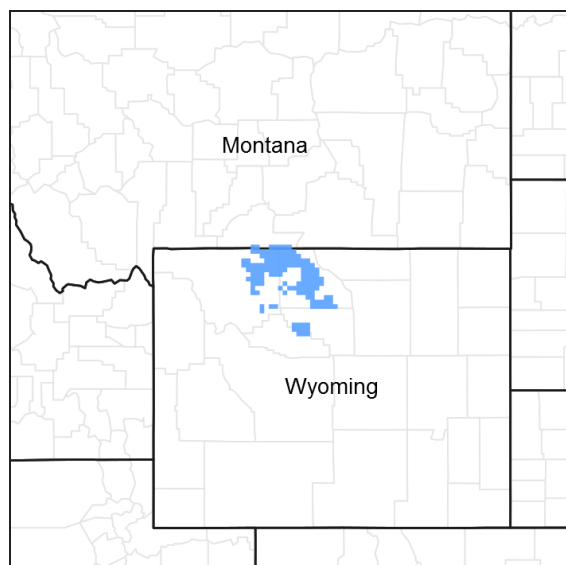


# **Ecological site R032XY162WY** **Shallow Loamy (SwLy) 5-9" Big Horn Basin Precipitation Zone**

Accessed: 05/16/2024

## **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.



**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**

R032XY112WY	<b>Gravelly (Gr) 5-9" Big Horn Basin Precipitation Zone</b>
R032XY122WY	<b>Loamy (Ly) 5-9" Big Horn Basin Precipitation Zone</b>
R032XY166WY	<b>Shallow Sandy (SwSy) 5-9" Big Horn Basin Precipitation Zone</b>

## **Similar sites**

R032XY362WY	<b>Shallow Loamy (SwLy) 10-14" East Precipitation Zone</b> Shallow Loamy 10-14" Foothills and Basins East P.Z., 032XY362WY has higher production.
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**Table 1. Dominant plant species**

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

## **Physiographic features**

This site occurs on steep slopes and ridge tops, but may occur on all slopes.

**Table 2. Representative physiographic features**

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Ridge (3) Escarpment
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	1,128–1,829 m
Slope	0–45%
Ponding depth	0 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

## Climatic features

Annual precipitation ranges from 5-9 inches per year. The normal precipitation pattern shows peaks in May and June and a secondary peak in September. This amounts to about 50% of the mean annual precipitation. Much of the moisture that falls in the latter part of the summer is lost by evaporation and much of the moisture that falls during the winter is lost by sublimation. Average snowfall is about 20 inches annually. Wide fluctuations may occur in yearly precipitation and result in more dry years than those with more than normal precipitation.

Temperatures show a wide range between summer and winter and between daily maximums and minimums, due to the high elevation and dry air, which permits rapid incoming and outgoing radiation. Cold air outbreaks from Canada in winter move rapidly from northwest to southeast and account for extreme minimum temperatures. Chinook winds may occur in winter and bring rapid rises in temperature. Extreme storms may occur during the winter, but most severely affect ranch operations during late winter and spring.

High winds are generally blocked from the basin by high mountains, but can occur in conjunction with an occasional thunderstorm.

Growth of native cool-season plants begins about April 1 and continues to about July 1. Cool weather and moisture in September may produce some green up of cool season plants that will continue to late October.

The following information is from the “Emblem” climate station:

Minimum Maximum 5 yrs. out of 10 between

Frost-free period (days): 98 171 May 13 – September 19

Freeze-free period (days): 120 184 May 1 – October 5

Mean Annual Precipitation (inches): 3.22 10.97

Mean annual precipitation: 7.42 inches

Mean annual air temperature: 45.01 F (31.2 F Avg. Min. to 58.7 F Avg. Max.)

For detailed information visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service National Water and Climate Center at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/> website. Other climate station(s) representative of this precipitation zone include “Basin”, “Deaver”, “Lovell”, and “Worland”.

