

## **Ecological site R025XY034NV Mountain Shoulder**

Last updated: 4/25/2024  
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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.

### **MLRA notes**

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 025X—Owyhee High Plateau

#### **MLRA Notes 25—Owyhee High Plateau**

This area is in Nevada (56 percent), Idaho (30 percent), Oregon (12 percent), and Utah (2 percent). It makes up about 27,443 square miles. MLRA 25 is characteristically cooler and wetter than the neighboring MLRAs of the Great Basin. The western boundary is marked by a gradual transition to the lower and warmer basins of MLRA 24. The boundary to the south-southeast, with MLRA 28B, is marked by gradual changes in geology marked by an increased dominance of singleleaf pinyon and Utah juniper and a reduced presence of Idaho fescue. The boundary to the north, with MLRA 11, is a rapid transition from the lava plateau topography to the lower elevation Snake River Plain.

#### **Physiography:**

All of this area lies within the Intermontane Plateaus. The southern half is in the Great Basin section of the Basin and Range province. This part of the MLRA is characterized by isolated, uplifted fault-block mountain ranges separated by narrow, aggraded desert plains. This geologically older terrain has been dissected by numerous streams draining to the Humboldt River.

The northern half of the area lies within the Columbia Plateaus province. This part of the MLRA forms the southern boundary of the extensive Columbia Plateau basalt flows. Most of the northern half is in the Payette section, but the northeast corner is in the Snake River Plain section. Deep, narrow canyons draining into the Snake River have been incised into this broad basalt plain. Elevation ranges from 3,000 to 7,550 feet on rolling plateaus and in gently sloping basins. It is more than 9,840 feet on some steep mountains. The Humboldt River crosses the southern half of this area

#### **Geology:**

The dominant rock types in this MLRA are volcanic. They include andesite, basalt, tuff, and rhyolite. In the north and west parts of the area, Cretaceous granitic rocks are exposed among Miocene volcanic rocks in mountains. A Mesozoic igneous and metamorphic rock complex dominates the south and east parts of the area. Upper and Lower Paleozoic calcareous sediments, including oceanic deposits, are exposed with limited extent in the mountains. Alluvial fan and basin fill sediments occur in the valleys.

#### **Climate:**

The average annual precipitation in most of this area is typically 11 to 22 inches. It increases to as much as 49 inches at the higher elevations. Rainfall occurs in spring and sporadically in summer. Precipitation occurs mainly as snow in winter. The precipitation is distributed fairly evenly throughout fall, winter, and spring. The amount of precipitation is lowest from midsummer to early autumn. The average annual temperature is 33 to 51 degrees F. The freeze-free period averages 130 days and ranges from 65 to 190 days, decreasing in length with elevation. It is typically less than 70 days in the mountains.

#### **Water:**

The supply of water from precipitation and streamflow is small and unreliable, except along the Owyhee, Bruneau, and Humboldt Rivers. Streamflow depends largely on accumulated snow in the mountains. Surface water from mountain runoff is generally of excellent quality and suitable for all uses. The basin fill sediments in the narrow alluvial valleys between the mountain ranges provide some ground water for irrigation. The alluvial deposits along the large streams have the most ground water. Based on measurements of water quality in similar deposits in

adjacent areas, the basin fill deposits probably contain moderately hard water. The water is suitable for almost all uses. The carbonate rocks in this area are considered aquifers, but they are little used. Springs are common along the edges of the limestone outcrops.

#### Soils:

The dominant soil orders in this MLRA are Aridisols and Mollisols. The soils in the area dominantly have a mesic or frigid temperature regime and an aridic, aridic bordering on xeric, or xeric moisture regime. Soils with aquic moisture regimes are limited to drainage or spring areas, where moisture originates or runs on and through. These soils are of a very limited extent throughout the MLRA. They generally are well drained, clayey or loamy, and shallow or moderately deep. Most of the soils formed in mixed parent material. Volcanic ash and loess mantle the landscape. Surface soil textures are loam and silt loam with ashy texture modifiers in some areas. Argillic horizons occur on the more stable landforms. They are exposed nearer the soil surface on convex landforms, where ash and loess deposits are more likely to erode. Soils that formed in carbonatic parent material in areas that receive less than 12 inches of precipitation are characterized by calcic horizons throughout the profile, while soils in areas that receive more than 12 inches of precipitation do not have calcic horizons in the upper part of the profile. Soils that formed on stable landforms at the lower elevations are dominated by ochric horizons. Soils that formed at the middle and upper elevations are characterized by mollic epipedons. Soils in drainage areas at all elevations that receive moisture running on or through them are characterized by thicker mollic epipedons.

