

## **Ecological site R030XA037CA Shallow Sandstone Slopes**

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Accessed: 11/21/2024

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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): 030X–Mojave Basin and Range

The Mojave Desert Major Land Resource Area (MLRA 30) is found in southern California, southern Nevada, the extreme southwest corner of Utah and northwestern Arizona within the Basin and Range Province of the Intermontane Plateaus. The Mojave Desert is a transitional area between hot deserts and cold deserts where close proximity of these desert types exert enough influence on each other to distinguish these desert types from the hot and cold deserts beyond the Mojave. Kottek et. al 2006 defines hot deserts as areas where mean annual air temperatures are above 64 F (18 C) and cold deserts as areas where mean annual air temperatures are below 64 F (18 C). Steep elevation gradients within the Mojave create islands of low elevation hot desert areas surrounded by islands of high elevation cold desert areas.

The Mojave Desert receives less than 10 inches of mean annual precipitation. Mojave Desert low elevation areas are often hyper-arid while high elevation cold deserts are often semi-arid with the majority of the Mojave being an arid climate. Hyper-arid areas receive less than 4 inches of mean annual precipitation and semi-arid areas receive more than 8 inches of precipitation (Salem 1989). The western Mojave receives very little precipitation during the summer months while the eastern Mojave experiences some summer monsoonal activity.

In summary, the Mojave is a land of extremes. Elevation gradients contribute to extremely hot and dry summers and cold moist winters where temperature highs and lows can fluctuate greatly between day and night, from day to day and from winter to summer. Precipitation falls more consistently at higher elevations while lower elevations can experience long intervals without any precipitation. Lower elevations also experience a low frequency of precipitation events so that the majority of annual precipitation may come in only a couple precipitation events during the whole year. Hot desert areas influence cold desert areas by increasing the extreme highs and shortening the length of below freezing events. Cold desert areas influence hot desert areas by increasing the extreme lows and increasing the length of below freezing events. Average precipitation and temperature values contribute little understanding to the extremes which govern wildland plant communities across the Mojave.

Arid Western Mojave Land Resource Unit (XA)

### **LRU notes**

The Mojave Desert is currently divided into 4 Land Resource Units (LRUs). This ecological site is within the arid portions of the Mojave where precipitation primarily occurs during the winter months (Hereford et. al 2004). The lack of summer precipitation as well as cooler temperatures allows cool season species to occupy sites at lower elevations than they do in the Eastern Mojave. For example, sandberg bluegrass, winterfat and spiny hopsage are common at lower elevations in the Western Mojave than they are in the Eastern Mojave. Warm season species like big galleta rarely occur in the Western Mojave. The Arid Western Mojave LRU is designated by the 'XA' symbol within the ecological site ID and is roughly equivalent to Western Mojave Basins and Western Mojave Low Ranges and Arid Footslopes of EPA Level IV Ecoregions.

Elevations range from 1650 to 4300 feet and precipitation is between 4 to 8 inches per year. The Arid Western Mojave LRU is distinguished from the Arid Eastern Mojave (XB) by the lack of summer precipitation which excludes many warm season plant species from occurring in this LRU. Vegetation includes creosote bush, rabbitbrush, shadscale saltbush, spiny hopsage, winterfat, Nevada jointfir, and Joshua tree. At the upper elevations of the LRU, plant production and diversity are greater and blackbrush is a common dominant shrub. The Arid Western Mojave LRU generally lacks the diversity of yucca, cacti and warm season species found in the Arid Eastern Mojave.

## Ecological site concept

The Shallow Sandstone Slopes ecological site is found within the hills and mountains landscapes below 3000 feet (915 m). Soils are shallow to densic material and formed in colluvium and residuum from sandstone.

The central concept for this ecological site is within the Soil Survey of the Mojave Desert Area, Northwest Part, California (CA682), on the 3301 - Cutterbank 50% component in the Cutterbank association, 15 to 60 percent slopes map unit.

