USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ecological site F043BP904MT
Shallow Warm Woodland Group

Last updated: 3/01/2024
Accessed: 05/02/2024

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.

MLRA notes

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

The Central Rocky Mountains (MLRA 43B) of Montana occupy some 28,850 square miles and exist primarily in Central and SW portions of the state. The climate is extremely variable with precipitation lows of 9 to 100 inches per year and frost free days of less than 30 to over 110 days. The geology of the region is also highly variable. The combination of variable climate and geology create a complex relationship of plant communities. MLRA 43B elevations typically exist between 6000 and 12,799 ft at Granite Peak (the highest point in Montana).

The Continental Divide runs through this MLRA effectively splitting its watershed to contribute to either the Missouri River to the East and the Columbia River to the West.

Ecological site concept

• Dominant Cover: Coniferous Forest
• Site does not receive any additional water
• Soils are
o Not saline or saline-sodic
o Not strongly or violently effervescent within surface mineral 4”
o Soil is shallow (less than 20in (50cm) to bedrock, lithic, or paralithic root restriction)
o Soil is not ashy or medial textural family
o Stones and/or boulders cover <15% surface area
• Soil surface texture variable from loamy to sandy loam (often gravelly or cobbly)
• Site Landform: hillslopes, ridges, escarpments
• Area of rugged mountain, hills, plateaus, and valleys of the Central Rocky Mountains in Southwest Montana.
• Parent material is colluvium, colluvium over residuum, residuum
• Moisture Regime: ustic
• Temperature Regime: cryic and frigid, cool
• Elevation Range: 3800-6500 ft
• Slope: 2-30% (typically less than 15%)

Associated sites

F043BP911MT	**Upland Warm Woodland Group** The Upland Warm Woodland site is adjacent to the Shallow Warm Woodland however tending to be lower on the landscape where soils tend to be deeper. These two sites share similar plant communities and state and transition models.

Similar sites

F043BP911MT	**Upland Warm Woodland Group** The Upland Warm Woodland site is adjacent to the Shallow Warm Woodland however tending to be lower on the landscape where soils tend to be deeper. These two sites share similar plant communities and state and transition models.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) *Pinus ponderosa* (2) *Pinus flexilis*
Shrub	(1) *Ribes* (2) *Cercocarpus ledifolius*
Herbaceous	(1) *Pseudoroegneria spicata* (2) *Festuca campestris*

Physiographic features

Site is shallow to bedrock that exists on mountain slopes, ridges, and escarpments. Typically site exists on the upper third of the landform. Site is quite variable in slope from 2 to 30 percent; however, the slope is rarely greater than 15 percent. The site has a root restrictive layer within 20 inches of the soil surface. Geology is mixed.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Mountains > Ridge (2) Mountains > Mountain slope (3) Mountains > Escarpment
Runoff class	Low to medium
Elevation	3,800–7,800 ft
Slope	2–60%
Water table depth	150 in
Aspect	W, NW, N, NE, E, SE, S, SW

Climatic features

This site exists in the frigid, cool soil temperature regime in the Typic Ustic moisture regime. Relatively Effective Annual Precipitation varies from 10 to 22 inches. Frost free days are 60 to 115 days.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	56-106 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	104-140 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	13-19 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	46-114 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	102-144 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	12-20 in
Frost-free period (average)	78 days
Freeze-free period (average)	121 days
Precipitation total (average)	16 in