**Table 3. Representative climatic features**

Frost-free period (average)	171 days
Freeze-free period (average)	184 days
Precipitation total (average)	229 mm

## Influencing water features

## Soil features

The soils of this site are shallow (8"-15" to bedrock) well-drained soils formed in alluvium over residuum or residuum. These soils have moderately slow to moderate permeability and may occur on all slopes. The bedrock may be any kind which is virtually impenetrable to plant roots, except igneous. The surface soil will have one or more of the following textures: very fine sandy loam, loam, silt loam, sandy clay loam, silty clay loam, and clay loam. Thin ineffectual layers of other textures are disregarded. The soil characteristics having the most influence on the plant community are the shallow depth, and potential for elevated quantities of soluble salts.

Major Soil Series correlated to this site includes: Hoot

**Table 4. Representative soil features**

Surface texture	(1) Loam (2) Silt loam (3) Clay loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderate
Soil depth	20–38 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0–10%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–10%
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	1.42–16 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0–15%
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0–8 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0–13
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	7.4–9
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0–15%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0%

## Ecological dynamics

Potential vegetation on this site is dominated by mid cool-season perennial grasses. Other significant vegetation includes green rabbitbrush, big sagebrush, and a variety of forbs. The expected potential composition for this site is about 80% grasses, 10% forbs and 10% woody plants. The composition and production will vary naturally due to historical use, fluctuating precipitation and fire frequency.

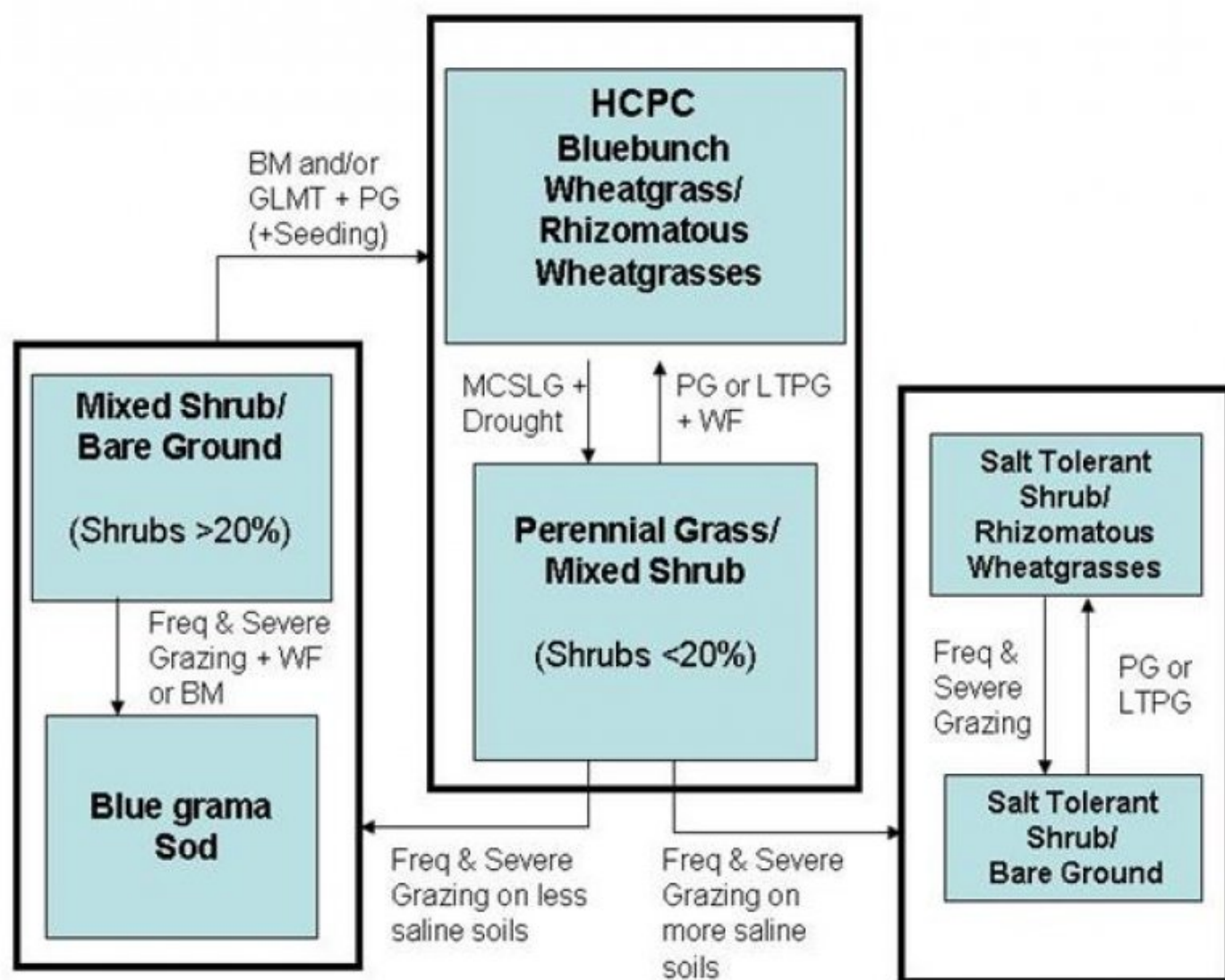
As this site deteriorates, species such as blue grama and big sagebrush will increase. Plains pricklypear and weedy annuals will invade. Cool season grasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, and rhizomatous wheatgrasses will decrease in frequency and production.

