.2B - Fire

1.3A - Prescribed grazing, no fire

State 2 submodel, plant communities



State 1

Reference State

Dominant plant species

- big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *xericensis*), shrub
- bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata* ssp. *spicata*), grass

Community 1.1

Phase 1.1 - Reference Plant Community Foothills big sagebrush - Antelope bitterbrush / Bluebunch wheatgrass - Thurber's needlegrass - Idaho fescue - Basin Wildrye

Foothills big sagebrush - Antelope bitterbrush / Bluebunch wheatgrass - Thurber's needlegrass - Idaho fescue - Basin Wildrye The Reference Plant Community Phase is Phase 1.1. This plant community is dominated by foothills sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, and bluebunch wheatgrass. Subdominant species include Thurber's needlegrass, Idaho fescue, basin wildrye, biscuitroot, white stoneseed, and lupine. A wide variety of other grasses, forbs and shrubs can occur in minor amounts. The plant species composition of Phase 1.1 is listed later under "Reference Plant Community Phase Plant Species Composition". Natural fire frequency is 20 to 50 years.

Resilience management. Total annual production is 900 pounds per acre (1008 kilograms per hectare) in a normal year. Production in a favorable year is 1100 pounds per acre (1232 kilograms per hectare). Production in an unfavorable year is 700 pounds per acre (784 kilograms per hectare). Structurally, cool season deep rooted perennial bunchgrasses are dominant, followed by tall shrubs being more dominant than perennial forbs while shallow rooted perennial bunchgrasses are subdominant.

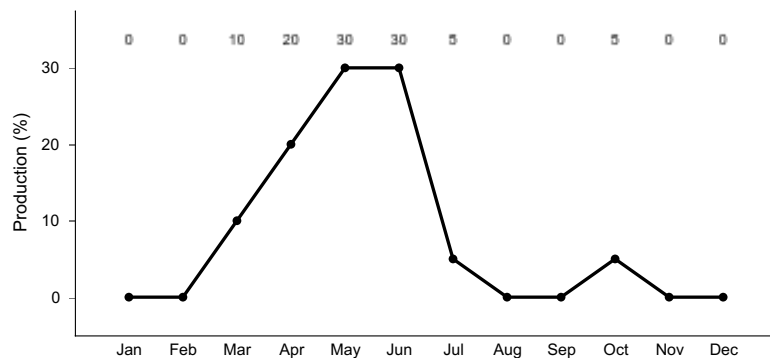


Figure 3. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). ID0904, ARTRW8/PSSPS/ACTH7 HIGH PRECIP.

Community 1.2

Phase 1.2 - Foothills Big Sagebrush / Sandberg Bluegrass - Bottlebrush Squirreltail Reduced amounts of Antelope bitterbrush, bluebunch wheatgrass, Thurber's needlegrass, and other bunchgrasses.

Reduced amounts of Antelope bitterbrush, bluebunch wheatgrass, Thurber's needlegrass, and other bunchgrasses. This plant community is dominated by foothills sagebrush with reduced amounts of bluebunch wheatgrass and other deep-rooted bunchgrasses. Sandberg bluegrass and bottlebrush squirreltail have increased in the understory. All deep-rooted bunchgrasses are typically in low vigor. Foothills sagebrush has increased as well as some other tall shrubs. Antelope bitterbrush is present but in reduced vigor and may be hedged. This state has developed due to improper grazing management and lack of fire. Some cheatgrass, bulbous bluegrass and/or medusahead may have invaded the site.