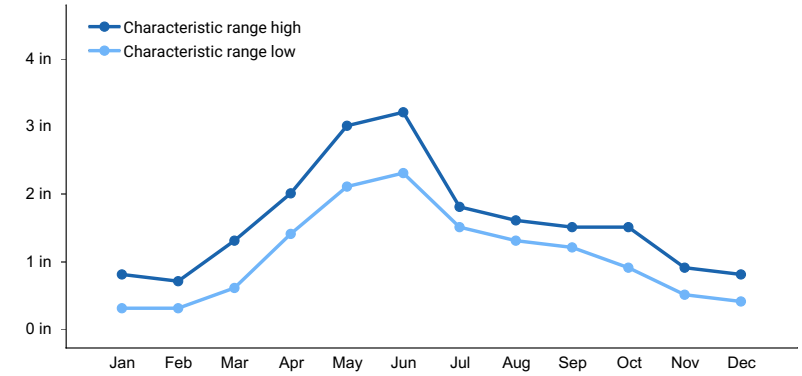


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

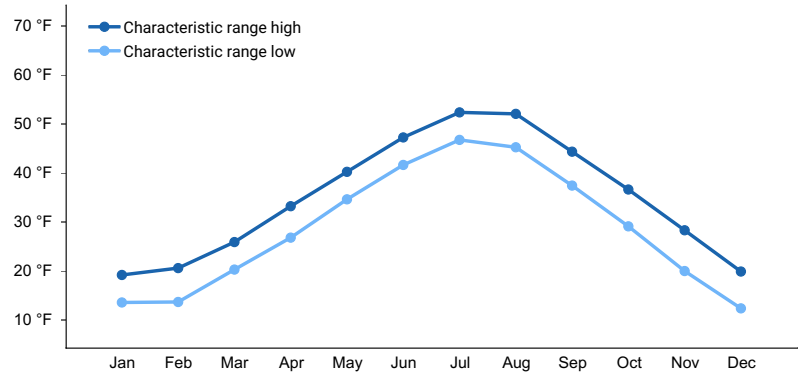


Figure 2. Monthly minimum temperature range

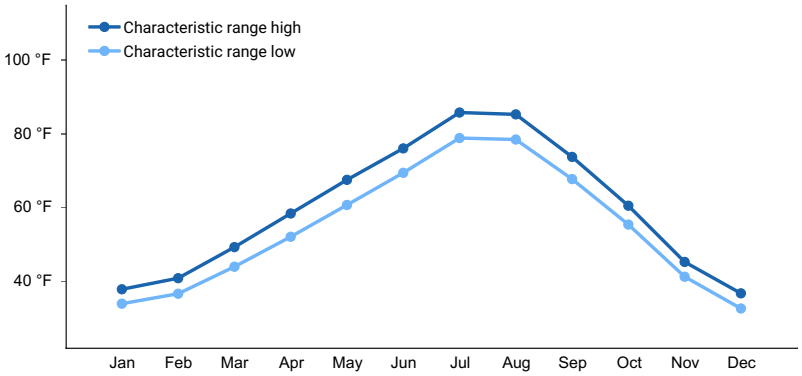


Figure 3. Monthly maximum temperature range

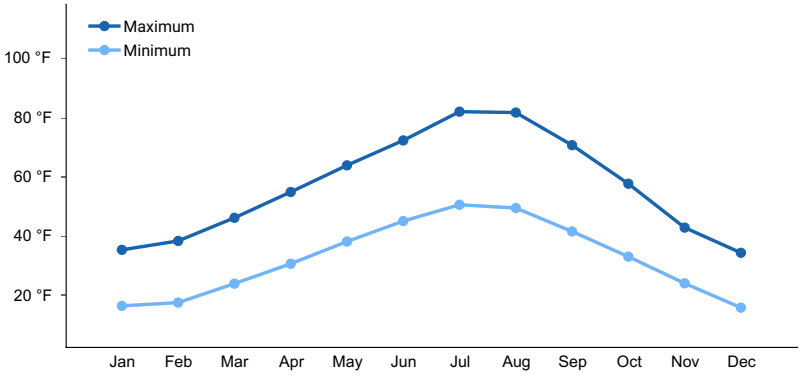


Figure 4. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

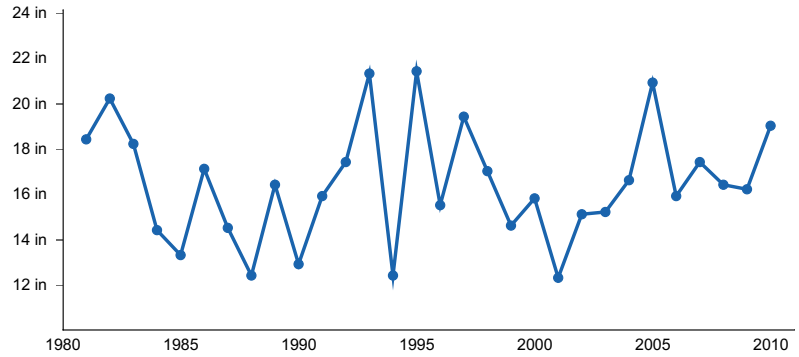


Figure 5. Annual precipitation pattern

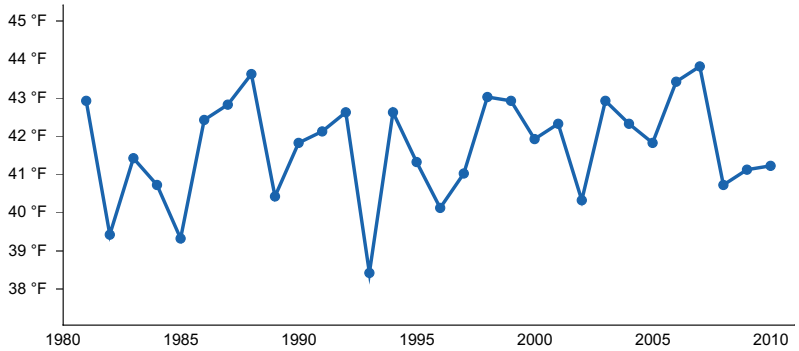


Figure 6. Annual average temperature pattern

Climate stations used

- (1) CANYON FERRY DAM [USC00241470], Helena, MT
- (2) HOLTER DAM [USC00244241], Wolf Creek, MT
- (3) MILLEGAN 14 SE [USC00245712], White Sulphur Springs, MT
- (4) PONY [USC00246655], Cardwell, MT
- (5) NORRIS MADISON PH [USC00246157], Ennis, MT
- (6) WILSALL 8 ENE [USC00249023], Wilsall, MT
- (7) WHITE SULPHUR SPRNGS 2 [USC00248930], White Sulphur Springs, MT

Influencing water features

Site not associated with water resources

Wetland description

Site not associated with wetlands.

Soil features

Soil textures are variable based on local geology; however, textures trend loam to sandy loam, often with gravelly, cobbly or stony modifiers. Parent material is colluvium, colluvium over residuum, and residuum.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Colluvium–igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rock (2) Residuum–igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rock
Surface texture	(1) Gravelly, cobbly loam (2) Cobbly sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy (2) Loamy-skeletal

Drainage class	Moderately well drained to well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderately rapid
Depth to restrictive layer	10–20 in
Soil depth	10–20 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0–30%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–22%
Available water capacity (0-20in)	1.1–3.8 in
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-10in)	4.8–7.8
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (0-20in)	0–50%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (0-20in)	0–45%

Ecological dynamics

1 - Reference State
1.1 Ponderosa pine and Limber pine forest with mixed understory of shrubs, grasses, and forbs. Douglas fir is a common overstory minor component. Bluebunch wheatgrass and rough fescue commonly dominant grasses. Shrubs common include Rhus and Ribes species.

T1A The decrease of overstory. Understory is relatively unchanged from reference
T1B Improper grazing management degrades understory however tree canopy remains same

2 - Degraded Overstory
2.1 Fire, insect damage, or climatic episode damage overstory. Lesser trees may increase in size and amount. Understory is relatively unchanged; however, the understory is likely to increase in production with decreased competition

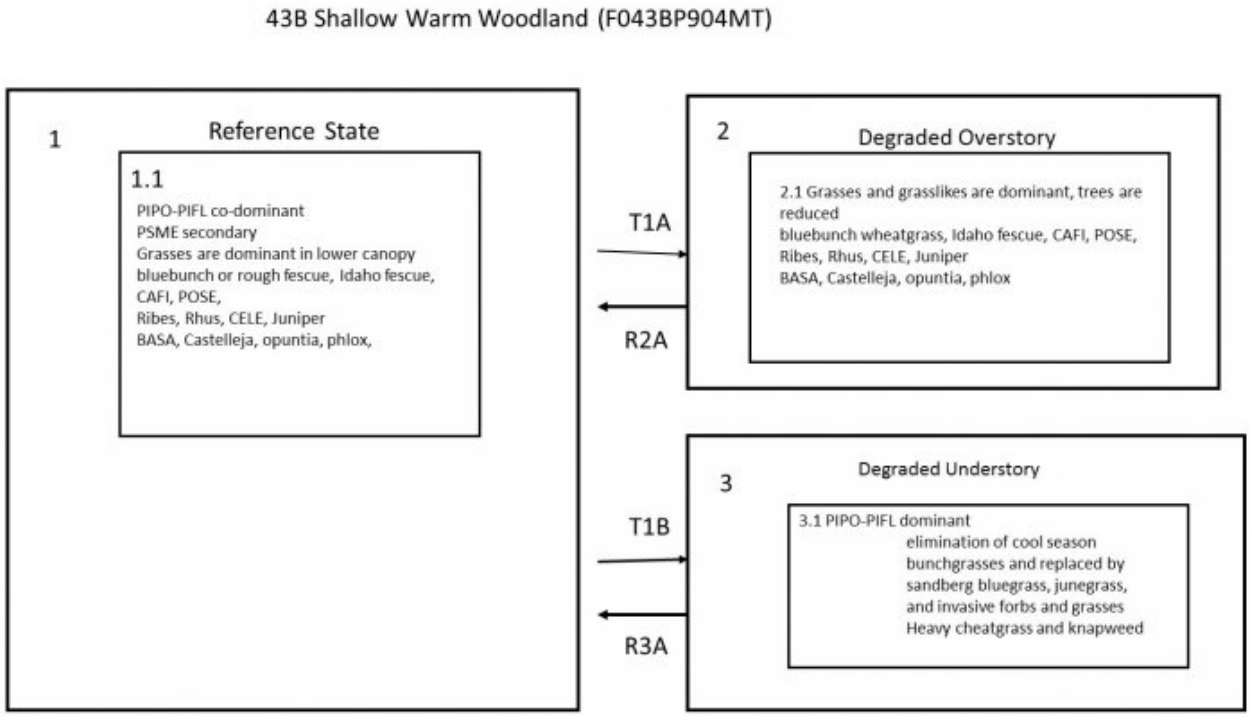
R2A Prescribed grazing management, time, integrated pest management

3 - Degraded Understory
3.1 Overgrazing and fire degrades understory. Native grasses typically reduced or replaced with invasive species such as cheatgrass or knapweed. Canopy is typically unaffected.

R3A Prescribed grazing management, time, integrated pest management

Site Development and Testing Plan:
This Provisional Ecological Site Description was developed to meet the criteria as defined in Soil Survey National Instruction part 306 (430-306-NI, April 2015) as interpreted by Regional Ecological Site Specialist. Information in this description is first approximations based on broad groupings of soil properties and vegetation characteristics associated with those groupings. Although this description has been through the quality control and quality assurance review process it has not been certified for use in conservation planning.

State and transition model



43B Shallow Warm Woodland (F043BP904MT)

1.1 Ponderosa Pine and/or Limber pine forest with mixed understory of shrubs, grasses, and forbs. Douglas Fir is a common overstory minor component. Bluebunch and Rough fescue commonly dominant grasses. Shrubs common include Rhus and Ribes species.
T1A The decrease of overstory. Understory is relatively unchanged from reference
T1B Improper grazing management degrades understory however tree canopy remains same

2.1 Fire, insect damage, or climatic episode damage overstory. Lesser trees may increase in size and amount. Understory is relatively unchanged however is likely to increase in production with decreased competition
R2A Prescribed grazing management, time, integrated pest management

3.1 Overgrazing and/or fire degrades understory. Native grasses typically reduced or replaced with invasive species such as cheatgrass or knapweed. Canopy is typically unaffected.
R3A Prescribed grazing management, time, integrated pest management

Animal community

This ecological site is considered important habitat for large wild game such as deer, elk, and moose as well as upland birds such as ruffed, dusky, and spruce grouse.

Typically this site is considered good for livestock grazing. If the tree canopy is open it will often contain grazeable forage.

Recreational uses

Site frequently used by many outdoor recreationists such as bird watchers, campers, hikers, bikers, and hunters.

Wood products

The dominant forest type is typically not suited to forest products however small post and pole operations may exist. Harvest of this site may prove challenging due to slope.

Inventory data references

Information presented was derived from NRCS inventory data, literature, field observations, and personal contacts with range-trained personnel (i.e., used professional opinion of agency specialists, observations of land managers, and outside scientists).

Other references

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Contributors

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Approval

Kirt Walstad, 3/01/2024

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.

Author(s)/participant(s)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	05/02/2024
Approved by	Kirt Walstad
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:**

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:**

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:**

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):**

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:**

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:**

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):**

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):**

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):**

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:**

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):**

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:

    Sub-dominant:

    Other:

    Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):**

14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):**

15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):**

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:**

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:**