

Ecological site R036XY289CO Clayey Foothills

Accessed: 05/03/2024

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.

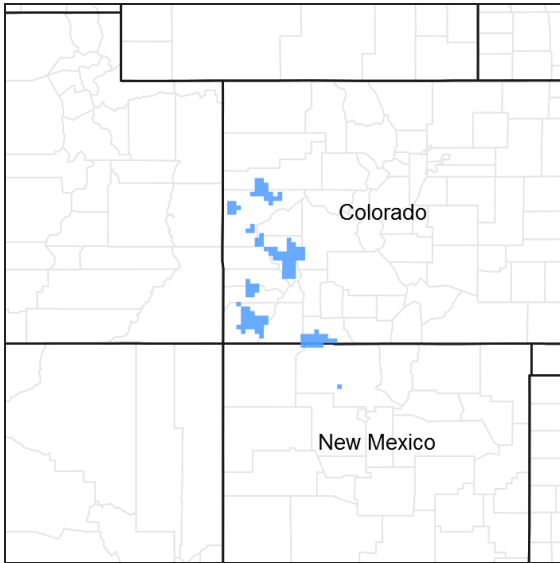


Figure 1. Mapped extent

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.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 036X–Southwestern Plateaus, Mesas, and Foothills

Clayey Foothills ecological site is found on benches and footslopes in MLRA 36 (Southwestern Plateaus Mesas and Foothills). The MLRA 36 is illustrated orange color on the map. The ecological site locations as assigned in soil survey map units are shown in pink color.

The site concept was established within the MLRA 36 Foothill/Upland regions. This zone is 12 to 16 inches of precipitation and has a mesic temperature regime. This site has bimodal precipitation that is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush.

Classification relationships

NRCS & BLM:

Major Land Resource Area 36, Southwestern Plateaus Mesas and Foothills (United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2006).

USFS:

313Aa - San Juan Basin-Mesa Verde, 313Ab - Canyon of Ancients-Blanding Basin and 313Ac - Monument Upwarp Subsections <313A Grand Canyons Section < 341 Colorado Plateau Semi-Desert (Cleland, et al., 2007).

313Be - San Juan Basin North subsection <313B Navaho Canyonlands Section < 313 Colorado Plateau Semi-Desert (Cleland, et al., 2007).

341Ba - Mancos Shale Lowlands-Grand Valley, 341Bd - Salt Anticline Benchlands, 341Bg-Northeast Flank, and 341Bp - Uncompahgre Plateau, subsections <341B Northern Canyonlands Section < 341 Intermountain Semi-desert and Desert (Cleland, et al., 2007).

M331Hm -Grand Mesa Break, and M331Hn - West Elks subsections < M331H Central Highlands and Rocky Mountains Section < M331 Southern Rocky Mountain Steppe - Open Woodland - Coniferous Forest - Alpine Meadow

M331Gf - Hills and Plateaus subsection <331G South Central Highlands Section < 331 Southern Rocky Mountain Steppe - Open Woodland - Coniferous Forest - Alpine Meadow

EPA:
20a Monticello-Cortez Uplands, 20b Shale Deserts and Sedimentary Basins, 20c Semiarid Benchlands and Canyonlands, , < 20 Colorado Plateaus < 10.I Cold Deserts < 10 North American Deserts (Griffith, 2006).

21f Sedimentary Mid-Elevation Forests, < 21 Southern Rockies< 6.2 Western Cordillera < 6 Northwestern Forested Mountains (Griffith, 2006).

USGS:
Colorado Plateau Province (Canyonlands and Navajo Section)

Ecological site concept

The 36X Clayey Foothills was drafted from the existing Clayey Foothills Range Site 34X, 35, 48A, (SCS, August, 1975). This site was written prior to MLRA 36 being mapped in Colorado and this area was in MLRA 34X when it was written. This site occurs on benchlands, footslopes, fans, valleys and broad ridges. Soils are moderately deep to deep clay loam or clay textured soils derived from mainly marine shales.

It is a Wyoming big sagebrush – western wheatgrass community. It has an aridic ustic moisture regime and mesic temperature regime. The effective precipitation ranges from 12 to 16 inches.

Associated sites

R036XY266CO	Salt Meadow This site has season-long ground water with salts in present in the soil. This site is poorly drained. Alkali sacaton and saltgrass are the dominant plants found on this site.
R036XY114CO	Mountain Pinyon This site is shallow to moderately deep. If soils are moderately deep then they are skeletal. Soils are loamy in texture. Dominant plants are Pinyon and Utah Juniper.
R036XY038CO	Wet Meadow This site has season-long ground water within 3.5 feet of the surface and is occasionally flooded. This site is poorly drained. Sedges and rushes are the dominant plants on this site.
R036XY284CO	Loamy Foothills This site occurs on hills, benches and mesas on moderately deep to deep loamy textured soils derived from alluvium, slope alluvium eolian deposits, and colluvium. It is a Wyoming big sagebrush – Muttongrass community. It has an aridic ustic moisture regime and mesic temperature regime. The effective precipitation ranges from 12 to 16 inches.
R036XY287CO	Stony Foothills Stony Foothill is a gentle sloped (<25% slope) site with moderately deep to deep that are loamy-skeletal in texture. This site is dominated by Pinyon, Utah Juniper. This site may have oakbrush in the understory. This site is in the 12 to 16 inch precipitation zone of foothills/upland.

R036XY405CO	Loamy Bottom Loamy bottom occurs on drainage-ways, floodplains and alluvial fans. This site is in a run-in position on the landscape. Soils are deep. Soil textures are generally loams. Dominant vegetation is basin wildrye, muttongrass, basin big sagebrush, and western wheatgrass
R036XY445CO	Steep Colluvial Slopes Steep Colluvial Slopes is a very steep (>25% slope) sloped site with very shallow to shallow soils that are clayey in texture. This site is dominated by Utah Juniper and pinyon. This site may have Wyoming big sagebrush in the understory. This site has higher precipitation than Semidesert Loam. The temperature is slightly cooler than the semidesert site. Foothill site will be found at elevations above the semidesert site. The soils are similar in nature.