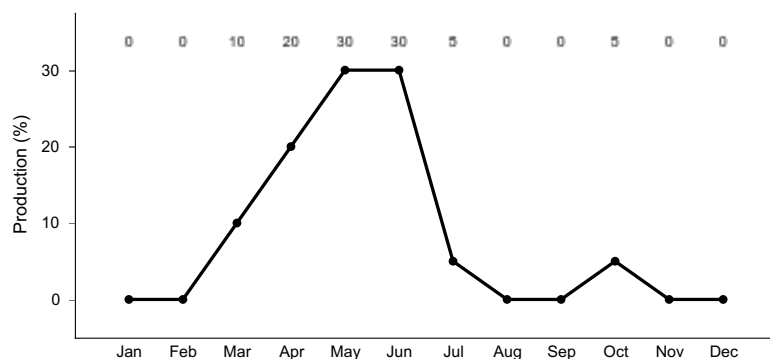


Figure 4. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). ID0904, ARTRW8/PSSPS/ACTH7 HIGH PRECIP.

Community 1.3

Phase 1.3 - Bluebunch Wheatgrass - Basin Wildrye - Bottlebrush Squirreltail Root sprouting

shrubs - and reduced amounts of other bunchgrasses.

Root sprouting shrubs - and reduced amounts of other bunchgrasses. This plant community is dominated by bluebunch wheatgrass with some basin wildrye and tall root-sprouting shrubs. Thurber's needlegrass and Idaho fescue can be lost due to fire. Bottlebrush squirreltail has increased. Forbs remain about in the same proportion as Phase A. Foothills sagebrush and antelope bitterbrush have been reduced significantly due to wildfire. Some cheatgrass, bulbous bluegrass, and/or medusahead may have invaded the site. This plant community is the result of wildfire.

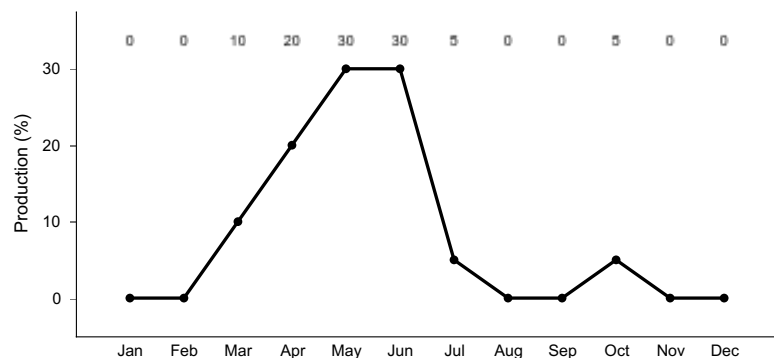


Figure 5. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). ID0904, ARTRW8/PSSPS/ACTH7 HIGH PRECIP.

Pathway 1.1A

Community 1.1 to 1.2

Phase 1.1 to 1.2. Develops with improper grazing management and in the absence of fire.

Pathway 1.3B

Community 1.1 to 1.3

Phase 1.1 to 1.3. Develops with fire.

Pathway 1.2A

Community 1.2 to 1.1

Phase 1.2 to 1.1. Develops with prescribed grazing and brush management.

Pathway 1.2B

Community 1.2 to 1.3

Phase 1.2 to 1.3. Develops with fire.

Pathway 1.3A

Community 1.3 to 1.1

Phase 1.3 to 1.1. Develops with prescribed grazing and no fire.

State 2

Disturbed State

Dominant plant species

- Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), grass
- cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), grass
- bulbous bluegrass (*Poa bulbosa*), grass

Community 2.1

Phase 2.1 - Sandberg Bluegrass - Cheatgrass - Bulbous Bluegrass - Annuals With some root-sprouting shrubs.

Sandberg Bluegrass - Cheatgrass - Bulbous Bluegrass - Annuals With some root-sprouting shrubs. This plant community is dominated by Sandberg bluegrass, cheatgrass, bulbous bluegrass and/or other annuals. Root sprouting shrubs such as rabbitbrush and horsebrush can be present, dependent upon, how frequent, fire has occurred. Some soil loss has occurred. This state has developed due to frequent fires and improper grazing management from Phase 1.2, State 1 or with frequent fires and/or improper grazing management from Phase 1.3, State 1. This site has crossed the threshold. It is economically impractical to return this plant community to State 1 with accelerating practices.

