

Ecological site R032XY308WY Coarse Upland (CU) 10-14" East Precipitation Zone

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General information

Provisional. A provisional ecological site description has undergone quality control and quality assurance review. It contains a working state and transition model and enough information to identify the ecological site.

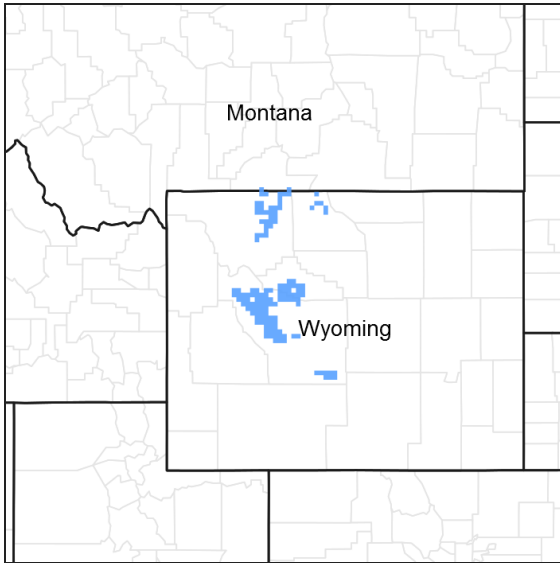


Figure 1. Mapped extent

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

Associated sites

| | |
|-------------|---|
| R032XY312WY | Gravelly (Gr) 10-14" East Precipitation Zone |
| R032XY328WY | Lowland (LL) 10-14" East Precipitation Zone |
| R032XY350WY | Sandy (Sy) 10-14" East Precipitation Zone |
| R032XY358WY | Shallow Clayey (SwCy) 10-14" East Precipitation Zone |
| R032XY366WY | Shallow Sandy (SwSy) 10-14" East Precipitation Zone |

Similar sites

| | |
|-------------|--|
| R032XY108WY | Coarse Upland (CU) 5-9" Big Horn Basin Precipitation Zone |
| R032XY208WY | Coarse Upland (CU) 5-9" Wind River Basin Precipitation Zone |

Table 1. Dominant plant species

| | |
|------------|---------------|
| Tree | Not specified |
| Shrub | Not specified |
| Herbaceous | Not specified |

Physiographic features

This site occurs on undulating rolling land.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Landforms | (1) Hill (2) Alluvial fan (3) Stream terrace |
| Flooding frequency | None |
| Elevation | 1,737–2,286 m |
| Slope | 0–30% |
| Ponding depth | 0 cm |
| Aspect | Aspect is not a significant factor |

Climatic features

Annual precipitation ranges from 10-14 inches per year. The normal precipitation pattern shows the least amount of precipitation in December, January, and February, increasing to a peak during the latter part of May. Amounts decrease through June, July, and August and then increase some in September. 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 exceeds 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.

Winds are generally not strong as compared to the rest of the state. Daytime winds are generally stronger than nighttime and occasional strong storms may bring brief periods of high winds with gusts to more than 75 mph.

Growth of native cool-season plants begins about April 15 and continues to about July 15. 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 “Thermopolis 2” climate station:

Minimum Maximum 5 yrs. out of 10 between
Frost-free period (days): 74 149 May 23 – September 16
Freeze-free period (days): 112 180 May 8 – October 1
Annual Precipitation (inches): 7.6 21.9

Mean annual precipitation: 12.35 inches

Mean annual air temperature: 46.2 F (30.1 F Avg. Min. to 62.3 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” Grass Creek 1E”, “Thermopolis”, Thermopolis 25NW”, “Buffalo Bill Dam” and “Black Mountain”.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Frost-free period (average) | 149 days |
| Freeze-free period (average) | 180 days |
| Precipitation total (average) | 356 mm |

Influencing water features

Stream Type: None

Soil features

The soils of this site are deep to moderately deep (greater than 20" to bedrock), moderately well to somewhat excessively well-drained & moderately slow to moderately rapid permeable. This site consists of bouldery to cobbly coarse fragment soils. The soil surface can be covered extensively with these coarse fragments and as such, plant density can be reduced. The soil characteristics having most influential to the plant community are volume of coarse fragments in the profile that reduces the available moisture and the extensive cover of these coarse fragments, which can reduce the plant density.