The Historic Climax Plant Community (description follows the plant community diagram) has been determined by study of rangeland relic areas, or areas protected from excessive disturbance. Trends in plant communities going from heavily grazed areas to lightly grazed areas, seasonal use pastures, and historical accounts have also been used.

The following is a State and Transition Model Diagram that illustrates the common plant communities (states) that can occur on the site and the transitions between these communities. The ecological processes will be discussed in

more detail in the plant community narratives following the diagram.

## **State and transition model**



**BM** - Brush Management (fire, chemical, mechanical)

**Freq. & Severe Grazing** - Frequent and Severe Utilization of the Cool-season Mid-grasses during the Growing Season

**GLMT** - Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment

**LTPG** - Long-term Prescribed Grazing

**MCSLG** - Moderate, Continuous Season-long Grazing

**NU, NF** - No Use and No Fire

**PG** - Prescribed Grazing (proper stocking rates with adequate recovery periods during the growing season)

**VLTPG** - Very Long-term Prescribed Grazing (could possibly take generations)

**WF** - Wildfire (Natural or Human Caused)

**State 1**  
**Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses Plant Community**

**Community 1.1**  
**Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses Plant Community**

The interpretive plant community for this site is the Historic Climax Plant Community. This state evolved with grazing by large herbivores, soils less than 15 inches, and periodic fires. The cyclical natural of the fire regime in this community and the shallow soils prevented big sagebrush from being the dominant landscape. This plant community can be found on areas that are properly managed with grazing and/or prescribed burning, and on areas receiving occasional short periods of rest. Potential vegetation is about 80% grasses or grass-like plants, 10% forbs, and 10% woody plants. Cool season midgrasses dominate the state. The major grasses include western wheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, and needleandthread. Other grasses occurring in the state include Sandberg bluegrass, blue grama, and prairie junegrass. Big sagebrush and green rabbitbrush are conspicuous elements of this state, which can make up 15% of the annual production. A variety of forbs also occurs in this state and plant diversity is high (see Plant Composition Table). The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 300 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 150 lbs. /acre in unfavorable years to about 375 lbs. /acre in above average years. The state is extremely stable and well adapted to the Northern Intermountain Desertic Basins climatic conditions. The diversity in plant species allows for high drought resistance. This is a sustainable plant community (site/soil stability, watershed function, and biologic integrity). Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Moderate, continuous season-long grazing will convert the plant community to the Perennial Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community. Prolonged drought will exacerbate this transition.