## Associated sites

R030XA046CA	<b>Steep Granitic Slope 5-7" p.z.</b> R030XA046CA Steep Granitic Slope 5-7
R030XA048CA	<b>Shallow Fans 5-7</b> R030XA048CA Shallow Granitic Loam 5-7
R030XA054NV	<b>Limy Hill 5-7 P.Z.</b> R030XA054NV Limy Hill 5-7

## Similar sites

R030XA048CA	<b>Shallow Fans 5-7</b> R030XA048CA Shallow Granitic Loam 5-7
R030XA047CA	<b>Shallow Granitic Slope 5-7" p.z.</b> This is the same ecological site concept which was copied to R030XA037CA in order to avoid duplicity in the event the 'F', 'R', and state designations are dropped.

**Table 1. Dominant plant species**

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Coleogyne ramosissima</i> (2) <i>Larrea tridentata</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>

## Physiographic features

This ecological site is located on relict lakebeds and fan remnants. Slopes range from 15 to 50 percent.

**Table 2. Representative physiographic features**

Landforms	(1) Lakebed (2) Hill
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	3,000–4,300 ft
Slope	15–50%
Water table depth	60 in

Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor
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### Climatic features

The Mojave Desert experiences clear, dry conditions for a majority of the year. Winter temperatures are mild, summer temperatures are hot, and seasonal and diurnal temperature fluctuations are large. Monthly minimum temperature averages range from 30 to 80 degrees F (-1 to 27 degrees C). Monthly maximum temperature averages range from 60 to 110 degrees F (16 to 43 degrees C) (CSU 2002).

Average annual rainfall is between 2 and 8 inches (50 to 205 millimeters) (USDA 2006). Snowfall is more common at elevations above 4000 feet (1220 meters), but it may not occur every year (WRCC 2002). The Mojave Desert receives precipitation from two sources. Precipitation falls primarily in the winter as a result of storms originating in the northern Pacific Ocean. The Sierra Nevada and Transverse Ranges create a rain shadow effect, causing little precipitation to reach the Mojave Desert. Sporadic rainfall occurs during the summer as a result of convection storms formed when moisture from the Gulf of Mexico or Gulf of California moves into the region. Summer rainfall is more common and has a greater influence on soil moisture in the eastern Mojave Desert.

Windy conditions are also common in the Mojave Desert, particularly in the west and central Mojave Desert. Spring is typically the windiest season, with winds averaging 10-15 miles per hour (WRCC 2002). Winds in excess of 25 miles per hour and gusts in excess of 50 miles per hour are not uncommon (CSU 2002).

Although half of the Jawbone-Butterbrecht ACEC Soil Survey is in the Mojave Desert (MLRA 30), the western and northwestern areas of the survey transition into the Southern Nevada Basin and Range (MLRA 29). As the Mojave Desert transitions into the Southern Nevada Basin and Range, the temperature range generally becomes cooler (WRCC 2002). Precipitation as rain and as snow also increases (USDA 2006). This survey area has a wide range of precipitation due to its location. Where the Mojave Desert influences are stronger, average annual precipitation ranges from 5 to 7 inches (127 to 178 millimeters). Where the Southern Nevada Basin and Range influences are stronger, average annual precipitation commonly ranges from 7 to 9 inches (178 to 229 millimeters), and may range up to 12 inches (305 millimeters) annually (WRCC 2002). At elevations above 4000 feet (1370 meters), average annual snowfall may reach 20 inches (WRCC 2002).

The data from the following climate stations were used to describe the climate in the Jawbone-Butterbrecht ACEC Soil Survey (station number in parentheses):  
 Cantil, CA (041488)  
 Inyokern, CA (044278)  
 Mojave, CA (045756)  
 Tehachapi, CA (048826)

"Maximum monthly precipitation" represents average monthly precipitation.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	300 days
Freeze-free period (average)	315 days
Precipitation total (average)	7 in