Resilience management. State 2 to unknown site. Excessive soil loss and changes in the hydrologic cycle caused by continued improper grazing management and/or frequent fire cause this state to cross a threshold and retrogress to a new site with reduced potential. It is economically impractical to return this plant community to State 1 with accelerating practices.

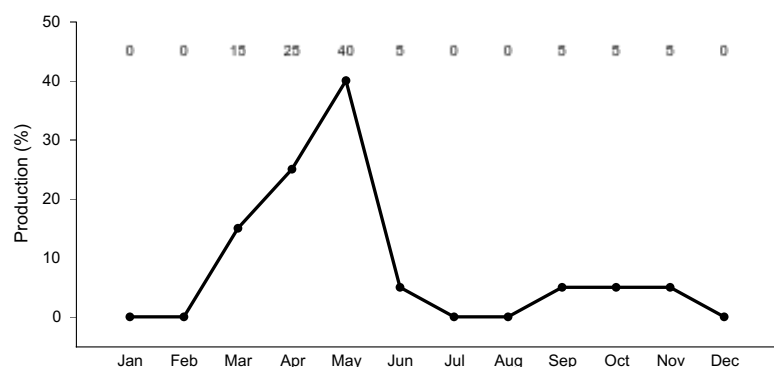


Figure 6. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). ID0911, D25 POSE/BRTE/ANNUALS.

Transition T1A State 1 to 2

State 1 Phase 1.2 to State 2. Develops through frequent fire and improper grazing management. State 1 Phase 1.3 to State 2. Develops through frequent fire and/or improper grazing management. This site has crossed the threshold. It is economically impractical to return this plant community to State 1 with accelerating practices.

Additional community tables

Animal community

Wildlife Interpretations.

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations

This rangeland ecological site provides diverse habitat for many native wildlife species. Large herbivore use of this ecological site is dominated by mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and elk. Important seasonal habitat is provided for resident and migratory animals including western toad, sagebrush lizard, western rattlesnake, shrews, bats, jackrabbits, ground squirrels, mice, coyote, red fox, badger, sage-grouse, Ferruginous hawk, prairie falcon, horned lark and western meadowlark. Changes in the plant community composition can reduce the number and diversity of wildlife species in the area. With reduced shrub cover, shrub obligate avian and mammal species become rare including sage-grouse, brewer's sparrow, sage thrasher, and pygmy rabbit. Encroachment of noxious and invasive plant species (cheatgrass, Medusahead and bulbous bluegrass) can replace native plant species which provide critical feed, brood-rearing and nesting cover for a variety of native wildlife. The loss of herbaceous understory vegetation has a negative impact on ground nesting birds, while the loss of shrub cover negatively affects both ground and shrub nesting avians. Water is limited only being provided by seasonal runoff, artificial water catchments and spring sites. This rangeland ecological site may be associated with pre-historic lava flows which provide unique cave habitats for several sensitive animal species, including the Blind Cave Leiodid Beetle, Cave Obligate Mite, Bats and Cave Obligate Harvestman.

State 1 Phase 1.1 - Foothills Big Sagebrush/ Antelope Bitterbrush/ Bluebunch Wheatgrass/ Thurber's Needlegrass/ Idaho Fescue/ Basin Wildrye Reference Plant Community (RPC): This plant community provides a diversity of grasses, forbs and shrubs used by native insect communities that assist in pollination. The reptile and amphibian community is represented by leopard lizard, short horned lizard, sagebrush lizard, western skink, western rattlesnake, western toad, boreal chorus frog and northern leopard frog. Amphibians are associated with springs and isolated water bodies adjacent to this plant community. Spring developments that capture all available water would preclude the use of these sites by amphibians. The plant community provides habitat for prey species and cover for these resident reptile and amphibian species. Shrub-steppe obligate avian species include the Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, sage thrasher and sage-grouse. Critical habitat (lek sites, nesting areas, winter cover and food) for sage-grouse is provided by this diverse plant community. The plant community supports seasonal needs of large mammals (mule deer and elk) providing food and cover. Antelope bitterbrush is preferred browse for wild ungulates. A diverse small mammal population including golden-mantled ground squirrels, chipmunks, yellow-bellied marmots and pygmy rabbits utilize this plant community. The deer mouse is the primary vector for planting bitterbrush seed.

