

Ecological site EX043B23B110 Dense Clay (DC) Absaroka Upper Foothills

Last updated: 3/04/2024
Accessed: 05/06/2024

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	04/30/2020
Approved by	Kirt Walstad
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

- Number and extent of rills:** Due to the wide slope range associated with this site, the number and extent of rills will vary from none on slope < 10% to common on slopes > 20%
- Presence of water flow patterns:** Barely observable Due to the wide slope range associated with this site, water flow patterns vary from barely observable on slopes of <10% and from broken and irregular in appearance to continuous on slopes >20%
- Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Not evident on slopes <20%. Erosional pedestals will be present with terracettes present at debris dams on slopes >20%.
- Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground is 15-50%, occurring in small openings throughout the site.
- Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Active gullies should not be present. Active gullies restricted to concentrated water flow patterns.
- Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None

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7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Little to no plant litter movement. Plant litter remains in place and is not moved by erosional forces. Little to no plant litter movement occurs on slopes <20%. Litter movement does occur on slopes >20%.
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8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Plant cover and litter is at 50% or greater of soil surface and maintains soil surface integrity. Soil Stability class is anticipated to be 5 or greater.
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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Use Soil Series description for depth and color of A-horizon
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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Grass canopy and basal cover should reduce raindrop impact and slow overland flow providing increased time for infiltration to occur. However, on a sparse plant canopy, slow infiltration rates, and the high amount of bare ground contribute. Infiltration varies with soil texture from moderately rapid to rapid. very slow to slow infiltration rates, the amount of bare ground, and steepness of slopes results in a naturally high runoff rate on slopes >20%, even in Reference.
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11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** No compaction layer or soil surface crusting should be present.
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12. **Functional/Structural Groups (list in order of descending dominance by above-ground annual-production or live foliar cover using symbols: >>, >, = to indicate much greater than, greater than, and equal to):**
- Dominant: Shrubs >
- Sub-dominant: Rhizomatous wheatgrasses > Mid stature Grasses >
- Other: Forbs = short stature grasses
- Additional:
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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Some plant mortality and decadence is expected
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Average litter cover is 10-20% with depths of 0.10 to 0.25 inches
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** Total annual production ranges from 200-600 lbs/ac (224-673 kg/ha), with an average production of 400 lbs/ac (448 kg/ha).

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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: Birdfoot sagebrush and fringed sagewort are increasers as well as rubber rabbitbrush. Sandberg bluegrass and foxtail barley are also common. Cheatgrass, povertyweeds, field cottonrose and other annuals, exotics, and invasive species listed on the county and state Noxious Weed List.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** May be Limited due to effective moisture and seed to soil contact
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