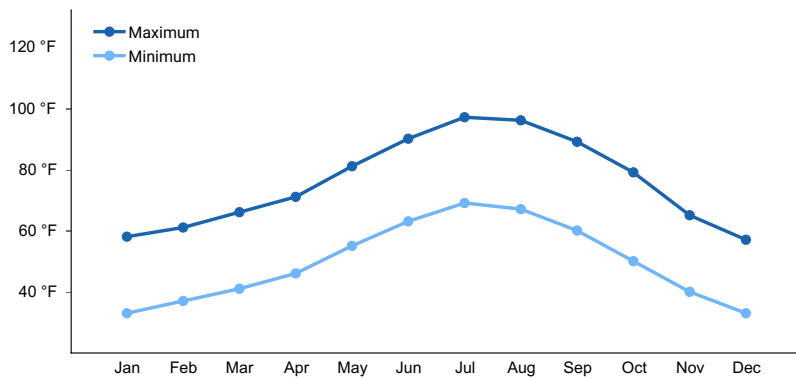


Figure 1. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

## Influencing water features

### Soil features

Soils are found in the hills and mountains landscape above 3000 feet (lower elevations on north facing slopes) and are formed in colluvium and residuum from sandstone and are shallow to densic material.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Fine sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Well drained to somewhat excessively drained
Permeability class	Very slow to moderate
Soil depth	9–80 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	20–90%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–7%
Available water capacity (0-40in)	0.6–6.2 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-40in)	0–1%
Electrical conductivity (0-40in)	0–2 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-40in)	0–5
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-40in)	7.4–8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	1–35%

### Ecological dynamics

This ecological site is located in a transition zone between the Mojave Desert and the Southern Nevada Basin and Range major land resource areas (MLRA 30 and MLRA 29, respectively). The dominant species are blackbrush (*Coleogyne ramosissima*), and creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*). Blackbrush is commonly found in cooler environments more affected by the climate of MLRA 29. Creosote bush is commonly found in warmer environments.

The dominant species on this ecological site are late seral species. Blackbrush is shallow-rooting, slow-growing species commonly found on soils that are shallow to weathered granitic bedrock or on stable soils. The stable soils frequently have an argillic horizon at shallow depth, which may aid blackbrush survival by supplying more water to

blackbrush's shallow roots. The presence of blackbrush on shallow granitic soils may also be a function of water availability. Due to the way in which granite weathers, the higher available water capacity of the bedrock and the ability of blackbrush to access the water through numerous cracks may be important for supporting the community.

Creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) is a long-lived species that reproduces largely by cloning (Marshall 1995). It is slow to establish from seed due to infrequent masting and germination (Barbour 1968). Creosote bush has a deep, expansive root system that can extract water from a large volume of soil, and it is highly effective at extracting water at very low water potentials.

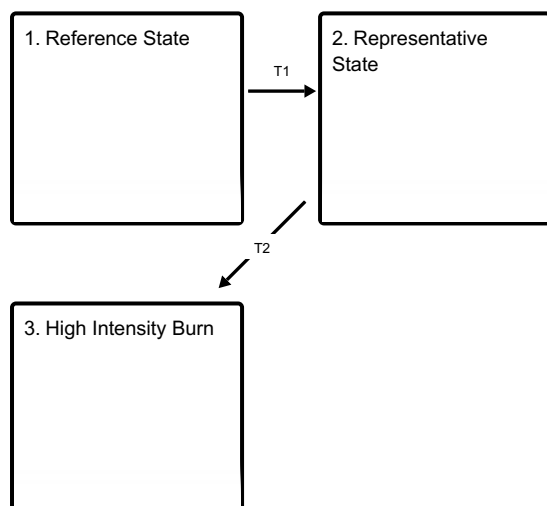
The successional status of the dominant species suggests that disturbances to this area are not common and/or are not intense. This ecosite is not affected by flooding or ponding. Wildfire has historically been a rare occurrence in the desert, but its effects may be severe. Widely spaced shrubs and discontinuous fuels prevented fires from spreading easily. Spread of non-native annual species in the Mojave Desert creates a more continuous and easily ignitable fuel bed, and increases the fire frequency and the size of the area disturbed (Clarke 2006, Howard 2006). Mediterranean grass (*Schismus arabicus*) and redstem stork's bill (*Erodium cicutarium*) are non-native species that are present on this ecosite. Spread of these species would increase the risk and frequency of fire on this ecosite.

Blackbrush communities are likely to be significantly altered by fire or other widespread disturbance. The ability of blackbrush to recolonize a disturbed site is severely limited by infrequent seedling establishment and an inability of existing plants to resprout following a disturbance. Burning or scorching often causes high mortality in creosote bush, but creosote bush has some ability to resprout following removal of aboveground stems if the root crown is not killed (Marshall 1995).