**Figure 4. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).**  
**WY0501, 5-9BH Upland sites. Monthly percentages of total annual growth for all upland sites with dominantly C3 Cool season plants..**

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			15	50	20	5		10			

**State 2**  
**Perennial Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community**

**Community 2.1**  
**Perennial Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community**

Historically, this plant community evolved under grazing and a low fire frequency. Currently, it is found under moderate, season-long grazing by livestock and will be exacerbated by prolonged drought conditions. In addition, the fire regime for this site has been modified and extended periods without fire is now common. This plant community is still dominated by cool-season grasses, while short warm-season grasses and miscellaneous forbs account for the balance of the understory. A variety of shrubs is now a conspicuous part of the overall production. Dominant grasses include western wheatgrass, and needleandthread. Grasses and grass-like species of secondary importance include blue grama, Sandberg bluegrass and threadleaf sedge. Forbs commonly found in this plant community include scarlet globemallow, fringed sagewort, fleabanes, leafy wildparsley, and phlox. Big sagebrush and green rabbitbrush dominate the overstory. Big sagebrush can make up to 20% of the annual production. The overstory of shrubs and understory of grass and forbs provide a diverse plant community When compared to the Historic Climax Plant Community, shrubs and blue grama have increased. Plains pricklypear cactus will also have increased, but occurs only in small patches. Indian ricegrass and bluebunch wheatgrass have decreased and may occur in only trace amounts under the sagebrush canopy or within the patches of pricklypear. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 200 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 100 lbs. /acre in unfavorable years to about 300 lbs. /acre in above average years. This plant community is resistant to change. The herbaceous species present are well adapted to grazing; however, species composition can be altered through long-term overgrazing. The herbaceous component is mostly intact and plant vigor and replacement capabilities are sufficient. Water flow patterns and litter movement may be occurring but only on steeper slopes. Incidence of pedestalling is minimal. Soils are mostly stable and the surface shows minimum soil loss. The watershed is functioning and the biotic community is intact. Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Prescribed grazing or possibly long-term prescribed grazing, will convert this plant community to the HCPC. The probability of this occurring is high especially if rotational grazing along with short deferred grazing is

implemented as part of prescribed method of use. In addition, the removal of fire suppression will allow a somewhat natural fire regime to reoccur to more easily transition between this plant community and the HCPC. A prescribed fire treatment can be useful to hasten this transition if desired. • Frequent and severe grazing on less saline soils (plus no fire) will convert the plant community to the Mixed Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community. The probability of this occurring is high. • Frequent and severe grazing on less saline soils (plus wildfire or brush control), will convert the plant community to the Blue Grama Sod Plant Community. The probability of this occurring is high, especially, if the sagebrush stand has been severely affected by drought or heavy use or has been removed altogether. • Frequent and severe grazing on more saline soils, will convert the plant community to the Salt Tolerant Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community. The probability of this occurring is high especially on soils with elevated salts and the sagebrush stand has been severely affected by drought and heavy use or has been removed altogether.

**Figure 5. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0501, 5-9BH Upland sites. Monthly percentages of total annual growth for all upland sites with dominantly C3 Cool season plants..**