Similar sites

R036XY284CO	Loamy Foothills This site occurs on hills, benches and mesas on moderately deep to deep loamy textured soils derived from alluvium, slope alluvium eolian deposits, and colluvium. It is a Wyoming big sagebrush – Muttongrass community. It has an aridic ustic moisture regime and mesic temperature regime. The effective precipitation ranges from 12 to 16 inches.
R036XY310CO	Sandy Foothills Site occurs on rolling uplands on mesas. Soils are deep sandy loams to loamy sands. Dominant plants are needle-and-thread, western wheatgrass, Wyoming big sagebrush, and balsamroot. It has an aridic ustic moisture regime and mesic temperature regime. The effective precipitation ranges from 12 to 16 inches.
R036XY287CO	Stony Foothills Stony Foothill is a gentle sloped (<25% slope) site with moderately deep to deep that are loamy-skeletal in texture. This site is dominated by Pinyon, Utah Juniper. This site may have oakbrush in the understory. This site is in the 12 to 16 inch precipitation zone of foothills/upland.
R036XY347CO	Foothill Valley Located in valley bottoms, toe slopes and flood plain steps. The soils are moderately deep to deep. Surface textures range from sandy loam to clay loam. This site has Basin Big Sagebrush as the dominated shrub.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Artemisia tridentata subsp. wyomingensis</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>

Physiographic features

This site occupies hills, alluvial fans, pediments, complex landslides, terraces, fan remnants, fans, and valleys. Slope is generally 1 to 15%, but in some place it can go to 30%. It is commonly associated with shale hills. Elevation is between 5500 and 7200 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Alluvial fan (3) Pediment
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	1,676–2,195 m
Slope	1–30%
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

Average annual precipitation is about 12 to 16 inches. Of this, 40-50% falls as snow, and 40-45% falls between May 1 and September 30. Summer moisture is mostly from thundershowers in late July, August, and September. The driest period is usually from April to early June; and June is normally the driest month. There is fall growth from late summer rains on this site during August and September, usually from the warm season plants. The average annual total snowfall is 38.3 inches. The highest winter snowfall record in this area is 117.5 inches which occurred in 1978-1979. The lowest snowfall record is 3.0 inches during the 1937-1938 winter. This area is located where there is winter precipitation and summer monsoonal rains. Moisture that comes during summer will favor the warm season plants. Mean daily annual air temperature is about 48°F to 52°F, averaging about 31°F for the winter and 60°F through the growing season, March through October. Summer temperatures of 100°F or more are not unusual. The frost-free period typically ranges from 110 to 130 days. The last spring frost is the end of April to the end of May and the first fall frost is the first week of October to the end of October. Mean annual temperature ranges from 64 to 37°F. The coldest winter temperature recorded was -23°F on February 8, 1933 and the coldest summer temperature recorded was 28°F on June 3, 1908. The hottest day on record is 110 °F on June 22, 1905. Wide yearly and seasonal fluctuations are common for this climatic zone. Data taken from Western Regional Climate Center (2015) for Blanding, Utah, Colorado Climate Station. Blanding is on the Western edge of the MLRA. Most Climate station in this LRU (Land Resource Unit) are either on the low end of the range (~12") or the high end (15 to 16") of the precipitation range. Blanding and Uravan are the only ones in the middle and Blanding has the longest record.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	122 days
Freeze-free period (average)	147 days
Precipitation total (average)	356 mm

Climate stations used

- (1) CORTEZ [USC00051886], Cortez, CO
- (2) NORTHDALE [USC00055970], Dove Creek, CO
- (3) BLANDING [USC00420738], Blanding, UT
- (4) URAVAN [USC00058560], Naturita, CO
- (5) YELLOW JACKET 2 W [USC00059275], Yellow Jacket, CO
- (6) LA SAL 1SW [USC00424947], Monticello, UT

Influencing water features

No water features associated with this site.

Soil features

Soils are mainly derived from alluvium, colluvium, residuum and slope alluvium from marine shales. They are moderately deep to deep and are generally rock free.

The soil surface horizon ranges from 3 to 12 inches in depth. Surface textures are mostly silty clay loam or clay loam and clay percentage range from 28 to 38%. In some cases there is a thin loam surface layer, when the surface texture is a loam it is usually 2 to 3 inches thick and ranges from 15 to 20% in clay. The major influence for this site is from heavier material underlying the soil surface. Soils are generally fine and sometimes can be fine-silty in the particle control section.

There is generally a well-developed textural B horizon. The clay percentage at 20" in depth ranges on average from 38 to 50% (clay loam, silty clay loam, silty clay and clay textures). Permeability is slow, but excellent storage of water favors extension of growth into dry weather. However, the high wilting point can be a significant factor in dry summers. The shrink-swell potential is high. These soils are subject to severe water erosion if plant cover is weakened.

Soils associate with this site are: Sili, Arboles, Bayfield, Cowcreek, Dominguez, Linscott, pinyonsprings, Sideshow, Xeribush and Colona.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium–shale (2) Colluvium–calcareous shale (3) Residuum–sandstone and shale
Surface texture	(1) Silty clay loam (2) Clay loam (3) Loam
Family particle size	(1) Clayey
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to slow
Soil depth	102 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0–5%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–3%
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	13.97–21.34 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0–10%
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0–4 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0–2
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	7–8.6
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0–7%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0–3%

Ecological dynamics

MLRA 36 occurs on the higher elevation portion of the Colorado Plateau. The Colorado Plateau is a physiographic province which exists throughout eastern Utah, western Colorado, western New Mexico and northern Arizona. It is characterized by uplifted plateaus, canyons and eroded features. The Colorado Plateau lies south of the Uintah Mountains, north of the Mogollon transition area, west of the Rocky Mountains, and east of the central Utah highlands. The higher elevation portion of the Colorado Plateau which is represented by MLRA 36 is characterized by broken topography, and lack of perennial water sources. This area has a long history of past prehistoric human use for thousands of years. MLRA 36 shows archaeological evidence indicating that pinyon-juniper woodlands were modified by prehistoric humans and not pristine and thus were altered at the time of European settlement (Cartledge & Propper, 1993). This area also included natural influences of herbivory, fire, and climate. This area rarely served as habitat for large herds of native herbivores or large frequent historic fires due to the broken topography. This site is extremely variable and plant community composition will vary with the water fluctuations on this site.

There is a winter-summer bimodal precipitation pattern on this part of the Colorado Plateau. Meaning that this site developed under climatic conditions that include wet, cold winters, and hot, dry summers with summer rains. This area has climatic fluctuations and prolonged droughts are common occurrences. Between an above average year and a drought year, forbs are the most dynamic (Passey et.al. 1982) and can vary up to 4 fold. The precipitation and climate of MLRA 36 are conducive to producing Pinyon/juniper, and sagebrush complexes with high productive sites in the bottoms of the canyons. Predominant species on the Colorado Plateau are Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* var. *wyomingensis*), mountain big sagebrush (*A. tridentata* var. *vaseyana*), and black sagebrush (*A. nova*), Basin Big Sagebrush (*A. tridentata* var. *tridentata*), Utah Juniper (*Juniperus utahensis*) and Pinyon (*Pinus edulis*).