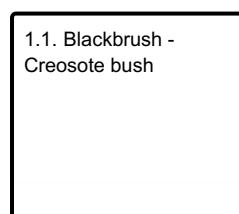
Early and mid-successional shrubs are present in small amounts and would become more common if this ecosite were disturbed. These include spiny hopsage (*Grayia spinosa*), Cooper's goldenbush (*Ericameria cooperi*), burrobrush (*Hymenoclea salsola*), and California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*). These species are adapted to a wide range of environmental conditions. Ample seed production, easy seed dispersal, and rapid growth help these species establish on disturbed areas. Perennial grasses such as Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*) also have the ability to resprout following a disturbance. Reduced competition from late seral species for light, water, and nutrients facilitates plant growth.

## State and transition model

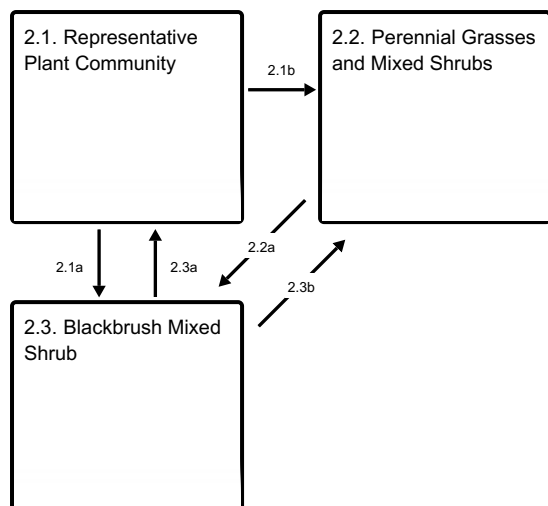
### Ecosystem states



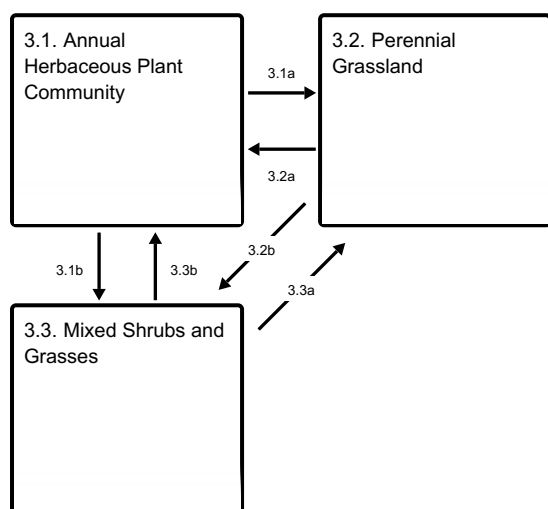
### State 1 submodel, plant communities



### State 2 submodel, plant communities



### State 3 submodel, plant communities



## State 1 Reference State

The Reference State is characterized by a blackbrush mixed shrub community. This ecological site is at the lower and warmer elevations of blackbrush habitat. Once blackbrush is removed from this plant community, it is replaced by other shrubs and unlikely blackbrush will return.

### Community 1.1 Blackbrush - Creosote bush

The interpretive plant community is the reference plant community prior to European colonization. This community is dominated by blackbrush (*Coleogyne ramosissima*) with a significant component of creosotebush (*Larrea tridentata*). Minor species include Mojave aster (*Xylorhiza tortifolia*), Mojave indigobush (*Psoralea argophylla*), Nevada ephedra (*Ephedra nevadensis*), and Sandberg bluegrass. The potential plant community is 95% shrubs, 1% perennial grasses, and 4% annual forbs.