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			15	50	20	5		10			

### State 3

#### Mixed Shrub/Bare Ground Community

#### Community 3.1

#### Mixed Shrub/Bare Ground Community

This plant community is the result of frequent and severe grazing and protection from fire. Shrubs and especially sagebrush dominates this plant community, as the annual production of sagebrush exceeds 20%. Shrubs are a significant component of the plant community and the preferred cool season grasses have been eliminated or greatly reduced. The dominant grasses are Sandberg bluegrass, threadleaf sedge, and blue grama. Weedy annual species such as cheatgrass may occupy the site if a seed source is available. Cactus and sageworts often increase. Noxious weeds such as Russian knapweed, leafy spurge, or Canada thistle may invade the site if a seed source is available. The interspaces between plants have expanded leaving the amount of bare ground more prevalent. As compared with the HCPC or the Perennial Grass/ Mixed Shrub Plant Communities, the annual production is similar, as the shrub production compensates for the decline in the herbaceous production. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 125 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 75 lbs. /acre in unfavorable years to about 225 lbs. /acre in above average years. This plant community is resistant to change as the stand becomes more decadent. These areas may actually be more resistant to fire as less fine fuels are available and the bare ground between the sagebrush plants is increased. Continued frequent and severe grazing or the removal of grazing does not seem to affect the composition or structure of the plant community. Plant diversity is moderate to poor. Soil erosion is accelerated because of increased bare ground. Water flow patterns and pedestalling are obvious. Infiltration is reduced and runoff is increased. Rill channels may be noticeable in the interspaces and gullies may be establishing where rills have concentrated down slope. Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Brush management, followed by prescribed grazing, will return this plant community at or near the HCPC. Reseeding after brush management with native species may be necessary to ensure a more rapid transition. If prescribed fire is used as a means to reduce or remove the shrubs, sufficient fine fuels will need to be present. This may require deferment from grazing prior to treatment. Post management is critical to ensure success. This can range from two or more years of rest to partial growing season deferment, depending on the condition of the understory at the time of treatment and the growing conditions following treatment. In the case of an intense wildfire that occurs when desirable plants are not completely dormant, the length of time required to reach the HCPC may be increased and seeding of natives is recommended. • Brush management or Wild Fire followed by frequent and severe grazing, will convert the plant community to the Blue Grama Sod Plant Community.

**Figure 6. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0501, 5-9BH Upland sites. Monthly percentages of total annual growth for all upland sites with dominantly C3 Cool season plants..**

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			15	50	20	5		10			

State 4  
Blue Grama Sod Plant Community

Community 4.1  
Blue Grama Sod Plant Community

This plant community is the result of frequent and severe grazing, which has adversely affected the perennial grasses as well as the addition of other impacts that can affect the shrub component. These factors include drought, heavy browsing, wildfires, and human brush control measures. A dense sod of blue grama with patches of threadleaf sedge dominates this state. Pricklypear cactus can become dense enough in patches so that livestock cannot graze forage growing within the cactus clumps. Big sagebrush has been reduced and in some cases removed. When compared to the Historic Climax Plant Community, blue grama and threadleaf sedge have increased. All cool-season mid-grasses and forbs have been greatly reduced and the shrub component is lacking. Total production has been significantly decreased. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 75 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 25 lbs. /acre in unfavorable years to about 125 lbs. /acre in above average years. This sod is extremely resistant to change and continued frequent and severe grazing or the removal of grazing does not seem to affect the plant composition or structure of the plant community. The biotic integrity of this state is not functional and plant diversity is extremely low. This sod bound plant community is very resistant to water infiltration. While this sod protects the site itself, off-site areas are affected by excessive runoff that can cause rills and gully erosion. Water flow patterns are obvious in the bare ground areas and pedestalling is apparent along the sod edges. Rill channels are noticeable in the interspaces and down slope. The watershed may or may not be functioning, as runoff may affect adjoining sites. Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Grazing land mechanical treatment (chiseling, etc.) and pricklypear cactus control (if needed), followed by prescribed grazing, will return this plant community to near Historic Climax Plant Community condition. Reseeding with natives is often needed to hasten this transition.

Figure 7. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).  
WY0501, 5-9BH Upland sites. Monthly percentages of total annual growth for all upland sites with dominantly C3 Cool season plants..

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			15	50	20	5		10			

State 5  
Salt Tolerant Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community

Community 5.1  
Salt Tolerant Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community