This site is characterized by big sagebrush. It is not a sagebrush steppe, but a sagebrush shrub-land where there is naturally less understory herbaceous production, more bare ground, and biological crusts are common (Boyle and Reeder, 2005). Recovery from fire, grazing, or other disturbances is usually slower and attempts at land restoration are less successful than in the sagebrush steppe (West 1983). The sites in this are developed with the natural influences of grazing, fire, climatic variability (i.e. extended drought) and insect herbivory. This area has climatic fluctuations and prolonged droughts are common. Between an above average year and a drought year, forbs are the most dynamic (Passey et.al. 1982) and can vary up to 4 fold.

The ability for an ecological site to carry fire depends primarily on the present fuel load and plant moisture content—sites with small fuel loads will burn more slowly and less intensely than sites with large fuel loads. Fire is an important aspect of big sagebrush dominated ecological sites. Fire intervals are historically 10-70 years (Howard, 1999) and fires are typically patchy, forming mosaics. Shrub vegetation is able to reestablish from seed dispersal from the adjacent non burned sagebrush stands; however the process is relatively slow. Fire also decreases the extent of Utah juniper/pinyon pine invasions, which allows the historic plant community to maintain integrity. When the plant community is burned shrubs decrease, while perennial and annual grasses increase. The perennial shrubs associated with this site are able to recover at a faster rate than the invading trees. When the site is degraded by the presence of invasive annuals, the fire return interval is shortened due to increased fuels. The shortened fire return interval is often sufficient to suppress the native plant community.

Variability in climate, soils, aspect and complex biological processes will cause the plant communities to differ. These factors contributing to annual production variability include wildlife use, drought, and insects. Factors contributing to special variability include soil texture, depth, rock fragments, slope, aspect, and micro-topography. The species lists are representative and not a complete list of all occurring or potentially occurring species on this site. The species lists are not intended to cover the full range of conditions, species and responses of the site. The State & Transition model depicted for this site is based on available research, field observations and interpretations by experts and could change as knowledge increases. As more data is collected, some of these plant communities may be revised or removed, and new ones may be added. The following diagram does not necessarily depict all the transitions and states that this site may exhibit, but it does show some of the most common plant communities.

From 1975 SCS range site:

Western wheatgrass dominates the cover, although big sagebrush gives the site an open brushland aspect. Black sagebrush is also present in places. Muttongrass, Indian ricegrass, squirreltail, junegrass, and other grasses combine with western wheatgrass to make up well over half the plant community. Forbs are scattered through but make up a minor part of the plant community. Some of the most common are buckwheat, globemallow, penstemon, and locos or milkvetches. Others which grow in parts of this community are yarrow, balsamroot, and aster. Douglas rabbitbrush and prickly pear are commonly occurring plants, and there may be an occasional four-wing saltbush or winterfat. On more moist parts of the site a few tall shrubs common to higher elevations may be present, and pinyon or juniper may show up. The latter are confined to occasional trees or patches under natural conditions, however, due to fire and other factors.

Tree species most likely to grow on the site are Utah juniper, one-seed juniper and pinyon pine. Approximate ground cover is 40 percent.

Species most likely to invade the site or increase from trace amounts are juniper (at upper elevations), rubber rabbitbrush, Colorado rubberweed, snakeweed, cheatgrass and annual weeds. Shadscale and greasewood move into some drier parts of the site, especially those adjacent to salty soils. Wyoming Big sagebrush commonly becomes dominant as the range condition deteriorates and may make up nearly all the vegetation. Other plants which increase in some places as the condition deteriorates are black sage and yellow rabbitbrush.