#### Biological Resources:

This MLRA supports shrub-grass vegetation. Lower elevations are characterized by Wyoming big sagebrush associated with bluebunch wheatgrass, western wheatgrass, and Thurber's needlegrass. Other important plants include bluegrass, squirreltail, penstemon, phlox, milkvetch, lupine, Indian paintbrush, aster, and rabbitbrush. Black sagebrush occurs but is less extensive. Singleleaf pinyon and Utah juniper occur in limited areas. With increasing elevation and precipitation, vast areas characterized by mountain big sagebrush or low sagebrush/early sagebrush in association with Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, needlegrasses, and bluegrass become common. Snowberry, curl-leaf mountain mahogany, ceanothus, and juniper also occur. Mountains at the highest elevations support whitebark pine, Douglas-fir, limber pine, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, aspen, and curl-leaf mountain mahogany.

Major wildlife species include mule deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn, mountain lion, coyote, bobcat, badger, river otter, mink, weasel, golden eagle, red-tailed hawk, ferruginous hawk, Swainson's hawk, northern harrier, prairie falcon, kestrel, great horned owl, short-eared owl, long-eared owl, burrowing owl, pheasant, sage grouse, chukar, gray partridge, and California quail. Reptiles and amphibians include western racer, gopher snake, western rattlesnake, side-blotched lizard, western toad, and spotted frog. Fish species include bull, red band, and rainbow trout.

### Ecological site concept

This ecological site occurs on mountain shoulders and upper back slopes on all aspects. Slope shape is convex-linear. Elevations range from 7000 to over 10,000 feet. Soils are moderately deep to bedrock, loamy-skeletal and characterized by a mollic epipedon and greater than 35 percent rock fragments by volume.

Important abiotic factors contributing to the occurrence of this ES include a landscape position, soil texture and slope that prevent wet, non-satiated conditions.

### Associated sites

R025XY027NV	<b>LOAMY 12-14 P.Z.</b>
R025XY007NV	<b>GRAVELLY LOAM 12-16 P.Z.</b>
R025XY004NV	<b>LOAMY SLOPE 16+ P.Z.</b>
R025XY024NV	<b>MOUNTAIN RIDGE</b>
R025XY076NV	<b>SHALLOW LOAM 16+ P.Z.</b>
R025XY077NV	<b>Dry Snowfield</b>

### Similar sites

R025XY024NV	<b>MOUNTAIN RIDGE</b> Mountain Ridge dominant species are: ARAR8-ARNO4/FEID
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**Table 1. Dominant plant species**

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Artemisia arbuscula subsp. arbuscula</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Festuca idahoensis</i>

## Physiographic features

This ecological site is found on mountain shoulders and upper backslopes on all aspects. Slopes range from 15 to 50 percent, but are typically 30 to 50 percent. Slope shape is convex-linear or linear-linear. Elevations range from 7000 to greater than 10,000 feet.

**Table 2. Representative physiographic features**

Landforms	(1) Mountain
Runoff class	Very high
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	7,000–10,000 ft
Slope	30–50%
Water table depth	84 in
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

## Climatic features

The climate associated with this site is semiarid, characterized by cold, moist winters and warm, dry summers. The average annual precipitation ranges from 14 or more inches. Mean annual air temperature is typically <45 degrees F.

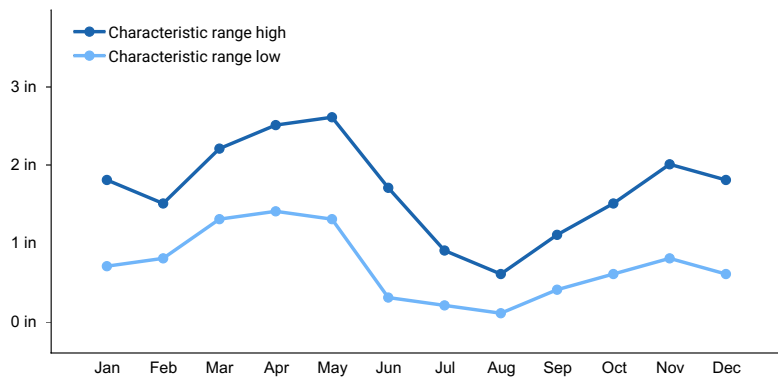
Mean annual precipitation across the range in which this ES occurs is 18.58".