This plant community can occur on sites subjected to continuous yearlong grazing and where soils are influenced by elevated amount of soluble salts. Salt tolerant shrubs are a significant component of the plant community and the preferred cool season grasses have been eliminated or greatly reduced. Wyoming big sagebrush makes up a minor component of the plant community. This state is dominated by an overstory of salt tolerant shrubs, such as greasewood, birdfoot sagebrush and saltbushes, but can vary widely in their composition and production. This variation results from the varying quantity of soluble salts present in the soils and the availability of shrubs to occupy the site. Big sagebrush and rabbitbrushes are present but are mostly in small patches. Perennial cool season mid-grasses have been removed leaving mostly patches of blue grama and annuals. Cheatgrass and weedy annual forbs such as halogeton, Russian thistle, and kochia, will occupy the site if a seed source is available. Noxious weeds such as Russian knapweed may also invade this state. Plant diversity is moderate to poor. When compared to the HCPC, grass production has diminished but is off set by the increase in shrub production. The interspaces between plants have expanded leaving the amount of bare ground more prevalent. Surface salts have increased, especially on sites dominated by greasewood and saltbushes. The leaves of these plants contain high amounts of sodium and other salts, and when shed these soluble salts are transferred to the soils underneath the plants. Consequently, the soil can exhibit wide variations in soluble salts, which can explain the variation in shrub composition. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 150 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 75 lbs. /acre in unfavorable years to about 200 lbs. /acre in above average years. This plant community is resistant to change. These areas are actually more resistant to fire as less fine fuels are available and the bare ground between the shrubs has increased. Continued frequent and severe grazing or the removal of grazing does



not seem to affect the composition or structure of the plant community. The biotic integrity of this state is mostly dysfunctional because of the predominant salt tolerant shrub overstory and absence of perennial cool season grasses. Soil erosion is accelerated because of increased bare ground. Water flow patterns and pedestalling are obvious. Infiltration is reduced and runoff is increased. Rill channels may be noticeable in the interspaces and gullies may be establishing where rills have concentrated down slope. Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Prescribed grazing or possibly long-term prescribed grazing, will convert this plant community to the Salt Tolerant Shrub/Rhizomatous Wheatgrass Plant Community. Recovery to near Historic Climax Plant Community condition is difficult to impossible due to the resistance of these shrubs to herbicides and other brush management techniques. In addition, the increase in surface salts has had accumulated effects on the soil so most of the herbaceous plants associated with the HCPC are no longer suitable for this site. The most notable exception is the rhizomatous wheatgrasses and bottlebrush squirreltail. Soil remediation to reduce the surface salts is not recommended, as this is mostly ineffective and extremely costly. Seeding more salt-tolerant native grasses and forbs will improve the productivity of the site and plant cover.

**Figure 8. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0501, 5-9BH Upland sites. Monthly percentages of total annual growth for all upland sites with dominantly C3 Cool season plants..**

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			15	50	20	5		10			

## State 6 Salt Tolerant Shrub/Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses Plant Community

### Community 6.1 Salt Tolerant Shrub/Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses Plant Community

This plant community can occur where prescribed grazing management is implemented in the Salt Tolerant Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community. Salt tolerant shrubs remain a significant component of the plant community, but preferred cool season grasses have reestablished. This state is dominated by an overstory of salt tolerant shrubs, such as greasewood and saltbushes, but can exhibit a wide variety of shrub composition and production. Some perennial cool season mid-grasses have once again reestablished such as rhizomatous wheatgrasses and bottlebrush squirreltail. Other important grasses include Sandberg bluegrass and blue grama. Patches of annuals such as cheatgrass and other weedy annual forbs such as halogeton, Russian thistle, and kochia, will persist on this site. Noxious weeds such as Russian knapweed may also remain if not treated. The interspaces between plants will have reduced in size. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 200 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 125 lbs. /acre in unfavorable years to about 300 lbs. /acre in above average years. This plant community is mostly resistant to change, but species composition can be altered through long-term overgrazing. The herbaceous component is stable and plant vigor and replacement capabilities are sufficient. The watershed may or may not be functioning and the biotic community is not intact because of the predominant salt tolerant shrub overstory. Plant diversity is moderate. Soils are mostly stable and recent soil loss is minimal. This should not be confused with evidence of remnant erosion. Water flow patterns and litter movement is stable but is still occurring on steeper slopes. Incidence of pedestalling is improving. Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Frequent and severe grazing will convert the plant community to the Salt Tolerant Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community. • Recovery to near Historic Climax Plant Community condition is difficult to impossible due to the resistance of these shrubs to herbicides and other brush management techniques. In addition, the increase in surface salts has had accumulated effects on the soil so most of the herbaceous plants associated with the HCPC are no longer suitable for this site. The most notable exception is the rhizomatous wheatgrasses and bottlebrush squirreltail. Soil remediation to reduce the surface salts is not recommended, as this is mostly ineffective and extremely costly. Seeding more salt-tolerant grasses and forbs will improve the productivity of site and plant cover, but will not improve the biotic integrity.