State and transition model

R036XY289CO Clayey Foothills

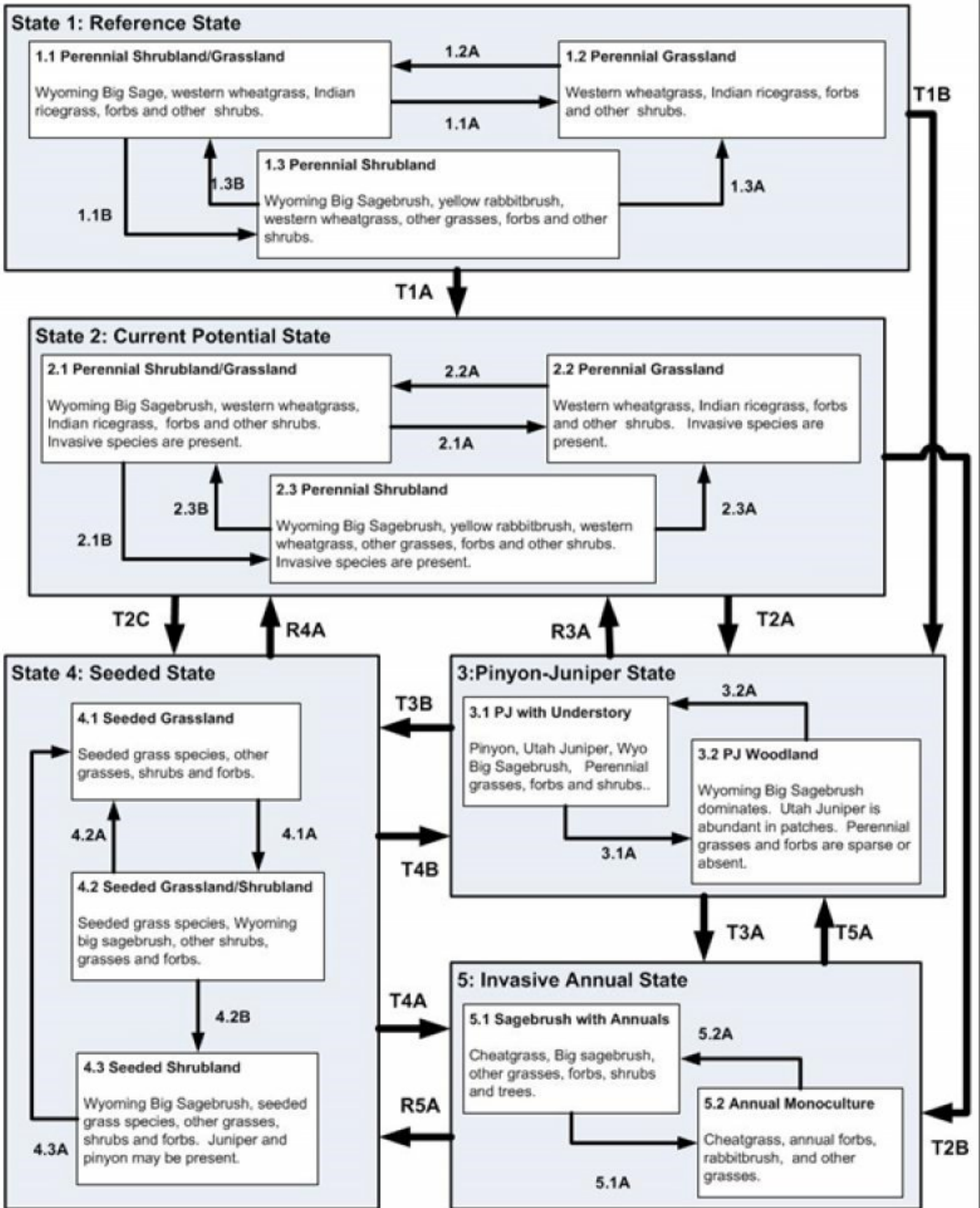


Figure 6. STM

Legend

1.1A, 2.1A, 4.2A – fire, insect herbivory, and/or drought
 1.1B, 2.1B, 1.2A, 2.2A, 4.1A, 4.2B – lack of fire, time without disturbance and improper grazing
 1.3A, 2.3A, 1.3B, 2.3B, 3.2A, R3A, 4.3A – fire, vegetation treatments, insect herbivory, drought, and/or tree encroachment removal
 T1A – invasive species establishment, improper grazing, fire, surface disturbances, and/or extended droughts.
 T1B, T2A, 3.1A, T4B – fire suppression, time without disturbance, insect herbivory, and tree encroachment
 T2B, T3A, T4A – invasive species establishment, frequent fire and/or long term drought
 T2C, T3B – Seeding and removal of tree encroachment
 R4A – Lack of disturbance, and/or removal of encroached PJ
 5.1A – Frequent fire, and/or drought
 5.2A, T5B – fire suppression and/or seeding
 T5A – treat invasive species, and seeding

Figure 7. STM Legend

State 1 Reference State

This state includes the biotic communities that become established on the ecological site under the natural disturbance regime prior to pre-European settlement. The main pathways on this site are fire and drought. Drought is frequent on this site. Historically, fires were of mixed severity, and various sizes. The fire frequency was 10-70 years in Big Sagebrush communities that occur in the uplands. The reference state is generally dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush, western wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, muttongrass, other native perennial grasses and native perennial and annual forbs which creates a diverse understory. Soil crusts are a very important part of this community. Crusts recycle nutrients, aid in moisture retention, fix nitrogen, fix carbon, and stabilize the soil reducing wind and water erosion (Belnap, 1994; Belnap and Gillette, 1998; Beymer and Klopatek 1991). The reference state is self-sustaining and resistant to change due to high resistance to natural disturbances and high resilience following natural disturbances. The primary drivers in the reference state include fire, insect herbivory, and fluctuations in climate (drought or wet periods) and grazing by livestock and wildlife. For example, improper grazing can result in a loss of herbaceous understory, the establishment of non-native invasive plants, and a reduction in the fire return interval. When natural disturbances occur, the rate of recovery is variable due to disturbance intensity. Once invasive plants establish, return to the reference state may not be possible.

Community 1.1 Perennial Shrubland/Grassland

This community phase is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush, western wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, and muttongrass. This phase has the most diverse understory of native perennial grasses and forbs. Abundance, and production of warm or cool season herbaceous plants and forb production are dependent on the timing of precipitation, and can vary widely between years. The sagebrush will be a mixed age stand. Biological crusts (lichen, moss, and cyanobacteria) should be present but are variable based on plant community and state. Small amounts of low woody and semi-woody plants such as, yellow rabbitbrush, and broom snakeweed are common. This community consists of approximately 55-65% grasses, 5-10% forbs, 30-35% shrubs.

Table 5. Annual production by plant type

Plant Type	Low (Kg/Hectare)	Representative Value (Kg/Hectare)	High (Kg/Hectare)
Grass/Grasslike	381	605	846
Shrub/Vine	247	328	392
Forb	45	75	106
Total	673	1008	1344

Figure 9. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
 CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Community 1.2 Perennial Grassland

This post-fire community would be dominantly characterized by perennial grasses and native forbs (annual and perennial). This community would exist for short time period until sagebrush began to become established and set seed. Scattered, sparse sagebrush may be present and will increase with time. This site would stay in grassland if fire returned to this site and did not allow big sagebrush time to re-seed and establish.

Figure 10. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Community 1.3 Perennial Shrubland

This community consists big sagebrush with sparse understory. Sagebrush canopy cover would typically be greater than 35%. Scattered Utah juniper and maybe two-needle pinyon might be present and tree canopy cover would be 0-10%. Biological crusts are typically well developed in the interspaces; however, bare ground is most common in this community phase. Improper grazing use can aid the establishment of pinyon and juniper seedlings through reduced competition, exposure of mineral soil, and reduction of fuel to carry fires. This combined with increasing control of fires has caused large portions of the site to be taken over by pinyon and juniper since the coming of livestock. Two-needle pinyon and Utah juniper are natural invaders if stands are found adjacent to this site. Trees left uncontrolled can form dense stands and eventually dominate the site.

Figure 11. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Pathway 1.1A Community 1.1 to 1.2

This transition is caused by naturally occurring fires, herbivory of sagebrush, and/or drought that suppresses sagebrush establishment. These events tend to favor grass establishment. With a mature sagebrush community, this pathway can be caused by high intensity fire that burns hot enough to remove big sagebrush. Low-intensity fire after sagebrush has had a chance to set seed, improper grazing and or browsing by native ungulates, and possible stem-root pathogens will revert a young sagebrush community to a grassland with the potential to become a sagebrush-grass community once again (Winward, 2004).

Pathway 1.1B Community 1.1 to 1.3

This transition is from the native shrub and perennial warm and cool season grass state, to a state that is dominated by big sagebrush. This pathway happens when fire does not occur within the historical fire regime interval for the site. Improper continuous grazing of perennial grasses will speed up this pathway. This will lead to an old decadent stand of sagebrush with little to no understory. This allows the possibility of Utah juniper and/or two-needle pinyon to become established on the site.

Pathway 1.2A Community 1.2 to 1.1

This pathway favors shrub establishment. This pathway is caused by time without disturbance (i.e. fire) and favorable conditions for young sagebrush establishment.