Monthly mean precipitation: January 1.65"; February 1.68"; March 1.98"; April 2.43"; May 2.41"; June 1.62"; July 0.61"; August 0.63"; September 0.84"; October 1.41"; November 1.51"; December 1.79".

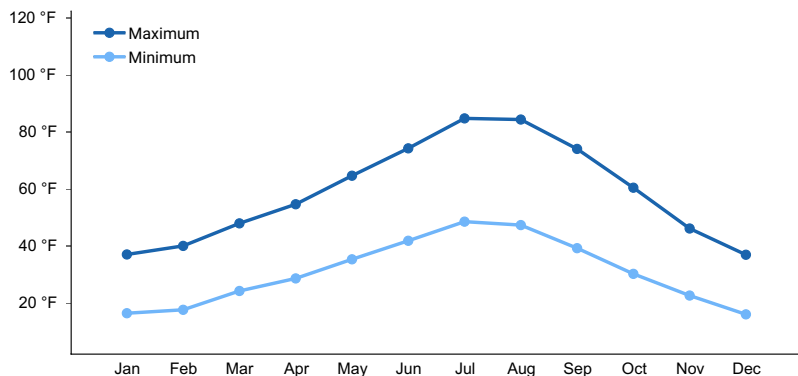
\*The above data is averaged from the Jarbridge 4N and Lamoille PH WRCC climate stations.

**Table 3. Representative climatic features**

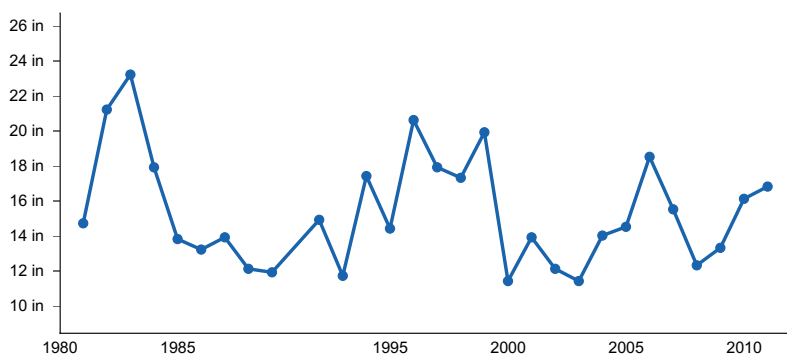
Frost-free period (average)	84 days
Freeze-free period (average)	114 days
Precipitation total (average)	19 in



**Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range**



**Figure 2. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature**



**Figure 3. Annual precipitation pattern**

## Climate stations used

- (1) JARBIDGE 7 N [USC00264039], Jackpot, NV
- (2) LAMOILLE YOST [USC00264394], Spring Creek, NV

## Influencing water features

This site has no influencing water features.

## Soil features

The soils associated with this site are moderately deep to bedrock, well drained and formed in colluvium/residuum derived from mixed parent material. The soil profile is characterized by a mollic epipedon and greater than 35 percent rock fragments distributed throughout the profile.

The soil series correlated to this site is Daphsue.