Major Soil Series correlated to this site includes: Brownsto

Table 4. Representative soil features

| | |
|---|---|
| Surface texture | (1) Cobbly loam (2) Bouldery silt loam (3) Very fine sandy loam |
| Family particle size | (1) Loamy |
| Drainage class | Well drained to somewhat excessively drained |
| Permeability class | Moderately slow to moderately rapid |
| Soil depth | 51–152 cm |
| Surface fragment cover ≤3" | 5–25% |
| Surface fragment cover >3" | 0–10% |
| Available water capacity (0-101.6cm) | 7.11–15.24 cm |
| Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm) | 0–30% |
| Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm) | 0–4 mmhos/cm |
| Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm) | 0–5 |
| Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm) | 7.4–8.4 |
| Subsurface fragment volume ≤3" (Depth not specified) | 0–25% |
| Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified) | 0–35% |

Ecological dynamics

Potential vegetation on this site is dominated by mid cool-season perennial grasses. Other significant vegetation includes big sagebrush and a variety of forbs. The expected potential composition for this site is about 75% grasses, 10% forbs and 15% 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 threadleaf sedge, Sandberg bluegrass, blue grama, and big sagebrush will increase. Plains pricklypear and weedy annuals will invade. Cool-season grasses such as Griffiths and bluebunch wheatgrass, rhizomatous wheatgrasses, and needleandthread will decrease in frequency and production.

Big sagebrush may become dominant on some areas with an absence of fire. Wildfires are actively controlled in recent times so chemical control using herbicides has replaced the historic role of fire on this site. Recently,

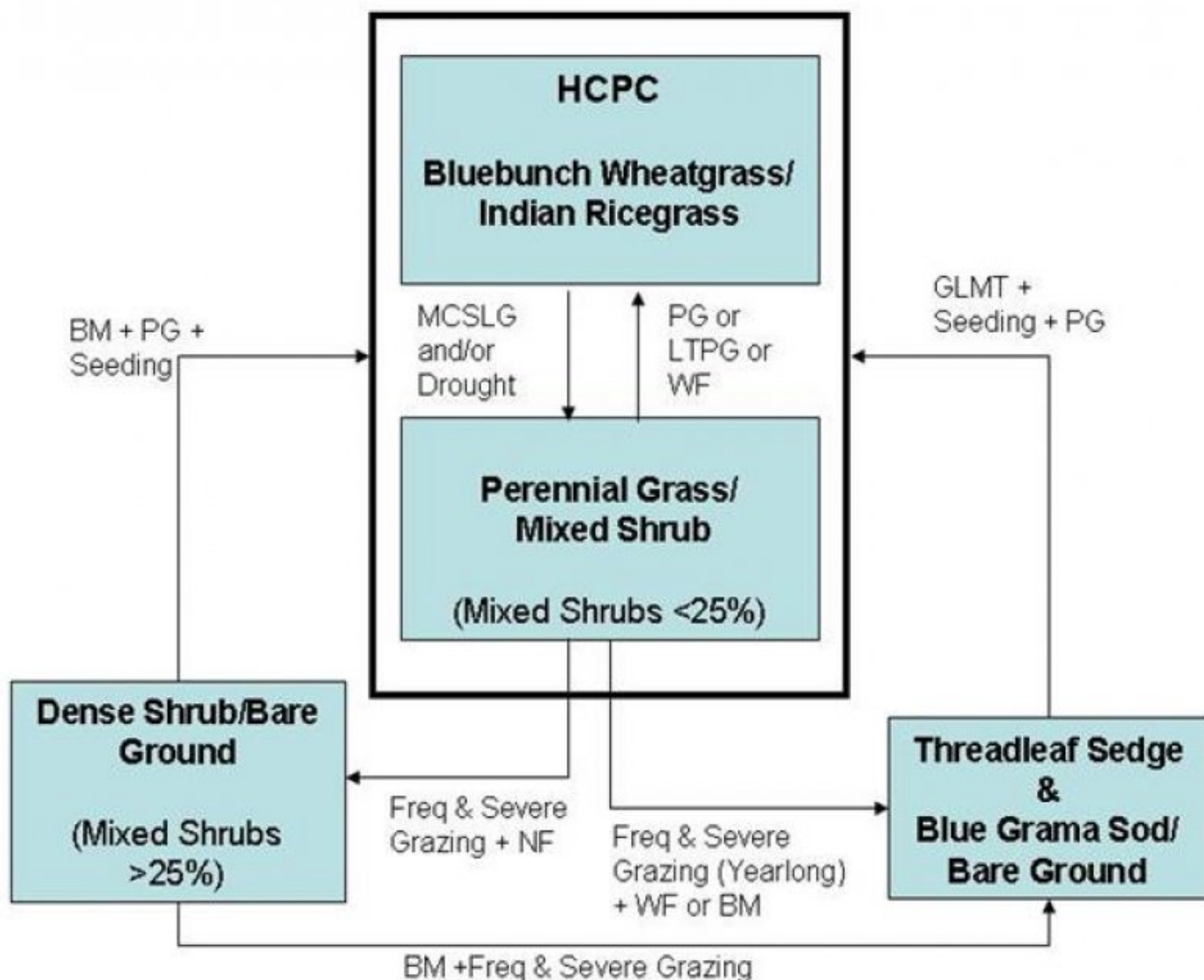
prescribed burning has regained some popularity.