Pathway 1.3B
Community 1.3 to 1.1

Pathways can be one or more of the following: brush treatments, seeding, insect herbivory/pathogen, proper grazing, drought, and fire. Insect herbivory and/or root and stem pathogen die-off will thin the stands and allow perennial plants to establish if it is properly grazed.

Pathway 1.3A
Community 1.3 to 1.2

This pathway is caused by naturally occurring fires and/or insect herbivory removes the shrubs and possible trees if they have encroached on this site. It reverts the system back to a grassland phase.

State 2
Current Potential State

The current potential state is similar in structure and function to the reference state, however invasive species are present in all community phases. The current potential state is generally dominated by big sagebrush and perennial grasses, but has an additional phase due to juniper encroachment as a result of fire suppression. The current potential state is less resilient than the reference state due to the presence of non-native/invasive species in the plant community.

Community 2.1
Perennial Shrubland/Grassland

This community phase is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush, western wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, and muttongrass. This phase has the most diverse understory of native perennial grasses and forbs. Abundance, and production of warm or cool season herbaceous plants and forb production are dependent on the timing of precipitation, and can vary widely between years. The sagebrush will be a mixed age stand. Biological crusts (lichen, moss, and cyanobacteria) should be present but are variable based on plant community and state. Small amounts of low woody and semi-woody plants such as, yellow rabbitbrush, and broom snakeweed are common. Nonnative invasive species, such as cheatgrass are present but in insignificant amounts.

Figure 12. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
 CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Community 2.2
Perennial Grassland

This post-fire community would be dominantly characterized by perennial grasses and native forbs (annual and perennial). Annual plant production is high in this phase due to the grass production. This community would exist for short time period until sagebrush began to become established and set seed. Scattered, sparse sagebrush may be present and will increase with time. This site would stay in grassland if fire returned to this site and did not allow big sagebrush time to re-seed and establish. Nonnative invasive species, such as cheatgrass are present but in insignificant amounts.

Figure 13. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
 CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Community 2.3 Perennial Shrubland

This community consists big sagebrush with sparse understory. Sagebrush canopy cover would typically be greater than 35%. Scattered Utah juniper and maybe two-needle pinyon might be present and tree canopy cover would be 0-10%. Biological crusts are typically well developed in the interspaces; however, bare ground is most common in this community phase. Improper grazing use can aid the establishment of pinyon and juniper seedlings through reduced competition, exposure of mineral soil, and reduction of fuel to carry fires. This combined with increasing control of fires has caused large portions of the site to be taken over by pinyon and juniper since the coming of livestock. Two-needle pinyon and Utah juniper are natural invaders if stands are found adjacent to this site. Trees left uncontrolled can form dense stands and eventually dominate the site. Nonnative invasive species, such as cheatgrass are present but in insignificant amounts.

Figure 14. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Pathway 2.1A Community 2.1 to 2.2

This transition is caused by naturally occurring fires, herbivory of sagebrush, and/or drought that suppresses sagebrush establishment. These events tend to favor grass establishment. With a mature sagebrush community, this pathway can be caused by high intensity fire that burns hot enough to remove big sagebrush and PJ, if it has started to encroach. Low-intensity fire after sagebrush has had a chance to set seed, improper grazing and or browsing by native ungulates, and possible stem-root pathogens will revert a young sagebrush community to a grassland with the potential to become a sagebrush-grass community once again (Winward, 2004). Vegetation treatments (mechanically, prescribed fire, chemically, etc.) can also be employed to imitate the natural disturbances regime.

Pathway 2.1B Community 2.1 to 2.3

This transition is from the native shrub and perennial warm and cool season grass state, to a state that is dominated by big sagebrush. This pathway happens when fire does not occur within the historical fire regime interval for the site. Improper continuous grazing of perennial grasses will speed up this pathway. This will lead to an old decadent stand of sagebrush with little to no understory. This allows the possibility of Utah juniper and/or two-needle pinyon to become established on the site.

Pathway 2.2A Community 2.2 to 2.1

This pathway favors shrub establishment. This pathway is cause by time without disturbance (i.e. fire) and favorable conditions for young sagebrush establishment.

Pathway 2.3B Community 2.3 to 2.1

Pathways can be one or more of the following: brush treatments, seeding, insect herbivory/pathogen, proper grazing, drought, and fire. Insect herbivory and/or root and stem pathogen die-off will thin the stands and allow perennial plants to establish if it is properly grazed.

Pathway 2.3A Community 2.3 to 2.2

This pathway is caused by naturally occurring fires, vegetation treatments, and/or insect herbivory removes the

shrubs and possible trees if they have encroached on this site. It reverts the system back to a grassland phase.

State 3 Pinyon-Juniper State

It is thought that pinyon and juniper, with an understory of mostly perennial grasses, may dominate the site in the longtime absence of fire, but lightning fires following warm dry early summer weather are a natural feature of the region. This could have maintained much of the site in a grassland cover, as reported by many early settlers except for occasional trees and isolated patches. Such vegetation is the basis for the potential described here. Without fire, simulated clearing methods may be necessary to maintain it (SCS, 1975, Miller and Tausch 2002). This state typically occurs when there is a long time span between fires. The transition to this state also has a reduction in fine fuels plays a part in increasing the fire return intervals once the site has transition to this pinyon-juniper state. Thus, state can persist for long time periods until the conditions needed for a fire occur or vegetation treatments are done to move the community to a different state.

Community 3.1 PJ with understory

It is dominated by a dense closed canopy of Utah juniper and pinyon. They will be with a sparse understory of big sagebrush with little to no grass or forbs. Also, Invasive annuals grasses and forbs will be present in the understory.

Figure 15. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Community 3.2 PJ Woodland

This state has an overstory of Utah juniper and/or two-needle pinyon with an understory of big sagebrush. There is very little herbaceous or other plant growth on this site. The production and infiltration is low. Erosion is high, and the associated watersheds will become less stable and have more runoff.

Figure 16. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Pathway 3.1A Community 3.1 to 3.2

Events include time without disturbance, insect herbivory, continuous season long grazing of perennial grasses, and continued tree invasion until they dominate the site

Pathway 3.2A Community 3.2 to 3.1

Occurs when trees are removed naturally (fire, drought, insects or other pathogens) and/or by vegetation treatments (i.e. mechanical, chemical).