**Table 4. Representative soil features**

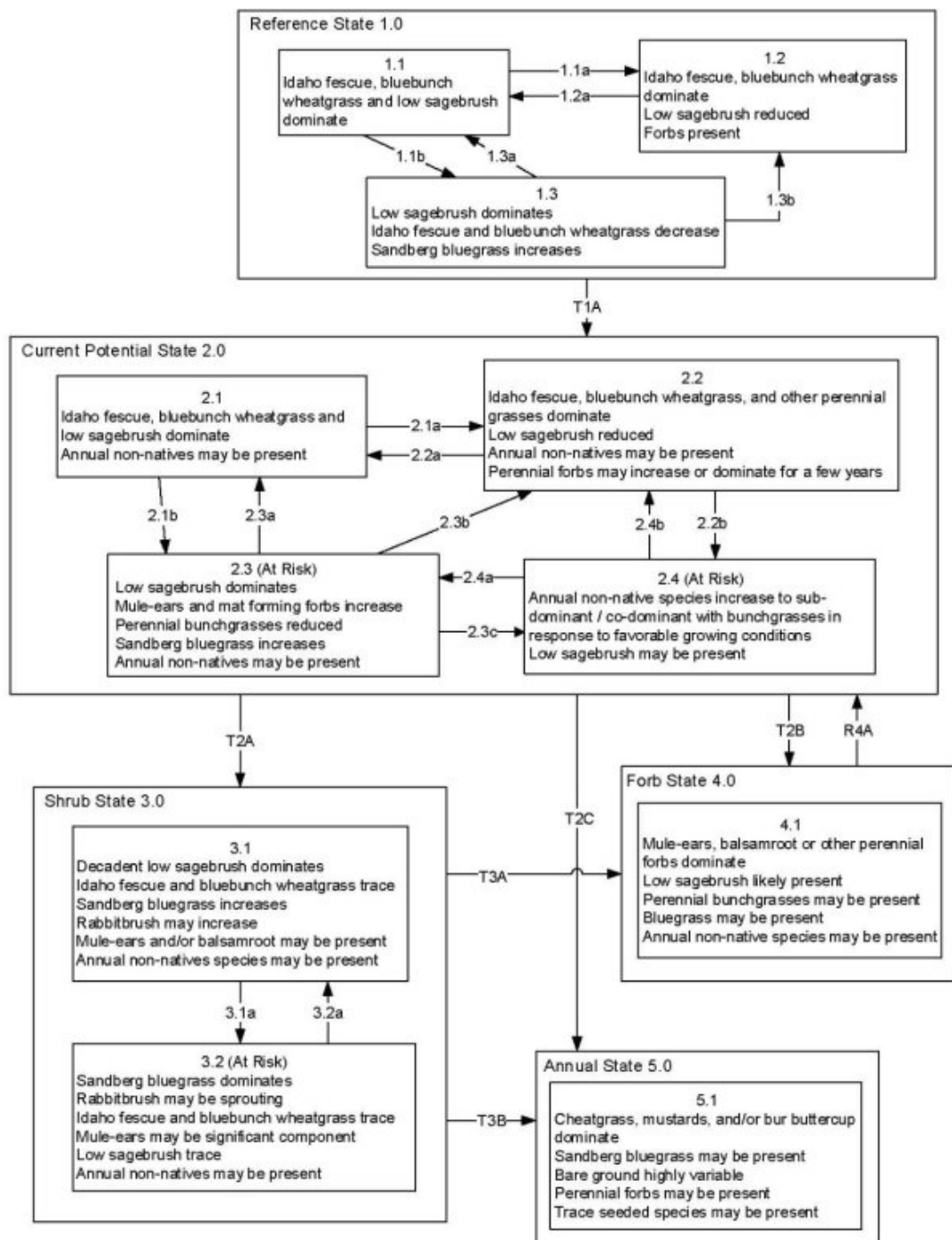
Parent material	(1) Colluvium
Surface texture	(1) Very cobbly sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy-skeletal
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow
Depth to restrictive layer	20–40 in
Soil depth	20–40 in
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	30–40%
Surface fragment cover >3"	5–15%
Available water capacity (0-40in)	0.5–1.5 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-40in)	0%
Electrical conductivity (0-40in)	0–2 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-40in)	0
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-40in)	6.6–7.8
Subsurface fragment volume ≤3" (Depth not specified)	40–50%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	15–25%

## Ecological dynamics

An ecological site is the product of all the environmental factors responsible for its development and it has a set of key characteristics that influence a site's resilience to disturbance and resistance to invasives. Key characteristics include 1) climate (precipitation, temperature), 2) topography (aspect, slope, elevation, and landform), 3) hydrology (infiltration, runoff), 4) soils (depth, texture, structure, organic matter), 5) plant communities (functional groups, productivity), and 6) natural disturbance regime (fire, herbivory, etc.) (Caudle 2013). Biotic factors that influence resilience include site productivity, species composition and structure, and population regulation and regeneration (Chambers et al. 2013).

Periodic drought regularly influences sagebrush ecosystems and drought duration and severity has increased throughout the 20th century in much of the Intermountain West. Major shifts away from historical precipitation patterns have the greatest potential to alter ecosystem function and productivity. Species composition and productivity can be altered by the timing of precipitation and water availability with the soil profile (Bates et al. 2006). Low sagebrush is fairly drought tolerant but also tolerates wet non-satiated conditions in the late winter and early spring months following snow melt. Low sagebrush is also be susceptible to the sagebrush defoliator, Aroga moth. Aroga moth can partially or entirely kill individual plants or entire stands of big sagebrush (Furniss and Barr 1975), but the research is inconclusive of the damage sustained by low sagebrush populations.

## State and transition model



Reference State 1.0 Community Pathways:

1.1a: Low severity fire creates grass/sagebrush mosaic; high severity fire significantly reduces sagebrush cover and leads to early/mid seral community dominated by grasses and forbs.

1.1b: Time and lack of disturbance. Excessive herbivory and/or long-term drought may also reduce perennial understory.

1.2a: Time and lack of disturbance allows for shrub regeneration.

1.3a: Low severity fire creates sagebrush/grass mosaic.

1.3b: High severity fire significantly reduces sagebrush cover, leads to early/mid seral community.

Transition T1A: Introduction of non-native species.

Current Potential State 2.0 Community Pathways:

2.1a: Low severity fire creates sagebrush/grass mosaic; high severity fire significantly reduces sagebrush cover and leads to early/mid-seral community dominated by grasses and forbs; non-native annual species present.

2.1b: Time and lack of disturbance such as fire or drought. Inappropriate grazing management may also reduce perennial understory.

2.2a: Time and lack of disturbance allows for regeneration of sagebrush.

2.2b: Fall and spring growing conditions that favors the germination and production of non-native, annual grasses. Pathway typically occurs 3 to 5 years post-fire and 2.4 may be a transitory plant community.

2.3a: Low severity fire and/or grazing management creates sagebrush/grass mosaic.

2.3b: High severity fire significantly reduces sagebrush cover leading to early mid-seral community.

2.3c: Fall and spring growing season conditions that favors the germination and production of non-native annual grasses. 2.4 may be a transitory plant community.

2.4a: Fall and spring growing season conditions unfavorable to cheatgrass production.

2.4b: Fall and spring growing season conditions favoring perennial bunchgrass productions and reduced cheatgrass production.

Transition T2A: Grazing management favoring shrubs and/or unpalatable forbs such as mule-ears.

Transition T2B: Inappropriate grazing management that promotes dominance of forbs; this may be coupled with fire (4.1).

Transition T2C: Catastrophic fire and/or soil disturbing treatments such as drill seeding, roller chopper, Lawson aerator etc. Probability of success of seeding on this site is *low* (5.1).

Shrub State 3.0 Community Pathways:

3.1a: Fire.

3.2a: Time without disturbance.

Transition T3A: Inappropriate grazing management promotes dominance of forbs; this may be coupled with fire (4.1).

Transition T3B: Catastrophic fire or multiple fires. Bare ground levels depend on variations in annual precipitation (5.1).

Forb State 4.0 Community Pathways:

None.

Restoration R4A: Herbicide treatment, may be coupled with seeding of desired species.

Annual State 5.0 Community Pathways:

None.

## Inventory data references

NASIS soil component data.

## Type locality

Location 1: Elko County, NV	
Township/Range/Section	T46 N R57 E S25
General legal description	NASIS Site ID 1987NV007075

## Other references

Bates, J. D., T. Svejcar, R. F. Miller, and R. A. Angell. 2006. The effects of precipitation timing on sagebrush steppe vegetation. *Journal of Arid Environments* 64:670-697.

Caudle, D., J. DiBenedetto, M. Karl, H. Sanchez, and C. Talbot. 2013. Interagency ecological site handbook for rangelands. Available at: <http://jornada.nmsu.edu/sites/jornada.nmsu.edu/files/InteragencyEcolSiteHandbook.pdf>. Accessed 4 October 2013.

Chambers, J., B. Bradley, C. Brown, C. D'Antonio, M. Germino, J. Grace, S. Hardegree, R. Miller, and D. Pyke. 2013. Resilience to Stress and Disturbance, and Resistance to *Bromus tectorum* L. Invasion in Cold Desert Shrublands of Western North America. *Ecosystems* 17:1-16.

Furniss, M. M. and W. F. Barr. 1975. Insects affecting important native shrubs of the northwestern United States General Technical Report INT-19. Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Ogden, UT. 68 p.

## Contributors

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## Approval

Kendra Moseley, 4/25/2024

## 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	05/05/2024
Approved by	Kendra Moseley
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

## Indicators

### 1. Number and extent of rills:

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### 2. Presence of water flow patterns:



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

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

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

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

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

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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):**

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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:**

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