USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ecological site EX043B23C168
Steep Loamy (SLy) Absaroka Subalpine 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.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 043B–Central Rocky Mountains

Major Land Resource Unit (MLRA) 43B: Central Rocky Mountains

43B – Central Rocky Mountains – The Central Rocky Mountains extends from northern Montana to southern extent of Wyoming and from Idaho to central Wyoming. The southern extent of 43B is comprised of a combination of metamorphic, igneous, and sedimentary mountains and foothills. Climatic changes across this extent are broad and create several unique breaks in the landscape.

Further information regarding MLRAs, refer to: United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2006. Land Resource Regions and Major Land Resource Areas of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin. U.S. Department of Agriculture Handbook 296.
Available electronically at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/ref/?cid=nrcs142p2_053624#handbook.

LRU notes

Land Resource Unit (LRU) 43B23C: Absaroka Subalpine Zone

Based on the shifts in geology, precipitation patterns and other climatic factors, as well as elevation and vegetation, the Absaroka Range was divided into LRU 23. Further division of this LRU is necessary due to the gradient moving from the foothills to the summit, as well as aspect shifts (north/east face versus south/west face). Subset C is the high elevation zone noted for dense timber interspersed with open parks and longer persisting snowpack (within timberline). Precipitation can range from 18 to 20 plus inches and is more noted for the duration of snow cover and shorter growing season. To verify or identify Subset C (the referenced subset for this ecological site), refer to the Wyoming LRU matrix key contained within the Ecological Site Key.

This LRU/Subset occurs on the eastern divide of the Absaroka Range. This LRU starts north of Clark, WY and runs to the Thermopolis, WY area. Once the Absaroka Range merges with the Owl Creek and Wind River Ranges, the climatic patterns and elevational changes shifts the plant community and creates a break in the LRU/Subset.

The extent of soils currently correlated to this ecological site does not fit within the digitized boundary. Many of the noted soils are provisional and will be reviewed and corrected in mapping update projects. Other map units are correlated as small inclusions within other MLRA's/LRU's based on elevation, landform, and biological references.

Moisture Regime: Typic Ustic
Temperature Regime: Cryic
Dominant Cover: Rangeland – Sagebrush Steppe (major species is Mountain Big Sagebrush)
Representative Value (RV) Effective Precipitation: 20+ inches (508 mm)
RV Frost-Free Days: 31-65 days

Classification relationships

Relationship to Other Established Classification Systems:

National Vegetation Classification System (NVC):
2 Shrub & Herb Vegetation Class
2.B Temperate & Boreal Grassland & Shrubland Subclass
2.B.2 Temperate Grassland & Shrubland Formation
2.B.2.Na Western North American Grassland & Shrubland Division
M048 Central Rocky Mountain Montane-Foothill Grassland & Shrubland Macro-group
G273 Central Rocky Mountain Lower Montane, Foothill & Valley Grassland Group

Ecoregions (EPA):
Level I: 6 North Western Forested Mountains
Level II: 6.2 Western Cordillera
Level III: 6.2.10 Middle Rockies
Level IV: 6.2.17ao – Absaroka Volcanic Subalpine Zone
6.2.17i – Absaroka – Gallatin Volcanic Mountains

Ecological site concept

• Site receives no additional water.
• Slope is >15% but < 70% (mostly 30-50%)
• Soils are:
o Textures range from very fine sandy loam to clay loam in top 4” (10 cm) of mineral soil surface
o Clay content is ≤ 32% in top 4” (10 cm) of mineral soil surface
o Each following subsurface horizon has a clay content of ≥18% but <35% by weighted average
o Moderately deep to very deep (20-79+ in. (50-200+ cm)
o <3% stone and boulder cover and <20% cobble and gravel cover
o Not skeletal (<35% rock fragments) within 20” (51 cm) of mineral soil surface
o None to Slightly effervescent throughout top 20” (51 cm) of mineral soil surface
o Non-saline, sodic, or saline-sodic

Associated sites

R043BY122WY	**Loamy High Mountains** Loamy
R043BY130WY	**Overflow High Mountains** Overflow
R043BY162WY	**Shallow Loamy High Mountains** Shallow Loamy

Similar sites

R043BY122WY	**Loamy High Mountains** Loamy (Ly) 20+M has higher production, occurs on lesser sloping topography, and lacks some of the forb diversity.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) *Artemisia tridentata ssp. vaseyana*
Herbaceous	(1) *Pseudoroegneria spicata* (2) *Achnatherum nelsonii*

Legacy ID

R043BX768WY

Physiographic features

This site occurs on moderate to steep mountain slopes. It is found on all exposures at high elevations, but primarily on north and east slopes at lower elevations.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Mountain range > Mountain slope (2) Mountain range > Alluvial fan (3) Mountain range > Stream terrace (4) Mountain range > Ridge
Runoff class	Negligible to very high
Elevation	1,981–3,658 m
Slope	15–70%
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

Annual precipitation and modeled relative effective annual precipitation range from 18 to 35 inches (457 – 889 mm). The normal precipitation pattern is evenly distributed through the year and averages over 20 inches. Annual snowfall averages 150 to 200 inches annually. Wide fluctuations may occur in yearly precipitation and result in more dry years than those with more than normal precipitation.