State 4 Seeded State

This state results from seeding introduced perennial grasses (i.e. crested wheatgrass and Russian wildrye). Native perennial grasses, forbs and shrubs may be included in the seed mix. This state behave similar community dynamics to the current potential state community. Other vegetation treatments may be necessary to get to this

state, they include chaining, mowing, disking, prescribed burning and other techniques which manipulate the plant community. Applying vegetation treatments to plant communities to either the invasive annuals or juniper encroachment states to create a seeded state is often the first step in assisted restoration to plant communities an intermediate step to get to the Current Potential State. The seeded state could persist for long periods of time with proper management. Native grasses and forbs may reestablish over time from nearby seed sources. Big sagebrush will typically reestablish in 30-40 years.

Community 4.1 Seeded Grassland

This community is dominated by seeded plants such as crested wheatgrass, Russian wildrye, smooth brome, and intermediate and pubescent wheatgrasses. Big sagebrush has little to no production in this phase. This site has high production due to the seed grass production. This production typically is higher than the current potential or reference state. This site usually has low species diversity.

Figure 17. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Community 4.2 Seeded Grassland/Shrubland

This phase has big sagebrush co-dominant with the seeded grass.

Figure 18. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Community 4.3 Seeded Shrubland

This community consists big sagebrush with sparse understory. Sagebrush canopy cover would typically be greater than 35%. Scattered Utah juniper and maybe two-needle pinyon might have encroached. Two-needle pinyon and Utah juniper are natural invaders if stands are found adjacent to this site. Trees left uncontrolled can form dense stands and eventually dominate the site. Nonnative invasive species, such as cheatgrass are present but in insignificant amounts. Biological crusts are typically well developed in the interspaces; however, bare ground is most common in this community phase.

Figure 19. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Pathway 4.1A Community 4.1 to 4.2

Time without disturbance and climatic conditions that favor establishment of sagebrush will assist this pathway. Improper grazing on the grasses species can favor shrub establishment and reduce their competitiveness. Also, several consecutive years of droughts can reduce grass cover.

Pathway 4.2A Community 4.2 to 4.1

This transition is caused by naturally occurring fires, herbivory of sagebrush, and/or drought that suppresses sagebrush establishment. These events tend to favor grass establishment. With a mature sagebrush community, this pathway can be caused by high intensity fire that burns hot enough to remove big sagebrush and PJ, if it has started to encroach. Low-intensity fire after sagebrush has had a chance to set seed, improper grazing and or browsing by native ungulates, and possible stem-root pathogens will revert a young sagebrush community to a grassland with the potential to become a sagebrush-grass community once again (Winward, 2004). Vegetation treatments (mechanically, prescribed fire, chemically, etc.) can also be employed to imitate the natural disturbances regime.

Pathway 4.2B
Community 4.2 to 4.3

This pathway favors shrub establishment. This pathway is cause by time without disturbance (i.e. fire) and favorable conditions for young sagebrush establishment. Also, Pinyon and juniper will start to encroach under these condition. Improper continuous grazing of perennial grasses will speed up this pathway. This will lead to an old decadent stand of sagebrush with little to no understory.

Pathway 4.3A
Community 4.3 to 4.1

This pathway is caused by naturally occurring fires, vegetation treatments (chemical and mechanical), and/or insect herbivory removes the shrubs and possible trees if they have encroached on this site. It reverts the system back to a grassland phase. Depending on the amount of understory present, grasses and forbs may need to be reseeded to aid reestablishment.

State 5
Invasive Annual State

This state is dominated by invasive annual species. Invasive annual species can including cheatgrass, Russian thistle, kochia, halogeton, storksbill geranium, and annual mustards. Generally as ecological conditions deteriorate and perennial vegetation decreases due to disturbance (fire, over grazing, drought, off road vehicle overuse, erosion, etc.) annual forbs and grasses will invade the site. The presence of these species will depend on soil properties and moisture availability; however, these invaders are highly adaptive and can flourish in many locations. Once established, complete removal is difficult but suppression may be possible.

Community 5.1
Sagebrush with Annuals

This state will look big sagebrush with an invasive annual species understory. Frequently, sagebrush canopy cover will be dense due to little to none perennial understory being present. Cheatgrass, and other annual introduced species are now present in the understory. It can function as a plant community this way unless the fire return interval decreases to less than 5 years (Whisenant 1986). Then it will transition to an Annual grasses phase (5.2). This phase is at risk for becoming a cheatgrass-dominated grassland.

Figure 20. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
 CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Community 5.2
Annual Monoculture

This community is characterized by an almost a complete monoculture of cheatgrass and/or other invasive annuals. This community can be long-lasting phase if fires and disturbance continue to be frequent.

Figure 21. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).
 CO0103, MLRA 36 - Foothills Mesic. MLRA 36.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	8	32	32	18	0	0	4	6	0	0

Pathway 5.1A **Community 5.1 to 5.2**

This pathway occurs when frequent fire or drought remove the big sagebrush, and favor the establishment of cheatgrass or other invasive annuals. In a degraded sagebrush community, cheatgrass will take advantage of the increased interspaces between plants will typically establish in the interspaces. Once annuals get established it creates a fine fuel load which will decrease the fire return interval. With more frequent fires, sagebrush can be eliminated from the site and a monocultures of invasive annuals can become established. These monocultures can persist for long time periods. Frequent fires also prevent the re-establishment of sagebrush on the site.

Pathway 5.2A **Community 5.2 to 5.1**

This pathway occurs when there is a longer fire return interval. Longer fire return intervals can be enabled by using fire suppression and fire breaks to allow perennial vegetation to a change to get established. Along with this seeding and/or proper grazing may allow native perennial plants to return to this community. This pathway has very intensive energy inputs.

Transition T1A **State 1 to 2**

The native understory in the reference state has been invade by non-native species. Plant may include cheatgrass, Russian thistle, and annual wheatgrass. Some invasive plants can become established in undisturbed and healthy native plant communities. Possible events that can cause this transition include improper domestic livestock, severe surface disturbances, fire, and/or extended droughts.

Transition T1B **State 1 to 3**

This transition is from the native shrub and perennial warm and cool season grass state, to a state that is dominated by two-needle pinyon and Utah juniper encroachment. Events include time without disturbance, insect herbivory, and continuous season long grazing of perennial grasses. Once junipers reach 50 years old they are much harder to kill with fire (Miller and Eddleman, 2001). As canopy density increase, bare ground will increase further increasing the fire return interval, accelerating erosion, increasing run-off and further affecting the watershed functionality. This transition also favors the establishment of invasive annual species such as cheatgrass.