Table 5. Annual production by plant type

Plant Type	Low (Lb/Acre)	Representative Value (Lb/Acre)	High (Lb/Acre)
Shrub/Vine	186	279	326
Forb	12	18	20
Grass/Grasslike	2	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>350</b>

**Table 6. Ground cover**

Tree foliar cover	0%
Shrub/vine/liana foliar cover	15-20%
Grass/grasslike foliar cover	1%
Forb foliar cover	2-3%
Non-vascular plants	0%
Biological crusts	0%
Litter	0%
Surface fragments >0.25" and <=3"	0%
Surface fragments >3"	0%
Bedrock	0%
Water	0%
Bare ground	0%

**Table 7. Soil surface cover**

Tree basal cover	0%
Shrub/vine/liana basal cover	5-7%
Grass/grasslike basal cover	0-1%
Forb basal cover	1-2%
Non-vascular plants	0%
Biological crusts	0%
Litter	3-5%
Surface fragments >0.25" and <=3"	15-20%
Surface fragments >3"	0%
Bedrock	0%
Water	0%
Bare ground	0%

**Table 8. Canopy structure (% cover)**

Height Above Ground (Ft)	Tree	Shrub/Vine	Grass/ Grasslike	Forb
<0.5	—	—	—	1-2%
>0.5 <= 1	—	—	1-1%	1-1%
>1 <= 2	—	2-3%	—	—
>2 <= 4.5	—	10-15%	—	—
>4.5 <= 13	—	3-5%	—	—
>13 <= 40	—	—	—	—
>40 <= 80	—	—	—	—
>80 <= 120	—	—	—	—
>120	—	—	—	—

**State 2**  
**Representative State**

Introduced annuals such as red brome, schismus and redstem stork's bill have invaded the reference plant community and have become a dominant component of the herbaceous cover. This invasion of non-natives is attributed to a combination of factors including surface disturbances, changes in the kinds of animals and their grazing patterns, drought, and changes in fire history. Following wet years, dried non-natives annuals can provide enough fuel to carry wildfires where large, intense wildfires historically have been infrequent.

## **Community 2.1**

### **Representative Plant Community**

Compositionally this plant community is similar to the Reference State with the presence of non-native species in the understory. Response to fire is unpredictable and can vary greatly depending on the climatic conditions at the time of fire, dynamic soil properties as well as varying land uses pre and post-fire (Bowns and West 1976).

## **Community 2.2**

### **Perennial Grasses and Mixed Shrubs**

## **Community 2.3**

### **Blackbrush Mixed Shrub**

Shrubs have begun to regenerate. Woody species with high seed production and early establishment will be the first to return. Once large shrubs are established and begin to produce shade it will favor the establishment of additional native perennials.

### **Pathway 2.1b**

#### **Community 2.1 to 2.2**

### **Pathway 2.1a**

#### **Community 2.1 to 2.3**

Disturbance removes long lived shrubs which are replaced by short lived shrubs.

### **Pathway 2.2a**

#### **Community 2.2 to 2.3**

Absent disturbance, woody species begin to regenerate. Fast growing, short-lived woody species with high reproductive ability such as snakeweed, brittlebush and Eastern Mojave buckwheat will increase and become nurse plants for other species. Blackbrush will begin to reestablish provided favorable climatic conditions and available seed source.

### **Pathway 2.3a**

#### **Community 2.3 to 2.1**

Many years without fire, minimal disturbance, the presence of a blackbrush seed source, ideal climatic conditions and multiple recruitment pulses blackbrush seedlings will establish and recruit into the stand.

### **Pathway 2.3b**

#### **Community 2.3 to 2.2**

Low intensity disturbance or some other form of shrub removal may promote perennial grasses.

## **State 3**

### **High Intensity Burn**

This state is characterized by the inability of blackbrush to return to site following a fire, due to insufficient climatic conditions and the lack of an available seed source. In the absence of ideal conditions blackbrush will not return to the site. Species will consist of fire tolerant shrubs with high growth rates and high reproductive capacities.



### **Community 3.1**

#### **Annual Herbaceous Plant Community**

This plant community is characterized by dominance of grasses; annual, perennial, native and non-native. Few surviving shrubs remain on the site. Non-native annuals provide a significant amount of herbaceous biomass.

### **Community 3.2**

#### **Perennial Grassland**

This plant community is dominated by perennial grasses. Shrubs able to sprout from the root crown following fire, are scattered throughout. Other herbaceous plants, including non-native annuals, are common and wide spread.

### **Community 3.3**

#### **Mixed Shrubs and Grasses**

This plant community is dominated by a variety of shrubs that were present in smaller quantities in the Reference State. Blackbrush continues to be excluded from this site due to the lack of seed source and ideal conditions required for recruitment and establishment.

