

Ecological site R024XY638OR SOUTH SLOPES 8-10 PZ

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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.



Figure 1. Mapped extent

Areas shown in blue indicate the maximum mapped extent of this ecological site. Other ecological sites likely occur within the highlighted areas. It is also possible for this ecological site to occur outside of highlighted areas if detailed soil survey has not been completed or recently updated.

Associated sites

R024XY015OR	DESERT LOAM 6-10 PZ Desert Loam 6-10 PZ (non-aspect, lower production, different composition – ATCO and PIDE4 dominant)
R024XY016OR	LOAMY 8-10 PZ Loamy 8-10 PZ (non-aspect, different composition – ACTH7 dominant, PSSPS prominent)
R024XY017OR	SHALLOW LOAM 8-10 PZ Shallow Loam 8-10 PZ (non-aspect, lower production, different composition – ACTH7 dominant, ACHY and PSSPS prominent)
R024XY020OR	SHRUBBY LOAM 8-10 PZ Shrubby Loam 8-10 PZ (non-aspect, different composition - EPHEd present, ACTH7 dominant, PSSPS prominent)
R024XY030OR	LOAMY SLOPES 6-10 PZ Loamy Slopes 6-10 PZ (lower production, warmer slopes, different composition – ARTRW8 and ORHY dominant w/ACTH7 sub-dominant)
R024XY031OR	DROUGHTY SHALLOW SLOPES 6-10 PZ Droughty Shallow Slopes 6-10 PZ (higher soluble salts, lower production, warmer slopes, different composition – ATCO dominant)

R024XY032OR	ARID SOUTH SLOPES 6-10 PZ Arid South Slopes 6-10 PZ (lower production, warmer slopes, different composition - ARTRW8-SADO4/ACHY-ACDE Association)
R024XY602OR	NORTH SLOPES 8-10 PZ North Slopes 8-10 PZ (higher production, cooler north slope)

Similar sites

R024XY031OR	DROUGHTY SHALLOW SLOPES 6-10 PZ Droughty Shallow Slopes 6-10 PZ (higher soluble salts, lower production, warmer slopes, different composition – ATCO dominant)
R024XY032OR	ARID SOUTH SLOPES 6-10 PZ Arid South Slopes 6-10 PZ (lower production, warmer slopes, different composition - ARTRW8-SADO4/ACHY-ACDE Association)
R024XY030OR	LOAMY SLOPES 6-10 PZ Loamy Slopes 6-10 PZ (lower production, warmer slopes, different composition – ARTRW8 and ORHY dominant w/ACTH7 sub-dominant)

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Artemisia tridentata ssp. wyomingensis</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata ssp. spicata</i> (2) <i>Achnatherum thurberianum</i>

Physiographic features

This site occurs on south facing aspects of terraces, basin hills and low mountain slopes. Slopes typically range from 30 to 50%. Elevation varies from 3500 to 5200 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Terrace (2) Hill (3) Mountain slope
Elevation	3,500–5,200 ft
Slope	30–50%
Aspect	S

Climatic features

The annual precipitation ranges from 8 to 10 inches, most of which occurs in the form of rain during the months of December through March. The soil temperature regime is mesic with a mean air temperature of 50 degrees F. Temperature extremes range from 110 to -20 degrees F. The frost free period ranges from 110 to 140 days. The optimum growth period for plant growth is from the first of April through early June.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	140 days
Freeze-free period (average)	0 days
Precipitation total (average)	10 in

Influencing water features

Soil features

The soils of this site are typically shallow to moderately deep over a strongly cemented duripan or bedrock. Substratum's can be either compacted alluvial sediments or bedrock. The surface texture is a very cobbly loam over a cobbly loam subsoil. A desert pavement is common. Permeability is moderately slow to moderate. The available water holding capacity (AWC) is about 2 to 4 inches for the profile. The potential for erosion is high.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Loess–rhyolite
Surface texture	(1) Very cobbly loam (2) Very flaggy
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Moderately well drained to well drained
Permeability class	Moderate to moderately slow
Soil depth	10–40 in
Available water capacity (0-40in)	2–4 in

Ecological dynamics

The reference native plant community is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush and bluebunch wheatgrass. Thurber's needlegrass is prominent in the stand. Spiny hopsage, Indian ricegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail and Sandberg bluegrass are present in the stand. Vegetative composition of the community is approximately 65 percent grasses, 10 percent forbs and 25 percent shrubs. The approximate ground cover is 30 to 40 percent (basal and crown).