Transition T2A **State 2 to 3**

This transition is from the native shrub and perennial warm and cool season grass state, to a state that is dominated by two-needle pinyon and Utah juniper. Events include time without disturbance, insect herbivory, continuous season long grazing of perennial grasses, and tree invasion. Once junipers reach 50 years old they are much harder to kill with fire (Miller and Eddleman, 2001). As canopy density increase, bare ground will increase further increasing the fire return interval, accelerating erosion, increasing run-off and further affecting the watershed functionality. This transition also favors the establishment of invasive annual species such as cheatgrass.

Transition T2C **State 2 to 4**

This transition is from a big sagebrush dominated state, to a state that has been seeded with introduced perennial grasses. High energy inputs are needed for this transition. Sagebrush and/or trees will need to be removed with vegetation treatment techniques (I.e. chemical, mechanical, or fire) and introduced species that are adapted to the area and adapted to management needs have been seeded and become established

Transition T2B

State 2 to 5

This transition is from big sagebrush dominated state, to a state that is dominated by invasive species. Events include establishment of invasive species, fire (<5-20 years), continuous season long grazing of perennial grasses, long term drought.

Restoration pathway R3A

State 3 to 2

Pathways can be one or more of the following: brush treatments, seeding, insect herbivory/pathogen, proper grazing, drought, and/or fire. This pathway requires lots of energy input into the system.

Transition T3B

State 3 to 4

Seeding of introduced/native species (grasses and forbs) is the pathway to state 4. Also, trees are usually removed by mechanical or chemical treatments. This transition requires energy input into the system.

Transition T3A

State 3 to 5

This transition is from a two needle pinyon and Utah juniper state, to a state that is dominated by invasive species. Events would include establishment of invasive species, fire, and other methods of tree removal with an understory that is dominated by invasive annual species (i.e. cheatgrass).

Restoration pathway R4A

State 4 to 2

This return path could possible occur as a result of long time frames without disturbance. Native plants from adjacent site would slow establish in the seeded state. Proper grazing from livestock and wildlife which would favor the establishment of native plants. Removal of the Utah juniper and Pinyon as they encroach would also be necessary.

Transition T4B

State 4 to 3

This transition is from the big sagebrush-seeded grass state to a state that is dominated by two-needle pinyon and Utah juniper. Events include, fire suppression, time without disturbance, insect herbivory, continuous season long grazing of perennial grasses, and tree invasion. As canopy density increase, bare ground will increase further increasing the fire return interval, accelerating erosion, increasing run-off and further affecting the watershed functionality. This transition also favors the establishment of invasive annual species such as cheatgrass.

Transition T4A

State 4 to 5

This transition is from a seeded state, to a state that is dominated by invasive species. Events include increased of invasive species, shortened fire return interval, and long term drought. Improper continuous season long grazing of perennial grasses can reduce the time needed for this pathway.

Transition T5A

State 5 to 3

This transition requires fire return intervals to length and fire suppression may be necessary to interrupted the shorten fire return intervals that occur when cheatgrass and other annuals invade. Juniper will encroach onto the site with time and lack of fire. Seeding may be necessary to establish perennial plants. This could require significant

energy inputs to make this transition happen.

Restoration pathway R5A State 5 to 4

Invasive annuals will need to be treated and dominance suppress enough to allow desired seeded species the ability to complete so that they can become established. Seeding of introduced species is the pathway to state 4. This transition will be difficult and require substantial inputs and management of the site. It may not be practical on a large scale. Research is needed for species adapted to compete with annual invasive plants, and seeding techniques to add with successful transition from the invasive annual state.

Additional community tables

Table 6. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Kg/Hectare)	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1				560–650	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	454–504	–
	muttongrass	POFE	<i>Poa fendleriana</i>	10–50	–
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	10–50	–
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	10–50	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	10–50	–
	saline wildrye	LESAS	<i>Leymus salinus ssp. salinus</i>	10–50	–
Forb					
2				50–101	
	redroot buckwheat	ERRA3	<i>Eriogonum racemosum</i>	10–20	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	10–20	–
	western yarrow	ACMIO	<i>Achillea millefolium var. occidentalis</i>	10–20	–
	aster	ASTER	<i>Aster</i>	10–20	–
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	10–20	–
	locoweed	OXYTR	<i>Oxytropis</i>	10–20	–
	beardtongue	PENST	<i>Penstemon</i>	10–20	–
	western yarrow	ACMIO	<i>Achillea millefolium var. occidentalis</i>	10–20	–
	aster	ASTER	<i>Aster</i>	10–20	–
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	10–20	–
	redroot buckwheat	ERRA3	<i>Eriogonum racemosum</i>	10–20	–
	locoweed	OXYTR	<i>Oxytropis</i>	10–20	–
	beardtongue	PENST	<i>Penstemon</i>	10–20	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	10–20	–
	arrowleaf balsamroot	BASA3	<i>Balsamorhiza sagittata</i>	0–10	–
	spiny phlox	PHHO	<i>Phlox hoodii</i>	0–10	–
	longleaf phlox	PHLO2	<i>Phlox longifolia</i>	0–10	–
	arrowleaf balsamroot	BASA3	<i>Balsamorhiza sagittata</i>	0–10	–
	cryptantha	CRYPT	<i>Cryptantha</i>	0–10	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	0–10	–

	stemless mock goldenweed	STAC	<i>Stenotus acaulis</i>	0–10	–
	scarlet gilia	IPAG	<i>Ipomopsis aggregata</i>	0–10	–
Shrub/Vine					
3				303–353	
	Wyoming big sagebrush	ARTRW8	<i>Artemisia tridentata ssp. wyomingensis</i>	151–202	–
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	10–50	–
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	10–20	–
	plains pricklypear	OPPO	<i>Opuntia polyacantha</i>	0–10	–
	wild crab apple	PERA4	<i>Peraphyllum ramosissimum</i>	0–10	–
	jointfir	EPHED	<i>Ephedra</i>	0–10	–
	fourwing saltbush	ATCA2	<i>Atriplex canescens</i>	0–10	–
	black sagebrush	ARNO4	<i>Artemisia nova</i>	0–10	–

Animal community

From 1975 SCS range site:

WILDLIFE INTERPRETATIONS:

For wildlife this site provides a high value for deer and cottontail; a medium value for upland game birds; and low for antelope, bison, elk, and jackrabbit.

GRAZING INTERPRETATIONS:

For grazing, this site provides a high value for cattle and horses, a medium value for sheep.