State 1 Phase 1.2 – Foothills Big Sagebrush/Sandberg Bluegrass/ Bottlebrush Squirreltail Plant Community: This plant community is the result of improper grazing management and no fire. An increase in canopy cover of sagebrush contributes to a sparse herbaceous understory. Grasses, forbs and shrubs, are used by native insects that assist in pollination but the reduced herbaceous understory results in decreased diversity and numbers of insects. The reptile community is represented by leopard lizard, short horned lizard, sagebrush lizard, western skink and western rattlesnake. Diversity and population of the reptile community would decline due to a reduced understory and associated loss of invertebrate habitat. Spring developments that capture all available water would preclude the use of these sites by amphibians. Key shrub-steppe avian obligate species include Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, sage thrasher and sage-grouse. Reduced herbaceous understory is a key factor in limiting the use of this plant community by avian species. Critical habitat (lek sites, nesting areas, winter cover and food) for sage-grouse is limited due to a less diverse herbaceous plant community. The plant community supports the needs of large mammals (mule deer and elk) providing food and cover on a seasonal basis. Antelope bitterbrush is preferred browse for wild ungulates. The reduced vigor and hedging on antelope bitterbrush will reduce available forage on this site. A diverse small mammal population including golden-mantled ground squirrels, chipmunks, deer mouse and yellow-bellied marmots would utilize the available habitat. The deer mouse is the primary vector for planting bitterbrush seed.

State 1 Phase 1.3 - Bluebunch Wheatgrass/ Sandberg Bluegrass/ Bottlebrush Squirreltail Plant Community: This plant community is the result of fire. The plant community, dominated by herbaceous vegetation with little or no sagebrush provides less vertical structure and limits use by shrub obligate animals. Insect diversity would be reduced but a diverse native forb plant community would still support select pollinators. Reptile use including short horned lizard, sagebrush lizard and western rattlesnakes, would be limited or excluded due to the absence of sagebrush. The dominance of herbaceous vegetation with reduced sagebrush canopy cover would eliminate use of these areas for nesting by Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, sage thrasher and sage-grouse. This plant community provides limited brood-rearing habitat for sage-grouse when sagebrush cover is adjacent to the site. Winter habitat for sage-grouse is eliminated. The herbaceous vegetation improves habitat for grassland avian species (horned lark and western meadowlark). Large mammal (mule deer and elk) forage use would be seasonal but the site would offer little thermal cover and young of year cover. The populations of small mammals would be dominated by open grassland species like the Columbian ground squirrel.

State 2 – Sandberg Bluegrass/ Cheatgrass/ Bulbous Bluegrass Annual Plant Community: This plant community is the result of continued improper grazing management and/or frequent fire. The loss of the native shrub and herbaceous plant community would not support a diverse insect community. The reduced forb component in the plant community would support a very limited population of pollinators. Most native reptilian species are not supported with food, water or cover. This plant community does not support the habitat requirements for sage-grouse, sage thrasher, Brewer's sparrow or sage sparrow. Diversity of grassland avian species is reduced due to poor cover and food. Birds of prey including hawks and falcons may range throughout these areas looking for prey species. Large mammals may utilize the herbaceous vegetation in the early part of the year when the invasive annuals (cheatgrass) are more palatable. At other times of the year large mammals would not regularly utilize these areas due to poor food and cover conditions. The reduction of insect populations and diversity would reduce suitability of the site for bats. The populations of small mammals would be dominated by open grassland species like the Columbian ground squirrel.

Grazing Interpretations.

The site is best used by livestock in the late spring, summer, and fall. The steep slopes and surface stones limit some access by livestock.

Estimated initial stocking rate will be determined with the landowner or decision-maker. They will be based on the inventory which includes species composition, similarity index, production, past use history, season of use, and seasonal preference. Calculations used to determine estimated initial stocking rate will be based on forage preference ratings.

Hydrological functions

None listed.

Recreational uses

This site has limited opportunities for hiking and horseback riding due to steep slopes and surface stones. The site has many spring flowering forbs that can provide opportunities for photography. There are some opportunities for big game and upland bird hunting.

Wood products

None

Other products

None

Other information

Field Offices

Mountain Home, ID
Gooding, ID
Fairfield, ID
Shoshone, ID
Rupert, ID
Arco, ID

Inventory data references

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS clipping and other inventory data. Also, field knowledge of range-trained personnel was used. Those involved in developing this site description include:

Dave Franzen, co-owner, Intermountain Rangeland Consultants, LLC

Jacy Gibbs, co-owner, Intermountain Rangeland Consultants, LLC

Jim Cornwell, Range Management Specialist, IASCD

Brendan Brazee, State Rangeland Management Specialist, NRCS, Idaho

Leah Juarros, Resource Soil Scientist, NRCS, Idaho

Lee Brooks, Range Management Specialist, IASCD

Type locality

Location 1: Gooding County, ID	
Township/Range/Section	T4S R13E S2

References

. Fire Effects Information System. <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/>.

Other references

Hironaka, M., M.A. Fosberg, A. H. Winward. 1983. Sagebrush-Grass Habitat Types of Southern Idaho. University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. Bulletin Number "35".

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USDA, NRCS.2001. The PLANTS Database, Version 3.1 (<http://plants.usda.gov/>). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA.

USDI Bureau of Land Management, US Geological Survey; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Agricultural Research Service; Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health. Technical Reference 1734-6; Version 4-2005.

Contributors

Dave Franzen and Jacy Gibbs

Approval

Kirt Walstad, 12/13/2023

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	03/28/2008
Approved by	Kirt Walstad
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** rills can occur on this site. If rills are present they are likely to occur immediately following wildfire. Rills are most likely to occur on soils with surface textures of silt loam and clay loam.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** water-flow patterns occur on the site. They occur as short and disrupted flows. They are disrupted by rocks, cool season grasses, and tall shrubs and are not extensive.

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3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** both are rare on this site. Where flow patterns and/or rills are present, a few pedestals may be expected. Terracettes can occur as deposits behind rocks, large bunchgrasses and shrubs. They are not extensive.
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4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** data is not available. On sites in mid-seral status bare ground may range from 20-30 percent.
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5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** none.
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6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** usually not present. Immediately following wildfire some soil movement may occur on lighter textured soils.
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7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** fine litter in the interspaces may move up to 3 feet following a significant run-off event. Coarse litter generally does not move. Some litter will be caught between rocks.
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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):** values should range from 4 to 6 but needs to be tested.
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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** structure ranges weak fine subangular blocky to moderate fine granular. Soil organic matter (SOM) needs to be determined. The A or A1 horizon is typically 5 inches thick. Soil surface color is very dark brown moist.
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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** bunchgrasses, especially deep-rooted perennials, slow run-off and increase infiltration. Tall shrubs accumulate snow in the interspaces. Surface stones will also slow water and help infiltration.
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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):** not 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: cool season deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses
- Sub-dominant: tall shrubs

Other: perennial forbs

Additional: shallow rooted bunchgrasses

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** foothills sagebrush will become decadent in the absence of fire and ungulate grazing. Grass and forb mortality will occur as tall shrubs increase.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** additional litter cover data is needed but is expected to be 20-30 percent to a depth of 0.1 inches. Under mature shrubs litter is >0.5 inches deep and is 90-100 percent ground cover.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** is 900 pounds per acre (1008 kilograms per hectare) in a year with normal temperatures and precipitation. Perennial grasses produce 55-65 percent of the total production, forbs 10-15 percent, and shrubs 25-35 percent.
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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:** includes cheatgrass, bulbous bluegrass, whitetop, rush skeletonweed, musk and scotch thistle, and diffuse and spotted knapweed.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** all functional groups have the potential to reproduce in most years.
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