#### **Pathway 3.1a**

##### **Community 3.1 to 3.2**

Without disturbance pioneering perennial grasses become established over time.

#### **Pathway 3.1b**

##### **Community 3.1 to 3.3**

Time without disturbance pioneering shrubs germinate and establish from an offsite seed source and sprouting shrubs begin to reappear.

#### **Pathway 3.2a**

##### **Community 3.2 to 3.1**

Small scale fire or other localized disturbances remove patches of woody vegetation and encourage growth of herbaceous species.

#### **Pathway 3.2b**

##### **Community 3.2 to 3.3**

Removal of disturbance and the absence of fire favors establishment of long-live native perennial vegetation.

#### **Pathway 3.3b**

##### **Community 3.3 to 3.1**

Large disturbance, like a high intensity fire, removes woody vegetation and promotes growth of non-native annuals.

#### **Pathway 3.3a**

##### **Community 3.3 to 3.2**

Disturbance, like a low intensity fire, removes woody vegetation and promotes growth of perennial grasses.

### **Transition T1**

#### **State 1 to 2**

Introduction of non-native species due to a combination of factors including; surface disturbance, changes in the kinds of animals and their grazing patterns, drought, changes in fire history or any other type of vegetation removal.

Non-natives can alter disturbance regimes significantly from their natural or historic range and change ecological processes therefore creating an unlikely scenario to restore the site back to reference.

## Transition T2 State 2 to 3

Large scale high intensity fire in combination with insufficient climatic conditions for germination and establishment of blackbrush. This is the lower elevation of blackbrush habitat where blackbrush recovery following removal is not expected.

## Additional community tables

Table 9. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Lb/Acre)	Foliar Cover (%)
<b>Shrub/Vine</b>					
1	<b>Perennial Shrubs</b>			186–326	
	blackbrush	CORA	<i>Coleogyne ramosissima</i>	140–245	–
	creosote bush	LATR2	<i>Larrea tridentata</i>	22–35	–
	burrobush	AMDU2	<i>Ambrosia dumosa</i>	10–18	–
	Mojave indigobush	PSAR4	<i>Psoralea argophylla</i>	4–9	–
	Mojave woodyaster	XYTO2	<i>Xylorhiza tortifolia</i>	4–9	–
	Joshua tree	YUBR	<i>Yucca brevifolia</i>	2–4	–
	Nevada jointfir	EPNE	<i>Ephedra nevadensis</i>	2–3	–
	burrobush	HYSA	<i>Hymenoclea salsola</i>	2–3	–
<b>Grass/Grasslike</b>					
2	<b>Perennial Grass</b>			2–4	
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	2–4	–
<b>Forb</b>					
3	<b>Annual Forbs</b>			10–16	
	pinyon blazingstar	MEER2	<i>Mentzelia eremophila</i>	4–7	–
	bristly fiddleneck	AMTE3	<i>Amsinckia tessellata</i>	2–3	–
	brittle spineflower	CHBR	<i>Chorizanthe brevicornu</i>	2–3	–
	pincushion flower	CHFR	<i>Chaenactis fremontii</i>	2–3	–
4	<b>Perennial Forb</b>			2–4	

## Animal community

Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) burrows have been observed in the vicinity of the site. Also creosotebush is a very important plant for animals that burrow in and around the roots.

## Hydrological functions

The soils on this ecological site (Cutterbank) are very susceptible to erosion during heavy rainfall. Heavy rainfall will move sediment into drainageways from the site and form channels in the hillsides.

## Recreational uses

This ecological site is located in an off-highway vehicle recreation area. Travel through this ecological site is currently limited to pre-existing roads.

## Other information

This site is composed of highly erodible soils that may release a significant quantity of sediment into drainageways if disturbed. This may impact Red Rock Canyon State Park is located to the east of the type location. The park contains several rare plants that occur in drainageways, and an increased sediment load may adversely affect those rare plant populations.

## Inventory data references

1 SCS Range 417 Production and Composition Record (2003)

2 Line-point intercept transects (2006)

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## Contributors

Heath M. McAllister

## Approval

Kendra Moseley, 10/21/2024

## 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	11/21/2024
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):**
- 

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):**
- 

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:**
-