Four states have been identified for this site: a reference state; a state with the presence of annuals; a state with a shrub/annual co-dominance; and a state with annual dominance.

Reference: Plant community phase change is driven by infrequent fire. Wyoming and basin big sagebrush decline after fire while Thurber's needlegrass, Indian ricegrass and other grasses increase. May see a temporary increase in rabbitbrush after fire. Time facilitates the reintroduction of sagebrush. The introduction of invasive annual grasses and forbs transitions into the state 2.

State 2: Compositionally similar to the reference state with a trace of cheatgrass and weedy forbs. Ecological function has not changed, however the resiliency of the state has been reduced by the presence of invasive weeds. Prescribed grazing and infrequent fire (> 50 year return interval) maintain state dynamics. The timing and/or intensity of grazing or prolonged drought favors Wyoming and basin big sagebrush, squirreltail and Sandberg's bluegrass. Prescribed grazing and/or release from drought may reverse the decline in needlegrass and Indian ricegrass production. Infrequent fire reduces the shrub community and promotes the bunchgrass component. Mismanaged grazing and/or prolonged drought leads to a biotic threshold and into state 3.

State 3: Wyoming and basin big sagebrush is decadent with little recruitment. The perennial grass component is significantly reduced in both density and productivity. Cheatgrass and/or annual forbs and/or Sandberg's bluegrass along with sagebrush control site resources and drive ecological dynamics. Bare ground is abundant. Spatial and temporal energy capture and nutrient cycling has been truncated. Infiltration may be reduced due to lack of ground cover. Risk of soil erosion by both wind and water is increased. Catastrophic wildfire will lead to an abiotic threshold and into state 4.

State 4: Cheatgrass and/or annual weed dominated plant community with limited to no shrub or perennial grass component. Soil erosion and redistribution along with changes in dynamic soil properties affect the hydrologic cycle and thus the nutrient cycle. Harsh environmental factors increase state resiliency to change.

Range in Characteristics

The depth to a restrictive layer and aspect influences the composition and production of the site. Production will

increase with greater soil depth and at the upper end of the precipitation zone. Bluebunch wheatgrass increases on a silty surface. Thurber's needlegrass increases on loamy surfaces. Indian ricegrass will increase on shallow coarse soils and warm slopes. Spiny hopsage and shadscale saltbush increases at the lower end of the precipitation zone and on droughty slopes. On older stable higher terraces an erosion pavement has accumulated with a distinctive desert varnish. The distinctive dark color is due to precipitated concentrates of manganese and lesser amounts of iron.

Response to Disturbance - States

If the condition of the site deteriorates as a result of over grazing, bluebunch wheatgrass, Thurber needlegrass and other deep rooted perennial bunchgrasses will decrease in the stand. Wyoming big sagebrush, squirreltail and Sandberg bluegrass will increase. Minor amounts of annuals will invade. With further deterioration, bare ground rapidly increases, erosion accelerates and site productivity decreases. The invasion of annuals and the natural re-establishment of native perennials are limited on eroded surfaces and in areas of dense cobbles and heavy erosion pavement.