Hydrological functions

Soils were originally assigned to hydrologic soil groups based on measured rainfall, runoff, and infiltrometer data (Musgrave 1955). Since the initial work was done to establish these groupings, assignment of soils to hydrologic soil groups has been based on the judgment of soil scientists. Assignments are made based on comparison of the characteristics of unclassified soil profiles with profiles of soils already placed into hydrologic soil groups. Most of the groupings are based on the premise that soils found within a climatic region that are similar in depth to a restrictive layer or water table, transmission rate of water, texture, structure, and degree of swelling when saturated, will have similar runoff responses. Four (4) Hydrologic Soil Groups are recognized (A-D). For specific definitions of each hydrologic soil group see the National Engineering Handbook, Chapter 7, Part 630 Hydrology, or visit:<http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/OpenNonWebContent.aspx?content=22526.wba>

The hydrologic soil groups are based on the following factors:

- intake and transmission of water under the conditions of maximum yearly wetness (thoroughly wet)
- soil not frozen
- bare soil surface
- maximum swelling of expansive clays

The slope of the soil surface is not considered when assigning hydrologic soil groups. In its simplest form, the hydrologic soil group is determined by the water transmitting soil layer with the lowest saturated hydraulic conductivity and depth to any layer that is more or less water impermeable (such as a fragipan or duripan) or depth to a water table (if present) (Caudle, et. al, 2013). The runoff curve numbers are determined by field investigations using hydrologic cover conditions and hydrologic soil groups.

Soils Hydrologic Group

Arboles - C
Bayfield - C & D
Colona - C
Cowcreek - C & D
Dominguez - C
Linscott - C
Pinyonsprings - C
Sideshow - C & D
Sili - C & D
Xeribrush - C

Hydrologic soil groups are based on estimates of runoff potential. Soils are assigned to one of four groups according to the rate of water infiltration when the soils are not protected by vegetation, are thoroughly wet, and receive precipitation from long-duration storms (Soil Survey Staff, 2017).

The soils in the United States are assigned to four groups (A, B, C, and D) and three dual classes (A/D, B/D, and C/D). The groups are defined as follows:

Group A. Soils having a high infiltration rate (low runoff potential) when thoroughly wet. These consist mainly of deep, well drained to excessively drained sands or gravelly sands. These soils have a high rate of water transmission.

Group B. Soils having a moderate infiltration rate when thoroughly wet. These consist chiefly of moderately deep or deep, moderately well drained or well drained soils that have moderately fine texture to moderately coarse texture. These soils have a moderate rate of water transmission.

Group C. Soils having a slow infiltration rate when thoroughly wet. These consist chiefly of soils having a layer that impedes the downward movement of water or soils of moderately fine texture or fine texture. These soils have a slow rate of water transmission.

Group D. Soils having a very slow infiltration rate (high runoff potential) when thoroughly wet. These consist chiefly of clays that have a high shrink-swell potential, soils that have a high water table, soils that have a claypan or clay layer at or near the surface, and soils that are shallow over nearly impervious material. These soils have a very slow rate of water transmission (Soil Survey Staff, 2017).

Recreational uses

From 1975 SCS range site:

This site is medium value for recreation and natural beauty.

Wood products

From 1975 SCS range site:

This site has a low value for wood products due to the inconsistency of pinyon and juniper.

Inventory data references

Field offices where this site is located:

Cortez, Delta, Durango, Grand Junction, Montrose, Norwood

Type locality

Location 1: Mesa County, CO	
General legal description	Colorado Division of Wildlife land, Sunnyside Area, northwest of Colbran, Mesa County.
Location 2: Montezuma County, CO	
General legal description	Doug Hindmarsh range just west of Mesa Verde National Park entrance and north of Highway 160, east of Cortez, Montezuma County.

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--Site Development and Testing Plan--:

Future work to validate and further refine the information in this Provisional Ecological Site Description is necessary. This will include field activities to collect low-, medium-, and high-intensity sampling, soil correlations, and analysis of that data.

Additional information and data is required to refine the Plant Production and Annual Production tables for this ecological site. The extent of MLRA 36 must be further investigated.

Field testing of the information contained in this Provisional ESD is required. As this ESD is moved to the Approved ESD level, reviews from the technical team, quality control, quality assurance, and peers will be conducted.

Rangeland health reference sheet

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

Author(s)/participant(s)	Original worksheet by Steve Myers and Scott Woodall dated 12-15-2004 Updated by J. Murray, C. Holcomb, L. Santana, F. Cummings, and S. Jaouen dated 1-19-2005. Updated 3-8-2017 by Suzanne Mayne-Kinney.
Contact for lead author	
Date	03/08/2017
Approved by	Rachel Murph, State Rangeland Management Spec., USDA NRCS Colorado
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** None to slight, if present - short and shallow.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Flow paths are expected but they are short and disconnected with numerous debris dams, Debris dams will be obvious after rainfall events.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Pedestals minor and become more prevalent on steeper slopes, occur in or near flow paths.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Expect 30-40% bare ground. Extended drought can cause bare ground to increase.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Gullies are inherent to the site, widely spaced with sharp edges, typically caused by concentrated flows. Depth is limited by bedrock.

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Litter movement associated with flow paths. Movement is typically short (<1 foot). Movement can be extensive with concentrated flow.

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Stability class rating anticipated to be 2-3 in the interspaces at soil surface.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Surface texture ranges are usually loam, clay loam, or silty clay loam. Soils are moderately deep to deep and rock free. Depth of the A horizon is typically 0-12 inches deep with a grayish brown colors. Structure is weak fine granular, very friable, and plastic.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Grasses and shrub canopy, basal cover, and inherent interspaces between plants allow for overland flow, providing a lost opportunity for infiltration to occur. The composition of the plant community has less effect on infiltration and runoff than does slope and texture.

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: cool season rhizomatous grasses (Western Wheatgrass) >

Sub-dominant: shrubs (Wyoming big sagebrush, yellow rabbitbrush, winterfat, > cool season bunchgrass (Indian Ricegrass, Salina wildrye, prairie Junegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail) >

Other: forbs (Penstemons, stemless goldenweed, cryptantha, buckwheat, milkvetches, scarlet globemallow, scarlet gilia, asters, phlox > trees (Pinyon, Utah Juniper)

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Slight
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** 10-20% litter cover at < 0.25 inch depth. Litter cover declines during and following extended drought.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 600 lbs./ac. low precip years; 900 lbs./ac. average precip years; 1200 lbs./ac. above average precip years. After extended drought or the first growing season following wildfire, production may be significantly reduced by 300 – 500 lbs./ac. or more.
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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, rabbitbrush, pinyon/juniper and noxious weeds.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** The major limitation are weather related (i.e. drought), wildlife, natural diseases, inter-species competition for moisture, wildlife and insects that may temporarily reduce reproductive capabilities.
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