

Ecological site R035XY239UT Semidesert Shallow Clay (Shadscale-Utah Juniper)

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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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Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Present. A. On more gentle slopes (< 10 %): While not common may occur in the site. Rills may be 10 or more feet in length. Sides of rills may be up to 4 inches high. Rills are most likely to form below adjacent exposed bedrock or water flow patterns where sufficient water accumulates to cause erosion. B. On steep slopes (> 20 %): More common. May occur throughout the site. Where they occur, rills may extend down entire slope.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Common and occur throughout area on gentle slopes (<10 %). Some sinuous flow around perennial plants. Interspaces between well developed biological soil crusts appear to be water depression storage areas but actually serve as water flow patterns across areas covered with biological soil crust during episodic precipitation events. Evidence of flow patterns is expected to increase somewhat with slopes greater than 20 percent.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Pedestals may form at the base of plants that occur on the edge of rills. On steep slopes (>20 %), gullies may remove soil from the base of shrubs and/or trees exposing roots that resemble pedestals. Interspaces between well developed biological soil crusts resemble pedestals and may be up to 2 inches high. Terracettes are rare. Debris dams of small to medium sized litter (up to 2 inches in diameter) may form in water flow patterns, rills, and gullies. These debris dams may accumulate smaller litter (leaves, grass and forb stems).

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** 30 – 40%. (Soil surface is typically covered by 30 to 60 percent surface fragments). Ground cover is based on the first raindrop impact, and bare ground is the inverse of ground cover. Ground cover + bare ground = 100%.

Any well developed biological crusts present should not be recorded as bare ground. Poorly developed biological soil crusts that are interpreted as functioning as bare ground (therefore they would be susceptible to raindrop splash erosion) should be recorded as bare ground.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** None to few on gentle slopes (< 10 %). On steep slopes and areas below adjacent exposed bedrock, gullies may be numerous. Length often extends from exposed bedrock until gully reaches a stream or an area where water and sediment accumulate. Gullies may remove soil from base of shrubs and/or trees exposing roots. Gullies may show slightly more indication of erosion as slope increases, or as the site occurs adjacent to steep sites/watershed with concentrated flow patterns.

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None. The channery soil surface armors and reduces the potential for wind erosion.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** On gentle slopes (< 10 %) most litter accumulates at base of plants. Woody stems from shrubs and/or trees is usually not moved unless present in water flow patterns, rills, or gullies. On steep slopes (> 20 %), woody stems may be washed from site.

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** This site should have an soil stability rating of 4 or 5 under plant canopies and a rating of 2 to 4 in the interspaces using the soil stability test kit. The average rating should be a 4. Surface texture is very channery clay loam. Vegetation cover, litter accumulation, surface rock and biological soil crusts reduce erosion.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Soil surface horizon is 5 inches deep. Structure is moderate fine granular. Color is light brownish gray to (2.5Y6/2). Use the specific information for the soil you are assessing found in the published soil survey to supplement this description.

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

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** None. Bedrock is found within 20 inches of soil surface. This should not be considered as compaction.

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: Dominance is based on average annual production, air dry weight: Sprouting shrubs > perennial grasses > Non-sprouting shrubs > perennial and annual native forbs. Functional/structural groups may appropriately contain non-native species if their ecological function is the same as the native species in the reference state (e.g. Crested wheatgrass, Smooth brome, Intermediate wheatgrass, Siberian wheatgrass and/or forage kochia etc.)

Sub-dominant:

Other:

Additional: Biological soil crust is variable in it's expression where present on this site and is measured as a component of ground cover.

Following a recent disturbance such as fire, drought or insects that may remove the woody vegetation, forbs and perennial grasses (herbaceous species) may become more dominate in the community. These conditions would reflect a functional community phase within the reference state.

Dominants: Torrey Mormon tea, galleta, Indian ricegrass, broom snakeweed. Sub-dominants: Other perennial grasses and shrubs. Perennial and annual forbs can be expected to vary widely in their expression in the plant community based upon departures from average growing conditions.

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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** All age classes of perennial grasses should be present under average to above average growing conditions with age class expression likely subdued during below average growing conditions or on sites with high (usually greater than 65 percent) similarity index (late seral to historic climax). In general, a mix of age classes may be expected with some dead and decadent plants present.

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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Variability may occur due to weather and season.

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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 85-220 #/acre

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16. **Potential invasive (including noxious) species (native and non-native). List species which BOTH characterize degraded states and have the potential to become a dominant or co-dominant species on the ecological site if their future establishment and growth is not actively controlled by management interventions. Species that become dominant for only one to several years (e.g., short-term response to drought or wildfire) are not invasive plants. Note that unlike other indicators, we are describing what is NOT expected in the reference state for the ecological site:** Cheatgrass, Russian thistle, and other introduced annual forbs.

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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All perennial plants should have the ability to reproduce sexually or asexually in most years, except in drought years.
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