Due to the amount and pattern of the precipitation, the big sagebrush component typically is not resilient once it has been removed if a healthy and vigorous stand of grass exists and is maintained. The exception to this is where the herbaceous component is severely degraded at the time of treatment, growing conditions are unfavorable after treatment, and/or recovery periods are inadequate.

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/ Indian Ricegrass

Community 1.1 Bluebunch Wheatgrass/ Indian Ricegrass

This plant community is the interpretive plant community for this site and is considered to be the Historic Climax Plant Community (HCPC). This state evolved with grazing by large herbivores and periodic fires. 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. The potential vegetation is about 75% grasses or grass-like plants, 10% forbs, and 15% woody plants. This state is dominated by cool season mid-grasses. The major grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, rhizomatous wheatgrasses, spikefescue, and needleandthread. Other grasses occurring in this state include blue grama and Sandberg's bluegrass. A variety of forbs occurs on this site, as shown in the preceding table. Big sagebrush, black sagebrush, and rubber rabbitbrush are conspicuous species in this plant community. Antelope bitterbrush will occur on sites associated with the upper limits of this precipitation zone. These shrubs occur in a mosaic pattern, and make up 15% of the annual production. Plant diversity is high (see Plant Composition Table). The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 650 lbs./acre, but it can range from about 400 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 900 lbs./acre in above average years. This plant community is extremely stable and well adapted to the Northern Intermountain Desertic Basins climatic conditions. The diversity in plant species allows for high drought tolerance. 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).
WY0701, 10-14E upland sites.

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | | 5 | 25 | 40 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 5 | | |

State 2 Perennial Grass/ Mixed Shrub

Community 2.1 Perennial Grass/ Mixed Shrub

Historically, this plant community evolved under grazing by large ungulates 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. Big sagebrush and rubber rabbitbrush are significant components of this plant community. Cool-season grasses make up the majority of the understory with the balance made up of short warm-season grasses, annual cool-season grasses, and miscellaneous forbs. Dominant grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass, needleandthread, and western wheatgrass. Grasses of secondary importance include threadleaf sedge, blue grama, Sandberg bluegrass, and red threeawn. Forbs commonly found in this plant community include scarlet globemallow, Hood's phlox, sulfur flower buckwheat, and penstemon spp. Shrubs can make up to 25% of the total annual production. Plains pricklypear can also occur. When compared to the Historic Climax Plant Community, sagebrush, rubber rabbitbrush, juniper, blue grama, and threadleaf sedge have increased. Production of cool-season grasses, particularly bluebunch wheatgrass and Indian ricegrass, has been reduced. Some weedy species may have invaded the site but are in small patches such as cheatgrass, kochia, and Russian thistle. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 500 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 300 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 700 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 a 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 plus no fires will convert the plant community to the Dense Shrub/ Bare Ground Plant community. The probability of this occurring is high. This is especially evident on areas where drought or heavy browsing does not adversely impact the shrub stand. • Frequent and severe grazing (yearlong) plus wildfire or brush management, will convert the plant community to a Threadleaf Sedge and Blue Grama Sod/Bare Ground Plant Community. The probability for is high especially on areas were the shrubs have been heavily browsed or removed by natural or human causes. Drought can also exasperate this transition.

Figure 5. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
WY0701, 10-14E upland sites.

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | | 5 | 25 | 40 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 5 | | |

State 3

Dense Shrub/ Bare Ground

Community 3.1

Dense Shrub/ Bare Ground

This plant community is the result of frequent and severe grazing and protection from fire. Sagebrush and rubber rabbitbrush dominate this plant community as the annual production of shrubs exceeds 25%. Shrubs comprise the 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 cheatgrass, kochia, Russian thistle, halogeton and a variety of mustards may occupy the site. Cactus has significantly increased. Noxious weeds such as Russian knapweed, leafy spurge, or Canada thistle may invade the site if a seed source is available. Plant diversity is moderate to poor. Cool-season grasses still exist, but are usually under the shrub canopy or in the cactus patches. The interspaces between plants have expanded leaving the amount of bare ground more prevalent. When compared with the HCPC or the Perennial Grass/ Mixed Shrub Plant Communities, the annual production is less, as the cool season grasses are reduced, but the shrub production compensates for the decline in some of the herbaceous production. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 400 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 250 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 650 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 shrubs is increased. The herbaceous component is not as diverse and plant vigor and species regeneration capabilities of cool-season perennials are deficient. The removal of grazing does not seem to affect the plant composition or structure of the plant community. 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 and seeding, will return this plant community to at or near the HCPC. 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 are recommended. • Brush management, followed by frequent and severe grazing, will convert the plant community to a Threadleaf Sedge and Blue Grama Sod/Bare Ground Plant community. The probability of this occurring is high, because of the amount of bare ground exposed to weedy annuals and sod formers as the competition for space, has been removed.

Figure 6. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
WY0701, 10-14E upland sites.

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | | 5 | 25 | 40 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 5 | | |

State 4

Threadleaf sedge & Blue Grama Sod/ Bare Ground

Community 4.1

Threadleaf sedge & Blue Grama Sod/ Bare Ground

This plant community is created when the Perennial Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community is subjected to severe heavy yearlong grazing and the shrub component has been removed by heavy browsing, wildfire or human means. Additionally, this plant community can occur as a result of the Dense Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community being subjected to fire or brush management and not followed by prescribed grazing. Weedy annuals, threadleaf sedge, and/or blue grama are the most dominant plants. Weedy annuals occupy any open bare ground areas, while threadleaf sedge and/or blue grama form patches of sod in between the exposed boulders or cobbles. Rubber rabbitbrush may or may not be present on this site as this species may quickly re-establish after a fire. However, heavy browsing by large ungulates will significantly reduce or remove this shrub. Compared to the HCPC, weedy annual species are widespread and may include cheatgrass, kochia, Russian thistle, halogeton and a variety of mustards. Cactus has increase significantly. Noxious weeds such as Russian knapweed or Canada thistle may invade the site if a seed source is available. Virtually all other cool-season mid-grasses are absent or severely decreased. Blue grama and threadleaf sedge have significantly increased from what is found in the HCPC. Shrubs have been removed with the exception of small patches of mostly rubber rabbitbrush. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 150 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 relatively stable and resistant to overgrazing. Annuals and sod forming grasses are effectively competing against the establishment of perennial cool-season grasses. Plant diversity is greatly altered and the herbaceous component is not intact. Recruitment of perennial grasses is not occurring and the replacement potential is absent. The biotic integrity is missing. On areas with a well established sod plant community, water infiltration will be significantly affected. While this sod protects the area itself, adjacent on-site and off-site areas are impacted by excessive runoff that can cause rill channels and gully erosion. Water flow patterns and pedestalling are obvious. The watershed may or may not be functional. 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. The sod areas are extremely resistant to change and will require grazing land mechanical treatments, such as chiseling to revert to a more preferred state. This may not be possible given the presence of cobbles or boulders on the soil surface, which can also exclude reseeding the area. If applicable, mechanical treatments and reseeding native plant species are recommended. This should be followed by proper grazing management to accelerate recovery where few desirable plants remain.

Figure 7. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0701, 10-14E upland sites.

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | | 5 | 25 | 40 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 5 | | |