**Figure 9. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0501, 5-9BH Upland sites. Monthly percentages of total annual growth for all upland sites with dominantly C3 Cool season plants..**

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			15	50	20	5		10			

## Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Kg/Hectare)	Foliar Cover (%)
<b>Grass/Grasslike</b>					
1				50–84	
	thickspike wheatgrass	ELLA3	<i>Elymus lanceolatus</i>	50–84	–
	thickspike wheatgrass	ELLAL	<i>Elymus lanceolatus ssp. lanceolatus</i>	50–84	–
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	50–84	–
2				84–118	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	84–118	–
3				34–84	
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	34–84	–
4				17–34	
	needle and thread	HECO26	<i>Hesperostipa comata</i>	17–34	–
5				17–50	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0–17	–
	blue grama	BOGR2	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	0–17	–
	sedge	CAREX	<i>Carex</i>	0–17	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	0–17	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	0–17	–
<b>Forb</b>					
6				0–34	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0–17	–
	textile onion	ALTE	<i>Allium textile</i>	0–17	–
	Indian paintbrush	CASTI2	<i>Castilleja</i>	0–17	–
	larkspur	DELPH	<i>Delphinium</i>	0–17	–
	fleabane	ERIGE2	<i>Erigeron</i>	0–17	–
	desertparsley	LOMAT	<i>Lomatium</i>	0–17	–
	phlox	PHLOX	<i>Phlox</i>	0–17	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	0–17	–
<b>Shrub/Vine</b>					
7				0–34	
	big sagebrush	ARTR2	<i>Artemisia tridentata</i>	0–34	–
8				0–17	
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	0–17	–
9				0–17	
	Shrub (>.5m)	2SHRUB	<i>Shrub (&gt;.5m)</i>	0–17	–

## Animal community

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations

Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses (HCPC): The predominance of grasses in this plant community

favors grazers and mixed-feeders, such as bison, elk, and antelope. Suitable thermal and escape cover for deer may be limited due to the low quantities of woody plants. However, topographical variations could provide some escape cover. When found adjacent to sagebrush dominated states, this plant community may provide brood rearing/foraging areas for sage grouse, as well as lek sites. Other birds that would frequent this plant community include western meadowlarks, horned larks, and golden eagles. Many grassland obligate small mammals would occur here.

**Perennial Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community:** The combination of an overstory of sagebrush and an understory of grasses and forbs provide a very diverse plant community for wildlife. The crowns of sagebrush tend to break up hard crusted snow on winter ranges, so mule deer and antelope may use this state for foraging and cover year-round, as would cottontail and jack rabbits. It provides important winter, nesting, brood-rearing, and foraging habitat for sage grouse.

**Mixed Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community:** This plant community can provide important winter foraging for elk, mule deer and antelope.

**Blue Grama Sod Plant Community:** These communities provide limited foraging for antelope and other grazers. They may be used as a foraging site by sage grouse if proximal to woody cover and if the Historic Climax Plant Community or the Perennial Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community is limiting. Generally, these are not target plant communities for wildlife habitat management.

**Salt Tolerant Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community:** This plant community exhibits a low level of plant species diversity due to the accumulation of salts near the soil surface. It may provide some thermal and escape cover for deer and antelope if no other woody community is nearby, but in most cases, it is not a desirable plant community to select as a wildlife habitat management objective.

**Salt Tolerant Shrub/Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses Plant Community:** These communities provide forage for antelope and other grazers. They may be used as a foraging site by sage grouse if proximal to woody cover and if the Historic Climax Plant Community or the Perennial Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community is limiting.