States: ARTRW8-GRSP/ELEL5-POSE-bare ground with erosion pavement; Annuals (scattered)-bare ground with erosion pavement

State and transition model

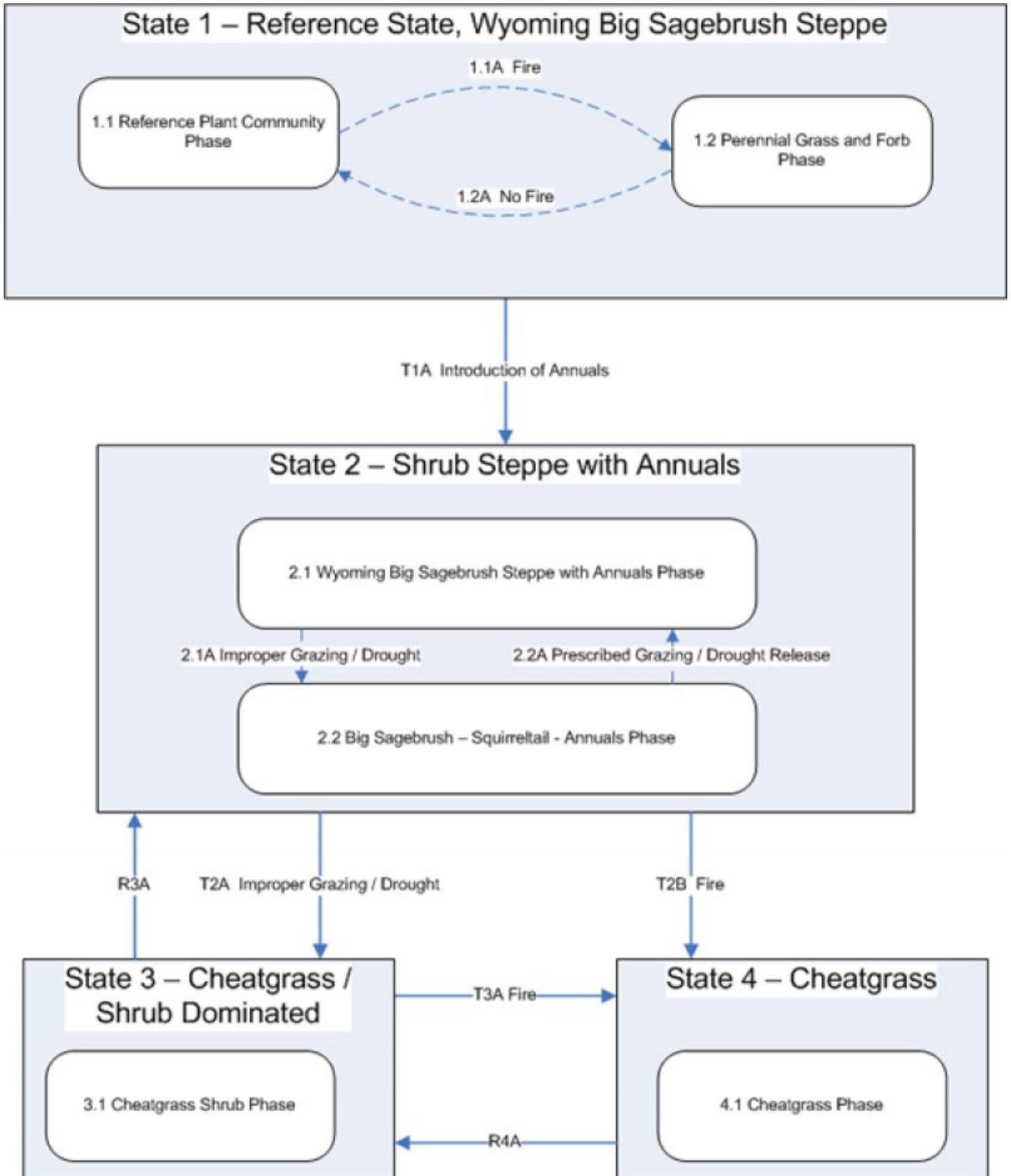


Figure 2. Group 6, STM

**State 1
Reference State**

**Community 1.1
Reference Plant Community**

The reference native plant community is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush and bluebunch wheatgrass.