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

| Group | Common Name | Symbol | Scientific Name | Annual Production (Kg/Hectare) | Foliar Cover (%) |
|------------------------|----------------------|--------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Grass/Grasslike | | | | | |
| 1 | | | | 183–256 | |
| | Montana wheatgrass | ELAL7 | <i>Elymus albicans</i> | 183–256 | – |
| | bluebunch wheatgrass | PSSP6 | <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i> | 183–256 | – |
| 2 | | | | 110–183 | |
| | Indian ricegrass | ACHY | <i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i> | 110–183 | – |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|--------|--|--------|---|
| 3 | | | | 37–110 | |
| | western wheatgrass | PASM | <i>Pascopyrum smithii</i> | 37–110 | – |
| 4 | | | | 0–73 | |
| | spike fescue | LEKI2 | <i>Leucopoa kingii</i> | 0–73 | – |
| 5 | | | | 0–73 | |
| | needle and thread | HECO26 | <i>Hesperostipa comata</i> | 0–73 | – |
| 6 | | | | 0–73 | |
| | Grass, perennial | 2GP | <i>Grass, perennial</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | Fendler threeawn | ARPUL | <i>Aristida purpurea var. longiseta</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | blue grama | BOGR2 | <i>Bouteloua gracilis</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | threadleaf sedge | CAFI | <i>Carex filifolia</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | prairie Junegrass | KOMA | <i>Koeleria macrantha</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | Sandberg bluegrass | POSE | <i>Poa secunda</i> | 0–37 | – |
| Forb | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | 0–73 | |
| | Forb, perennial | 2FP | <i>Forb, perennial</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | yarrow | ACHIL | <i>Achillea</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | rosy pussytoes | ANRO2 | <i>Antennaria rosea</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | prairie sagewort | ARFR4 | <i>Artemisia frigida</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | corn gromwell | BUAR3 | <i>Buglossoides arvensis</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | wavyleaf Indian paintbrush | CAAPM | <i>Castilleja applegatei ssp. martinii</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | Indian paintbrush | CASTI2 | <i>Castilleja</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | miner's candle | CRVI4 | <i>Cryptantha virgata</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | larkspur | DELPH | <i>Delphinium</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | sulphur-flower buckwheat | ERUM | <i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | aster | EUCEP2 | <i>Eucephalus</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | beardtongue | PENST | <i>Penstemon</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | phlox | PHLOX | <i>Phlox</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | scarlet globemallow | SPCO | <i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i> | 0–37 | – |
| Shrub/Vine | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | 37–110 | |
| | Shrub (>.5m) | 2SHRUB | <i>Shrub (>.5m)</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | black sagebrush | ARNO4 | <i>Artemisia nova</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | big sagebrush | ARTR2 | <i>Artemisia tridentata</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | yellow rabbitbrush | CHVI8 | <i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | rubber rabbitbrush | ERNA10 | <i>Ericameria nauseosa</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | Utah juniper | JUOS | <i>Juniperus osteosperma</i> | 0–37 | – |
| | antelope bitterbrush | PUTR2 | <i>Purshia tridentata</i> | 0–37 | – |

Animal community

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations

Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Indian Ricegrass Plant Community (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. Brewer's sparrows' nest in big sagebrush plants, and hosts of other nesting birds utilize stands in the 20-30% cover range.

Dense Shrub/Bare Ground Plant Community: This plant community can provide important winter foraging for elk, mule deer and antelope, as sagebrush can approach 15% protein and 40-60% digestibility during that time. This community provides escape and thermal cover for large ungulates, as well as nesting and brood rearing habitat for sage grouse.

Threadleaf Sedge and Blue Grama Sod/Bare Ground 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.

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)

Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Indian Ricegrass 400-900 .3

Perennial Grass/Mixed Shrub 300-700 .25

Dense Shrub/Bare Ground 250-650 .15

Threadleaf Sedge & Blue Grama Sod/B. Ground 100-300 .07

* - 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 moderately slow to moderate. Runoff potential for this site varies from low to moderate 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. 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. Those involved in developing this site include: Chris Krassin, Range Management Specialist, NRCS and Everet Bainter, Range Management Specialist. Other sources used as references include USDA NRCS Water and Climate Center, USDA NRCS National Range and Pasture Handbook, USDI and USDA Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health Version 3, and USDA NRCS Soil Surveys from various counties.

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 | 05/01/2008 |
| Approved by | E. Bainter |
| Approval date | |
| Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on | Annual Production |

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Rare to nonexistent. Where present, short and widely spaced.
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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:** Rare to nonexistent.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground can range from 10-30%.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Active gullies should not be present.

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

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Herbaceous litter expected to move only in small amounts (to leeward side of shrubs). Large woody debris from sagebrush will show no movement.

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Soil Stability Index ratings range from 1 (interspaces) to 6 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 3.0 or greater.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Soil data is limited for this site. Described A-horizons vary from 2-11 inches (5-28 cm) with OM of 1 to 2%.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Plant community consists of 60-80% grasses, 10% forbs, and 10-30% shrubs. Evenly distributed plant canopy (55-80%) and litter plus moderate to moderately rapid infiltration rates result in minimal runoff. Basal cover is typically less than 5% for this site and does very little to effect runoff on this site.

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

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-size, cool season bunchgrasses>> perennial shrubs>>perennial forbs>cool season rhizomatous grasses=short cool season bunchgrasses

Sub-dominant:

Other:

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Minimal decadence, typically associated with shrub component.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter ranges from 5-30% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 30-70% expected. Herbaceous litter depth typically ranges from 3-10mm. Woody litter can be up to a couple inches (4-6 cm).
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** English: 400-900 lb/ac (650 lb/ac average); Metric 448-1008 kg/ha (728 kg/ha average).
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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:** Bare ground greater than 50% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Threadleaf sedge, Blue grama, big sagebrush, Sandberg bluegrass, buckwheat, and phlox are common increasers. Annual weeds such as cheatgrass, mustards, kochia, lambsquarter, and Russian thistle are common invasive species in disturbed sites.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing, except in drought years.
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