#### Animal Community – Grazing Interpretations

The following table lists suggested stocking rates for cattle under continuous season-long grazing under normal growing conditions. These are conservative estimates that should be used only as guidelines in the initial stages of the conservation planning process. Often, the current plant composition does not entirely match any particular plant community (as described in this ecological site description). Because of this, a field visit is recommended, in all cases, to document plant composition and production. More precise carrying capacity estimates should eventually be calculated using this information along with animal preference data, particularly when grazers other than cattle are involved. Under more intensive grazing management, improved harvest efficiencies can result in an increased carrying capacity. If distribution problems occur, stocking rates must be reduced to maintain plant health and vigor.

#### Plant Community Production Carrying Capacity\*

(lb. /ac) (AUM/ac)

Historic Climax Plant Community 150-375 .10

Perennial Grass/Mixed Shrub 100-300 .08

Mixed Shrub/Bare Ground 125-300 .05

Blue Grama Sod 050-125 .03

Salt Tolerant Shrub/Bare Ground 75-200 .03

Salt Tolerant Shrub/Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses 125-300 .05

\* - Continuous, season-long grazing by cattle under average growing conditions.

Grazing by domestic livestock is one of the major income-producing industries in the area. Rangeland in this area may provide yearlong forage for cattle, sheep, or horses. During the dormant period, the forage for livestock use needs to be supplemented with protein because the quality does not meet minimum livestock requirements.

## Hydrological functions

Water is the principal factor limiting forage production on this site. This site is dominated by soils in hydrologic group B and C, with localized areas in hydrologic group D. Infiltration ranges from moderate to moderately rapid. Runoff potential for this site varies from moderate to high depending on soil hydrologic group and ground cover. In many cases, areas with greater than 75% ground cover have the greatest potential for high infiltration and lower runoff. An example of an exception would be where short-grasses form a strong sod and dominate the site. Areas where ground cover is less than 50% have the greatest potential to have reduced infiltration and higher runoff (refer to Part 630, NRCS National Engineering Handbook for detailed hydrology information).

Rills and gullies should not typically be present. Water flow patterns should be barely distinguishable if at all present. Pedestals are only slightly present in association with bunchgrasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass. Litter typically falls in place, and signs of movement are not common. Chemical and physical crusts are rare to non-existent. Cryptogamic crusts are present, but only cover 1-2% of the soil surface.

## Recreational uses

This site provides hunting opportunities for upland game species. The wide varieties of plants which bloom from spring until fall have an esthetic value that appeals to visitors.

## Wood products

No appreciable wood products are present on the site.

## Other products

None noted.

## Inventory data references

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS inventory data. Field observations from range trained personnel were also used. Other sources used as references include: USDA NRCS Water and Climate Center, USDA NRCS National Range and Pasture Handbook, and USDA NRCS Soil Surveys from various counties.

### Inventory Data References

Data Source Number of Records Sample Period State County  
SCS-RANGE-417 19 1965-1986 WY Park & others

## Contributors

Ray Gullion

## 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	05/02/2008
Approved by	E. Bainter
Approval date	

## Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Rills should not be present

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2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Barely observable

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3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Essentially non-existent

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4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground is 40-60% occurring in small areas throughout site

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5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Active gullies should be restricted to areas of concentrated water flow patterns on steeper slopes

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6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Small scoured sites may be observed

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7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Litter movement is little to none based on topography and water flow patterns

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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):** Plant cover and litter is at 50% or greater of soil surface and maintains soil surface integrity. Soil Stability class is anticipated to be 4 or greater.

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

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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Grass canopy and basal cover should reduce raindrop impact and slow overland flow providing increased time for infiltration to occur. Infiltration is moderate.

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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):** No compaction layer or soil surface crusting should be 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: Mid stature Bunch Grasses > Mid Stature Rhizomatous Grasses > Shrubs > Forbs > Short Grasses/Grasslikes

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):** Very Low
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth ( in):** Average litter cover is 15-25% with depths of 0.1 to 0.2 inches. Litter cover is in contact with soil surface with little evidence of biological activity.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 250 lbs/ac
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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:** Blue grama, Big sagebrush, Annuals, Exotics, and Species found on Noxious Weed List
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing
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