Thurber's needlegrass is prominent in the stand. Spiny hopsage, Indian ricegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail and Sandberg bluegrass are present in the stand. Vegetative composition of the community is approximately 65 percent grasses, 10 percent forbs and 25 percent shrubs. The approximate ground cover is 30 to 40 percent (basal and crown).

Table 5. Annual production by plant type

Plant Type	Low (Lb/Acre)	Representative Value (Lb/Acre)	High (Lb/Acre)
Grass/Grasslike	325	455	585
Shrub/Vine	125	175	225
Forb	50	70	90
Total	500	700	900

Additional community tables

Table 6. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Lb/Acre)	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	Dominant, moderate rooted bunchgrass			175–245	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSPS	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata ssp. spicata</i>	175–245	–
2	Sub-dominant, moderate rooted bunchgrass			140–210	
	Thurber's needlegrass	ACTH7	<i>Achnatherum thurberianum</i>	140–210	–
3	Perennial bunch grasses			28–84	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	14–35	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	14–35	–
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	0–14	–
Forb					
4	Perennial forbs			7–21	
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	0–7	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	0–7	–
	lupine	LUPIN	<i>Lupinus</i>	0–7	–
	evening primrose	OENOT	<i>Oenothera</i>	0–7	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	0–7	–
	nodding thelypody	THFL3	<i>Thelypodium flexuosum</i>	0–7	–
Shrub/Vine					
5	Dominant, evergreen, non-sprouting shrubs			140–210	
	Wyoming big sagebrush	ARTRW8	<i>Artemisia tridentata ssp. wyomingensis</i>	105–140	–
	basin big sagebrush	ARTRT	<i>Artemisia tridentata ssp. tridentata</i>	35–70	–
6	Sub-dominant, evergreen non-sprouting shrub			0–14	
	spiny hopsage	GRSP	<i>Grayia spinosa</i>	0–14	–
7	Other shrubs			7–42	
	shadscale saltbush	ATCO	<i>Atriplex confertifolia</i>	0–14	–
	bud sagebrush	PIDE4	<i>Picrothamnus desertorum</i>	0–14	–
	greasewood	SAVE4	<i>Sarcobatus vermiculatus</i>	0–7	–
	littleleaf horsebrush	TEGL	<i>Tetradymia glabrata</i>	0–7	–
	shortspine horsebrush	TESP2	<i>Tetradymia spinosa</i>	0–7	–
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	0–7	–
	rubber rabbitbrush	ERNA10	<i>Ericameria nauseosa</i>	0–7	–

Animal community

Livestock Grazing

This site has limited suitability for livestock grazing use in the late spring and fall under a planned grazing system. Use should be postponed until the soils are firm enough to prevent trampling damage and soil compaction. Care should be taken to avoid plant crown damage and soil movement when the soils are wet. The shallow soils on the steep slopes of this site are very susceptible to movement and compaction from hoof action. Grazing management should be keyed to bluebunch wheatgrass and Thurber's needlegrass. Deferred grazing or rest is recommended at least once every three years.

Wildlife

This site offers food and cover for mule deer, desert bighorn sheep and a variety of birds, rodents and associated

predators. It is an important spring, fall and winter use area for mule deer and desert bighorn sheep.

Hydrological functions

The soils of this site have a high runoff potential because of low intake rates, low water holding capacity, shallow depths and steep slopes. Hydrologic cover is fair to good when the bluebunch wheatgrass and Thurber's needlegrass components are greater than 70 percent of potential. The soils are in hydrologic group D.

Other information

This site has virtually no potential for range seeding because it is steep, very droughty and usually has a stony surface. Extended drought can inhibit germination and establishment of presently available species. In areas where dense cobbles and a heavy erosion pavement exists, the potential for natural seeding reestablishment is low.

Contributors

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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)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	
Approved by	
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):**

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

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

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):**

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:

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

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

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

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:

17. Perennial plant reproductive capability:
