

## **Ecological site R028AY252UT Semidesert Stony Loam (Black Sagebrush)**

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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.

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| Author(s)/participant(s)                    | Jack Alexander, Range Specialist, Synergy Resource Solutions, Inc.; Julia Kluck, Soil Scientist, Synergy Resource Solutions, Inc.; Shane Green, State Range Specialist, Utah NRCS. Revised to include updated terminology and concepts by V. Keith Wadman (NRCS Retired). |
| Contact for lead author                     | Shane.Green@ut.usda.gov   |
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| Approved by                                 | Shane A. Green  |
| Approval date                               |   |
| Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on | Annual Production   |

### Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** A few rills present. Rills should be <1 inch deep, fairly short (<6 feet), and somewhat widely spaced (6 to 9 Feet). Rill development may increase slightly following large storm events or during spring runoff events, but should begin to heal during the following growing season. Frost heaving will accelerate recovery. Rill development may increase when run inflow enters site from other sites that produce large amounts of runoff (i.e. steeper sites, slickrock, rock outcrop).
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2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Very Minor. Water flow patterns will be short (2-5') and meandering; interrupted by plants and exposed rocks. Some evidence of erosion or deposition associated with flow patterns. Where slopes exceed 5%, water flow patterns may be longer (5-10').
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3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Perennial plants may have small pedestals (1") where they are adjacent to water flow patterns, but without exposed roots. Terracettes should be few and stable. Terracettes should be small (3-6") and show little sign of active erosion. Some plants may appear to have a pedestal but rather than be formed by erosion, the only place litter accumulates and soil collects is at plant bases forming the appearance of a pedestal.

Well-developed biological crusts may appear pedestalled, but are actually a characteristic of the crust formation. Some plants may appear to have a pedestal but rather than be formed by erosion, the only place litter accumulates and soil

collects is at plant bases forming the appearance of a pedestal.

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4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** 20-35% bare ground (soil with no protection from raindrop impact). Herbaceous communities are most likely to have lower values. As species composition by shrubs increases, bare ground is likely to increase. Poorly developed biological soil crust that is susceptible to raindrop splash erosion should be recorded as bare ground. Very few if any bare spaces of greater than 1 square foot.

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5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** No gullies present on site. A very few gullies may be present in landscape settings where they transport runoff from areas of greater water flow such as exposed bedrock. These gullies will be limited to slopes exceeding 10% and adjacent to sites where this runoff accumulation occurs. Any gullies present should show little sign of accelerated erosion and should be stabilized with perennial vegetation.

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6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Very minor evidence of active wind-generated soil movement. Wind scoured (blowouts) and depositional areas are rarely present. If present they have muted features and are mostly stabilized with vegetation and/or biological crust. Gravel or desert pavement protects the site from wind scour.

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7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Most litter resides in place with some redistribution caused by water and wind movement. Very minor litter removal may occur in flow patterns and rills with deposition occurring at points of obstruction. The majority of litter accumulates at the base of plants. Some leaves, stems, and small twigs may accumulate in soil depressions adjacent to plants. Woody stems are not likely to move.

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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):** This site should have an erosion rating of 5 or 6 under plant canopies and a rating of 4 to 5 in the interspaces with an average rating of 5 using the soil stability kit test.

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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** (Hiko Peak) Soil surface horizon is typically 2 inches deep. Texture is a cobbly loam. Structure is typically weak thin platy. Color is light brownish gray (10YR 6/2). An ochric horizon extends to a depth of 7 inches. An ochric horizon is a surface horizon lacking fine stratification and which is either light colored, or thin, or has a low organic carbon content, or is massive and (very) hard when dry. The A horizon would be expected to be more strongly developed under plant canopies. It is important if you are sampling to observe the A horizon under plant canopies as well as the interspaces.

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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Bunchgrasses and shrubs are equally important for increasing infiltration and reducing runoff. Litter plays a role in increasing infiltration and decreasing runoff. Plants provide microhabitat for seedlings, catch litter and soil, and slow raindrops and runoff. Vascular plants and/or well-developed biological soil crusts (where present) will break raindrop impact and splash erosion. Spatial distribution of vascular plants and interspaces between well-developed biological soil crusts (where present) provide detention storage and surface roughness that slows runoff allowing time for infiltration. Interspaces between plants and any well-developed biological soil crusts (where present) may serve as water flow patterns during episodic runoff events, with natural erosion expected in severe storms. When perennial grasses decrease, reducing ground cover and increasing bare ground, runoff is expected to increase

and any associated infiltration reduced. Shrubs catch snow, slow wind evaporation, and provide microhabitat for seedling establishment.

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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):** None. Naturally occurring soil horizons may be harder than the surface because of an accumulation of clay or calcium carbonate and should not be considered as compaction layers.
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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: Non-Sprouting shrubs (black sagebrush, shadscale), > Perennial bunchgrasses (bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass) >> Sprouting Shrub (winterfat).

Sub-dominant: Rhizomatous Grasses (blue grama, James galleta) > Perennial Forbs (Gooseberryleaf globemallow)

Other: A wide variety of other perennial grasses and both perennial and annual forbs are expected to occur on this site.

Additional: In the northern portion of the MLRA cool-season perennial grasses (Indian ricegrass, needle and thread) dominate. In the southernmost portion of the MLRA warm-season perennial grasses (galleta, sand dropseed) dominate. The two groups share dominance in the middle portion of the MLRA.

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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** During years with average to above average precipitation, there should be very little recent mortality or decadence apparent in either the shrubs or grasses. Some bunchgrass and shrub mortality may occur during severe droughts, particularly on the shallower and coarser soils associated with this site.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth ( in):** Litter cover includes litter under plants. Most litter will be fine litter. Depth should be 1-2 leaf thickness in the interspaces and up to 1/2" under canopies. Litter cover may increase to 15-25% following years with favorable growing conditions. Excess litter may accumulate in absence of disturbance. Vegetative production may be reduced if litter cover exceeds 40%.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** Annual production in air-dry herbage should be approximately 600#/acre on an average year but could range from 400 - 700#/acre during periods of prolonged drought or above average precipitation. Even the most stable communities exhibit a range of production values. Production will vary between communities and across the MRLA. Refer to the community descriptions in the ESD. Production will differ across the MLRA due to the naturally occurring variability in weather, soils, and aspect. The biological processes on this site are complex; therefore, representative values are presented in a land management context.
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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:** Cheatgrass, Russian thistle, halogeton, alyssum, various mustard species, and Utah juniper.

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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All perennial plants should have the ability to reproduce sexually or asexually, except in drought years. Density of plants indicates that plants reproduce at level sufficient to fill available resource. Within capability of site there are no restrictions on seed or vegetative reproductive capacity.
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