Because of the varied topography, the wind will vary considerably for different parts of the area. Prevailing winds are from the southwest, and strong winds are less frequent than over other areas of Wyoming. Occasional storms, however, can bring brief periods of high winds with gusts exceeding 50 mph.

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. High winds are generally blocked by high mountains but occur in conjunction with thunderstorms, which are common in late summer. Growth of native cool-season plants begins about June 1, but can be as late as July 15, and continues until the beginning of September.

For detailed information visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service National Water and Climate Center at http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/. Climate station representative of this precipitation zone include: “Cooke City 2W” and “Tower Falls”. The following graphs and charts are a collective sample representing the averaged normals and 30-year annual rainfall data for the selected weather stations from 1981 to 2010.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	1-2 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	23-47 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	457-584 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	1-2 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	17-53 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	432-610 mm
Frost-free period (average)	2 days
Freeze-free period (average)	35 days

Precipitation total (average)	533 mm

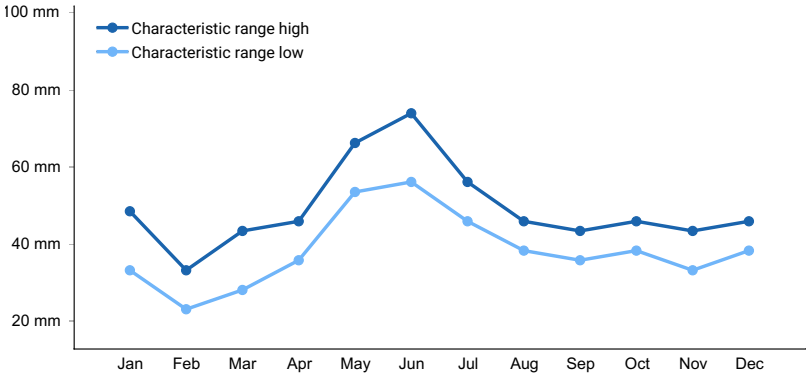


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

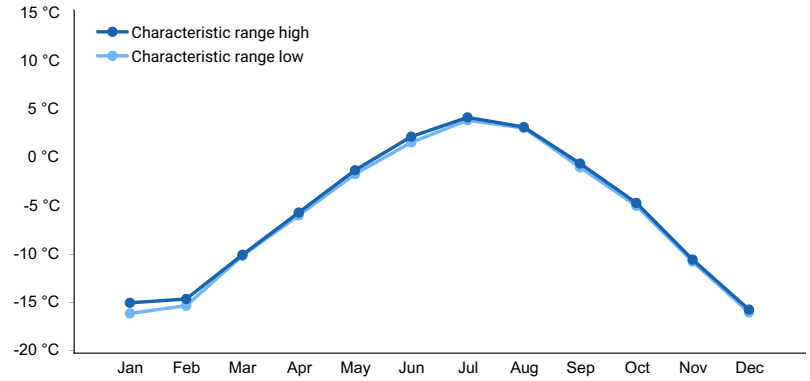


Figure 2. Monthly minimum temperature range

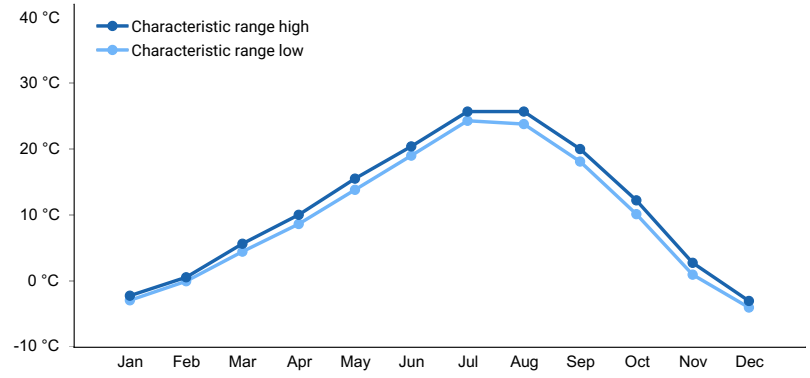


Figure 3. Monthly maximum temperature range

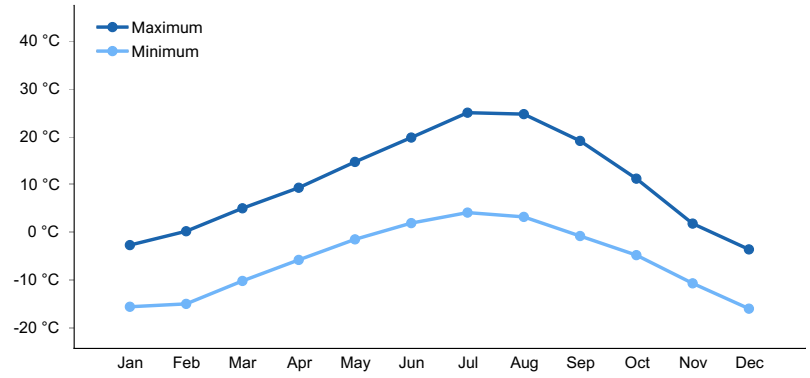


Figure 4. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

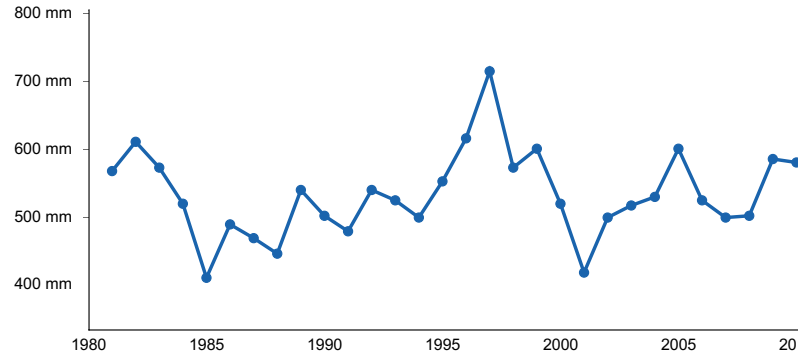


Figure 5. Annual precipitation pattern

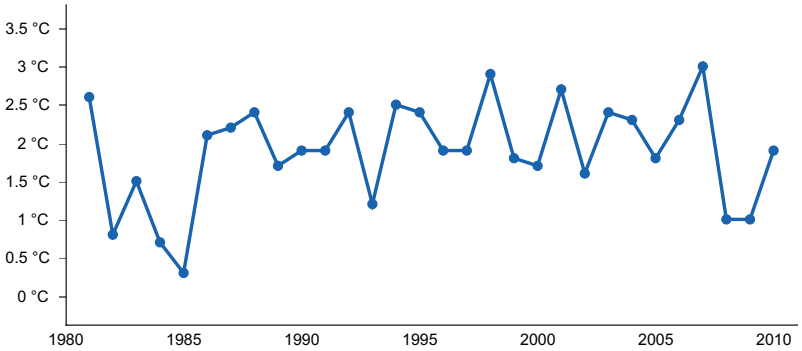


Figure 6. Annual average temperature pattern

Climate stations used

- (1) COOKE CITY 2 W [USC00241995], Gardiner, MT
- (2) TOWER FALLS [USC00489025], Yellowstone National Park, WY

Influencing water features

The characteristics of these upland soils have no influence from ground water (water table below 60 inches (150 cm)) and have minimal influence from surface water/overland flow. There may be isolated features that are affected by snow pack that persists longer than surrounding areas due to position on the landform (shaded/protected pockets).

Soil features

The soils of this site are moderately deep (greater than 20" to bedrock) to very deep and well-drained with textures ranging from very fine sandy loams through clay loams. Some soils have a lime horizon below 3 feet. The overlying soil is usually noncalcareous. These sites occur on slopes >30% and usually on north and east aspects.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium–igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rock (2) Residuum–sedimentary rock
Surface texture	(1) Gravelly loam (2) Clay loam (3) Fine sandy loam (4) Silt loam (5) Sandy clay loam (6) Silty clay loam
Family particle size	(1) Fine-loamy
Drainage class	Moderately well drained to well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderate

Soil depth	51–152 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0–20%
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	6.35–15.24 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0–15%
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0–8 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0–5
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	6.6–8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0–10%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0–5%

Ecological dynamics

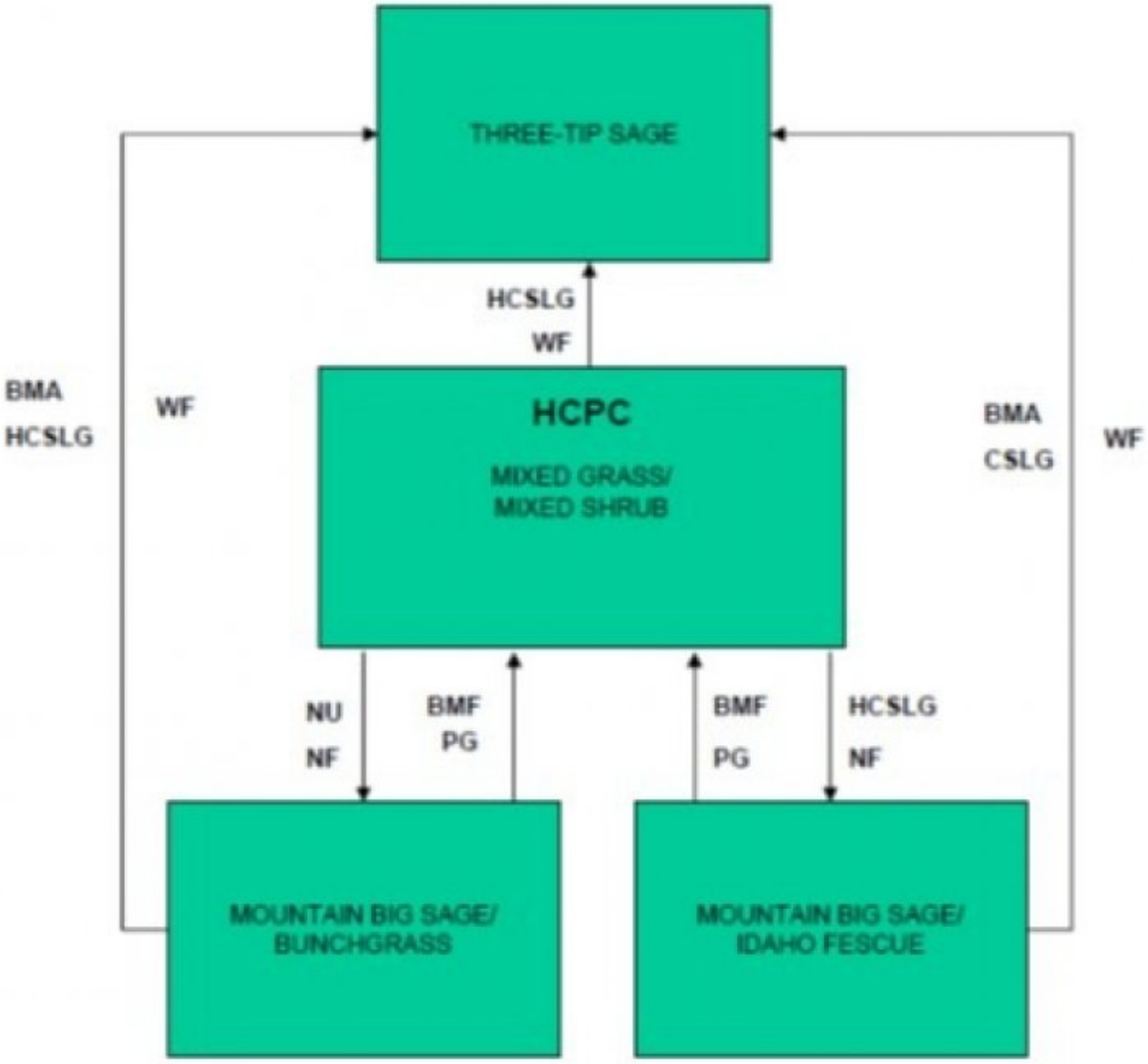
As this site deteriorates because of a combination of frequent and severe grazing, species such as three-tip and mountain big sagebrush, buckwheat, and yarrow will increase. Rhizomatous and/or less palatable grasses such as Letterman needlegrass, rhizomatous wheatgrass, and Sandberg bluegrass increase. Kentucky bluegrass may invade. Cool-season grasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, Columbia needlegrass, and spike fescue will decrease in frequency and production.

Mountain big sagebrush will become dominant with the absence of fire. Wildfires are often actively controlled so chemical control using herbicides has replaced the historic role of fire on this site. Recently, prescribed burning has regained some popularity.

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



BMA – Brush Management (all methods)
BMC – Brush Management (chemical)
BMF – Brush Management (fire)
BMM – Brush Management (mechanical)
CSP – Chemical Seedbed Preparation
CSLG – Continuous Season-long Grazing
DR – Drainage
CSG – Continuous Spring Grazing
HB – Heavy Browse
HCSLG – Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing
HI – Heavy Inundation
LPG – Long-term Prescribed Grazing
MT – Mechanical Treatment (chiseling, ripping, pitting)

NF – No Fire
NS – Natural Succession
NWC – Noxious Weed Control
NWI – Noxious Weed Invasion
NU – Nonuse
P&C – Plow & Crop (including hay)
PG – Prescribed Grazing
RPT – Re-plant Trees
RS – Re-seed
SGD – Severe Ground Disturbance
SHC – Severe Hoof Compaction
WD – Wildlife Damage (Beaver)
WF - Wildfire

State 1

Mixed Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community (HCPC)

Community 1.1
Mixed Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community (HCPC)

The interpretive plant community for this site is the Historic Climax Plant Community. This state evolved with grazing by large herbivores and is well suited for grazing by domestic livestock. Potential vegetation is estimated at 75% grasses or grass-like plants, 15% forbs, and 10% woody plants. The major grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, Columbia needlegrass, thickspike wheatgrass, and spike fescue. Other grasses may include big, Canby, mutton, and Sandberg bluegrass, blue wildrye, prairie junegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, Letterman needlegrass, alpine timothy, timber oatgrass, slender and bearded wheatgrass, and mountain and nodding brome. Woody species may include mountain big sagebrush, chokecherry, rose, snowbrush ceanothus, three-tip sagebrush, bitterbrush, snowberry, serviceberry, silver sagebrush, and green rabbitbrush. A typical plant composition for this state consists of bluebunch wheatgrass 25-35%, Idaho fescue 15-20%, Columbia needlegrass 10-20%, thickspike wheatgrass 10-20%, spike fescue 10-20%, other grasses and grass-like plants 10-20%, perennial forbs 5-15%, and 5-15% woody species. Ground cover, by ocular estimate, varies from 55-60%. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 2200 lbs./acre, but it can range from about 1800 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 2600 lbs./acre in above average years. The following is the growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year: Growth curve number: WY0101 Growth curve name: 20+M, UPLAND SITES Growth curve description: ALL UPLAND SITES JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC 0 0 0 0 5 30 40 20 5 0 0 0 (Monthly percentages of total annual growth) This plant community is extremely stable and well adapted to the Central Rocky Mountains 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: • Nonuse and No Fire will convert this plant community to the Mountain Big Sage/Bunchgrass State. • Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing and No Fire will convert this plant community to the Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue State. • Wildfire with Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the Three-tip Sage State.

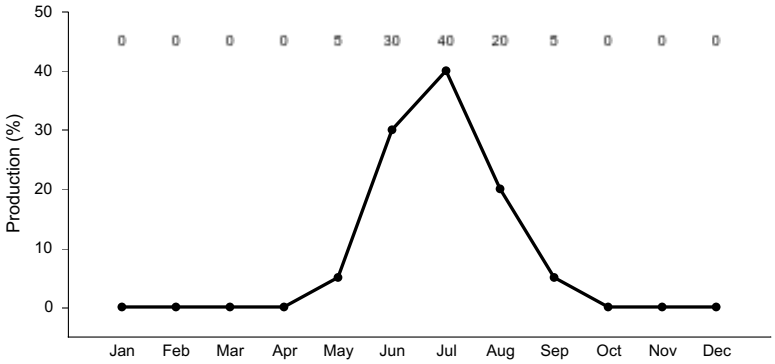


Figure 8. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0101, 20+ upland sites.

State 2
Mountain Big Sage/Bunchgrass Plant Community

Community 2.1
Mountain Big Sage/Bunchgrass Plant Community

This plant community is the result of long-term protection from grazing and fire. Mountain big sagebrush dominates the site, often exceeding 20-50% annual production and lowering herbaceous forage production. Bunchgrasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass, blue wildrye, Columbia needlegrass, Idaho fescue, and mountain brome dominate the understory. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 2000 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 1600 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 2400 lbs./acre in above average years. The following is the growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year: Growth curve number: WY0101 Growth curve name: 20+M, UPLAND SITES Growth curve description: ALL UPLAND SITES JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC 0 0 0 0 5 30 40 20 5 0 0 0 (Monthly percentages of total annual growth) The state is stable and protected from excessive erosion. The biotic integrity of this plant community is usually intact, however forage value will decrease and wildlife values will shift toward different species. The watershed is functioning.

Transitional pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Prescribed Fire followed by deferment for 1 to 2 years as part of a Prescribed Grazing plan will return this state to near Historic Climax Plant Community (Mixed Grass/Mixed Shrub State). Care should be taken when planning brush management to consider wildlife habitat and critical winter ranges. • Brush Management or Wildfire followed by Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the Three-tip Sage State.

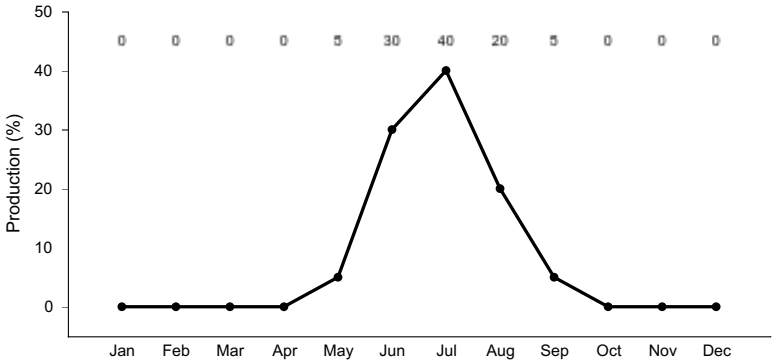


Figure 9. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0101, 20+ upland sites.

State 3
Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue Plant Community

Community 3.1
Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue Plant Community

This plant community is the result of heavy, continuous season-long grazing and protection from fire. Mountain big sagebrush eventually dominates this plant community with its annual production often exceeding 50%. Forbs such as yarrow, phlox, lupine, larkspur, buckwheat, and pussytoes increase. Grasses such as Idaho fescue, Sandberg and mutton bluegrass, Letterman needlegrass, and rhizomatous wheatgrass increase in proportion to other grasses. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 1500 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 1000 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 2000 lbs./acre in above average years. The following is the growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year: Growth curve number: WY0101 Growth curve name: 20+M, UPLAND SITES Growth curve description: ALL UPLAND SITES JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC 0 0 0 0 5 30 40 20 5 0 0 0 (Monthly percentages of total annual growth) Soil erosion is accelerated because of increased bare ground. The biotic community has been compromised, but is relatively stable. The watershed is functioning, but is at risk of further degradation. Water flow patterns and pedestals are obvious. Infiltration is reduced and runoff is increased. Transitional pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: • Prescribed Fire followed by deferment for 1 to 2 years as part of a Prescribed Grazing plan will return this state to near Historic Climax Plant Community (Mixed Grass/Mixed Shrub State). Care should be taken when planning brush management to consider wildlife habitat and critical winter ranges. • Brush Management or Wildfire followed by Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the Three-tip Sage State.

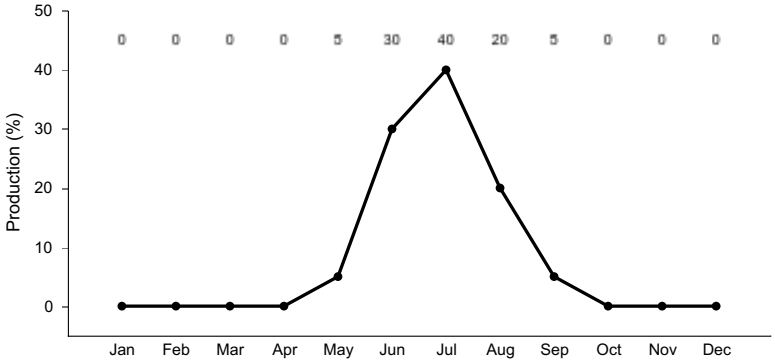


Figure 10. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0101, 20+ upland sites.

State 4

Three-tip Sage Plant Community

Community 4.1
Three-tip Sage Plant Community

This plant community is the result of brush management or wildfire followed by improper grazing management practices. With sagebrush removed, it is dominated by sprouting shrubs such as green rabbitbrush and three-tip sagebrush. Rhizomatous wheatgrasses, low growing bunchgrasses such as Letterman needlegrass and Sandberg bluegrass, and unpalatable annual and perennial forbs dominate the herbaceous understory. Forbs such as prairie smoke, lupine, and thistles are common. There is a substantial amount of bare ground. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 1000 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 500 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 1500 lbs./acre in above average years. The following is the growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year: Growth curve number: WY0101 Growth curve name: 20+M, UPLAND SITES Growth curve description: ALL UPLAND SITES JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC 0 0 0 0 5 30 40 20 5 0 0 0 (Monthly percentages of total annual growth) The soil is not protected and erosion will increase if management is not changed. The biotic integrity may be reduced due to low vegetative production. The watershed is functioning at risk. Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: It is not often practicable or economically feasible to convert this plant community.

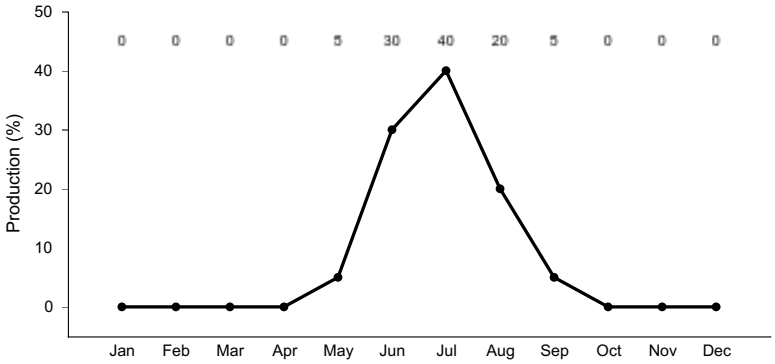


Figure 11. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0101, 20+ upland sites.

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				616–863	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	*Pseudoroegneria spicata*	616–863	–
2				370–493	
	Idaho fescue	FEID	*Festuca idahoensis*	370–493	–
3				247–493	
	Columbia needlegrass	ACNE9	*Achnatherum nelsonii*	247–493	–
4				247–493	
	spike fescue	LEKI2	*Leucopoa kingii*	247–493	–
5				247–493	
	thickspike wheatgrass	ELLAL	*Elymus lanceolatus ssp. lanceolatus*	247–493	–
6				247–493	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	*Grass, perennial*	0–123	–
	Letterman's needlegrass	ACLE9	*Achnatherum lettermanii*	0–123	–
	mountain brome	BRMA4	*Bromus marginatus*	0–123	–

	Porter brome	BRPO2	*Bromus porteri*	0–123	–
	sun sedge	CAINH2	*Carex inops ssp. heliophila*	0–123	–
	California oatgrass	DACA3	*Danthonia californica*	0–123	–
	timber oatgrass	DAIN	*Danthonia intermedia*	0–123	–
	squirreltail	ELELE	*Elymus elymoides ssp. elymoides*	0–123	–
	blue wildrye	ELGL	*Elymus glaucus*	0–123	–
	slender wheatgrass	ELTR7	*Elymus trachycaulus*	0–123	–
	slender wheatgrass	ELTRS	*Elymus trachycaulus ssp. subsecundus*	0–123	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	*Koeleria macrantha*	0–123	–
	oniongrass	MEBU	*Melica bulbosa*	0–123	–
	alpine timothy	PHAL2	*Phleum alpinum*	0–123	–
	Cusick's bluegrass	POCU3	*Poa cusickii*	0–123	–
	muttongrass	POFE	*Poa fendleriana*	0–123	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	*Poa secunda*	0–123	–
	spike trisetum	TRSP2	*Trisetum spicatum*	0–123	–
Forb					
7				123–370	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	*Forb, perennial*	0–123	–
	common yarrow	ACMI2	*Achillea millefolium*	0–123	–
	giant hyssop	AGAST	*Agastache*	0–123	–
	agoseris	AGOSE	*Agoseris*	0–123	–
	pussytoes	ANTEN	*Antennaria*	0–123	–
	sandwort	ARENA	*Arenaria*	0–123	–
	milkvetch	ASTRA	*Astragalus*	0–123	–
	balsamroot	BALSA	*Balsamorhiza*	0–123	–
	Indian paintbrush	CASTI2	*Castilleja*	0–123	–
	hawksbeard	CREPI	*Crepis*	0–123	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	*Eriogonum*	0–123	–
	elkweed	FRSP	*Frasera speciosa*	0–123	–
	bedstraw	GALIU	*Galium*	0–123	–
	geranium	GERAN	*Geranium*	0–123	–
	little sunflower	HEPU3	*Helianthus pumilus*	0–123	–
	stoneseed	LITHO3	*Lithospermum*	0–123	–
	lupine	LUPIN	*Lupinus*	0–123	–
	creeping barberry	MARE11	*Mahonia repens*	0–123	–
	bluebells	MERTE	*Mertensia*	0–123	–
	ragwort	PACKE	*Packera*	0–123	–
	beardtongue	PENST	*Penstemon*	0–123	–
	phacelia	PHACE	*Phacelia*	0–123	–
	phlox	PHLOX	*Phlox*	0–123	–
	buttercup	RANUN	*Ranunculus*	0–123	–
	stonecrop	SEDUM	*Sedum*	0–123	–
	ragwort	SENEC	*Senecio*	0–123	–

	aster	SYMPH4	*Symphyotrichum*	0–123	–
	meadow-rue	THALI2	*Thalictrum*	0–123	–
	clover	TRIFO	*Trifolium*	0–123	–
	American vetch	VIAM	*Vicia americana*	0–123	–
	violet	VIOLA	*Viola*	0–123	–
	mule-ears	WYAM	*Wyethia amplexicaulis*	0–123	–
Shrub/Vine					
8				123–370	
	Shrub, deciduous	2SD	*Shrub, deciduous*	0–123	–
	Shrub, evergreen	2SE	*Shrub, evergreen*	0–123	–
	Tree, deciduous	2TD	*Tree, deciduous*	0–123	–
	Tree, evergreen	2TE	*Tree, evergreen*	0–123	–
	Saskatoon serviceberry	AMAL2	*Amelanchier alnifolia*	0–123	–
	silver sagebrush	ARCA13	*Artemisia cana*	0–123	–
	threetip sagebrush	ARTR4	*Artemisia tripartita*	0–123	–
	mountain big sagebrush	ARTRV	*Artemisia tridentata ssp. vaseyana*	0–123	–
	snowbrush ceanothus	CEVE	*Ceanothus velutinus*	0–123	–
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	*Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus*	0–123	–
	chokecherry	PRVI	*Prunus virginiana*	0–123	–
	antelope bitterbrush	PUTR2	*Purshia tridentata*	0–123	–
	Woods' rose	ROWOW	*Rosa woodsii var. woodsii*	0–123	–
	snowberry	SYMPH	*Symphoricarpos*	0–123	–

Animal community

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations

Mixed Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community (HCPC): This plant community provides suitable thermal and escape cover for mule deer, elk, and antelope. Sagebrush, which can approach 15% protein and 40-60% digestibility, provides important winter forage for mule deer and elk. Birds that would frequent this plant community include horned larks and golden eagles.

Mountain Big Sage/Bunchgrass Plant Community: This plant community may be useful for the same wildlife that would use the Historic Climax Plant Community.

Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue Plant Community: This plant community may be beneficial for the same wildlife that would use the Historic Climax Plant Community. However, the plant community composition is less diverse, and thus, less apt to meet the seasonal needs of these animals.

Three-tip Sage Plant Community: This plant community provides limited forage for elk and mule deer due to low production and lack of palatable woody species.

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)
Mixed Grass/Mixed Shrub (HCPC) 1800-2600 0.6
Mountain Big Sage/Bunchgrass 1600-2400 0.5
Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue 1000-2000 0.3
Three-tip Sage 500-1500 0.15

* - 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, with localized areas in hydrologic groups A and C. Infiltration ranges from rapid 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. 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 and shrubs. 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 variety 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.

Inventory data references

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS clipping data and other inventory data. Field observations from range trained personnel were also used. Those involved in developing this site include: Bill Christensen, Range Management Specialist, NRCS; Karen Clause, Range Management Specialist, NRCS; and Everet Bainter, Range Management Specialist, NRCS. 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.

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS inventory data, Field observations from range trained personnel, and the existing range site descriptions. Those involved in developing the Loamy range site include: Karen Clause, Range Management Specialist, NRCS and Everet Bainter, Range Management Specialist.

Those involved in the development of the new concept for Loamy and Loamy Calcareous Ecological site include: Ray Gullion, Area Range Management Specialist, NRCS; Jim Wolf, Resource Manager, USDI-BLM; Jack Mononi, Range Management Specialist, USDI-BLM; Daniel Wood, MLRA Soil Survey Leader, NRCS; Jane Karinen, Soil Data Quality Specialist, NRCS; and Marji Patz, Ecological Site Specialist, NRCS.

Inventory Data References:
Ocular field estimations observed by trained personnel were completed at each site. Then sites were selected where a 100-foot tape was stretched, and the following sample procedures were completed by inventory staff. For full sampling protocol and guidelines with forms please refer to the Wyoming ESI Operating Procedures, compiled in 2012 for the Powell and Rock Springs Soil Survey Office, USDA-NRCS.
• Double Sampling Production Data (4.8 square foot hoop used to estimate 10 points, clipped a minimum of 2 of these estimated points, with two 21-foot X 21-foot square extended shrub plots).
• Line Point Intercept (over story and understory captured with soil cover). Height of herbaceous and woody cover is collected every three feet along established transect.)
• Continuous Line Intercept (Woody Canopy Cover, with minimum gap of 0.2 of a foot for all woody species and succulents. Intercept height collected at each measurement.),
• Gap Intercept (Basal Gap measured with a minimum gap requirement of 0.7 foot.),
• Sample Point (10 – 1-meter square point photographs taken at set distances on transect. Red using the sample point computer program established by the High Plains Agricultural Research Center, WY).
• Soil Stability (Slake Test – surface and subsurface samples collected and processed according to the soil stability guidelines provided by the Jornada Research Center, NM.)

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Contributors

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Approval

Scott Woodall, 10/04/2019

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)	K. Clause, E. Bainter
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Date	03/16/2007
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.

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 0-10%.

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 in moderate amounts. Large woody debris will show only slight movement down slope.

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 3 (interspaces) to 6 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 4.0 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. Soil OM of 6-16% is expected.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Plant community consists of 75-80% grasses, 15% forbs, and 5-10% shrubs. Evenly distributed plant canopy (60-95%) and litter plus moderate infiltration rates result in minimal runoff. Basal cover is typically greater than 10% for this site and does affect 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

    Sub-dominant: cool season rhizomatous grasses perennial forbs perennial shrubs

    Other: tall, cool season bunchgrasses = short, cool season bunchgrasses

    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 5-40% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 50-90% expected. Herbaceous litter depth typically ranges from 5-15mm. 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: 1800-2600 lb/ac (2200 lb/ac average); Metric 2016-2912 kg/ha (2464 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 30% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Rabbitbrush, Sandberg bluegrass, buckwheat, phlox, and yarrow are common increasers. Kentucky bluegrass, common dandelion, thistles, and annual weeds are common invasive species in disturbed sites.

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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing, except in extreme drought years.
