

Ecological site DX034A02X126 Loamy Calcareous Pinedale Plateau (LyCa PP)

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Rangeland health reference sheet

Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health is a qualitative assessment protocol used to determine ecosystem condition based on benchmark characteristics described in the Reference Sheet. A suite of 17 (or more) indicators are typically considered in an assessment. The ecological site(s) representative of an assessment location must be known prior to applying the protocol and must be verified based on soils and climate. Current plant community cannot be used to identify the ecological site.

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Approved by	Kirt Walstad
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

- Number and extent of rills:** Not common, but can be present, particularly at the upper end of the slope range for this site. When present, rills are short and widely spaced relative to slope distance.
- Presence of water flow patterns:** Water patterns can be present, but are very small and not connected beyond 2 gaps in the plant canopy.
- Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Existing pedestals are blunt and not active, less than 2 inches (5cm) and typically found at the drip line of the shrub canopy. It is typical to find biological soil crusts at margins. Terracettes are not present.
- Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground is typically <20%, but can be dependent on plant community phase within the reference state. Higher bare ground is expected directly following a sagebrush killing disturbance, but returns to <20% within 2 years post-disturbance. Canopy gaps comprise up to 30% of the ground surface, and are primarily in the 1-2 foot categories (>60%). Canopy gaps >6 ft are rare.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Active gullies should not be present on this site, but sometimes there is erosion or deposition associated with adjacent steeper sites.

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Minimal wind scour or deposition may be present with wind scour found in canopy gaps and deposition found on the leeward side of shrubs. It is only occasional and does not occur as repeating pattern across the landscape, but is localized to exposed topography.

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) due to wind. Large woody debris from sagebrush will show no movement except for minimal debris damming after large rain or snowmelt events on slopes >6%.

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 can be variable. Values of 6 are typical when sample includes soil biological crusts, but often average 4-5 in plant interspaces. Overall, the biotic component provide stability for this site.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Soil organic matter (SOM) <2% is common. Color and structure are poor indicators of SOM in Aridisols (dry, arid soils with thin surfaces and salt and/or clay close to the surface) because SOM potential is low. Typically soil surface consists of an A-horizon of 3-12 inches (7-30 cm) thick with weak to medium sub-angular blocky structure that is brown to grayish brown (i.e. 10YR 5/3 or 5/2) in color. Field indicators of departure from the reference condition include exposure of subsoil with strong, sub-angular blocky structure as evidenced by excessive pedestalling and/or surface disturbance.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** The reference state consists of 40-80% grasses, 5-10% forbs, and 10-50% shrubs composition by dry weight. The sagebrush canopy is evenly distributed with foliar cover ranging from 5-25%. When sage canopy is at the high end, herbaceous understory diminishes in the plant interspaces, but desirable bunchgrasses can still be found in the interspaces of sage canopy as well as litter to reduce runoff potential. Infiltration is moderate resulting in moderate runoff potential. 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. A dry subsurface will often refuse a probe, causing misidentification of a compaction layer. Most soil profiles must be described by hand dug holes.

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

Sub-dominant:

Other:

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Minimal decadence can be observed and is typically associated with shrub component. It is common to find dead matter accumulated in bunchgrasses, but live plant matter quantity should exceed standing dead except for in times of severe drought. Sagebrush canopy will often have occasional dead branches, but it should not exceed 30% and shouldn't be found on most plants.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter ranges from 5-35% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) 35-65% expected. Herbaceous litter depth is typically very shallow, approximately 1-2mm. Woody litter can be up to a couple inches in diameter (4-6cm), but is sporadically distributed.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** English: 300-800 lb/ac (550 lb/ac average); Metric: 336-897 kg/ha (617 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 40% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Annual weeds such as kochia, lambsquarter, flixweed, and Russian thistle are common weedy species in disturbed sites. When dominant, rabbitbrush, which is native and typically found in small quantities on this site, indicates a change in disturbance regime and a threshold being crossed.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing except in severe drought years. Thickspike wheatgrass will commonly reproduce by underground rhizomes and not by seed production.
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