USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ecological site F043BP906MT
Subirrigated Cold 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: Forest
• Site receives additional water
• This site occurs on low terraces adjacent to flood plains of perennial or intermittent streams (though not in the floodplain), near springs and seeps, or other areas having a permanent or perched water table.
• Seasonal high water table within 40” (approx. 100cm) of soil surface.
• Moisture Regime: udic
• Temperature Regime: cryic
• Soils are
o Not saline or saline-sodic
o Moderately deep, deep, or very deep
o Typically less than 5% stone and boulder cover (<10% max)
• Area of rugged mountain, hills, plateaus, and valleys of the Central Rocky Mountains in Southwest Montana.
• Parent material is alluvium, colluvium
• Elevation Range: 6000-10000 ft
• Slope: 0-15%

Associated sites

F043BP909MT	**Upland Cold Woodland Group** The Upland Cold Woodland is a neighboring site slightly above the Subirrigated Cold Woodland on the landscape. The two sites may have slight overlap in tree species however their hydrology, state and transition models, and core plant communities are distinctly different.

Similar sites

F043BP907MT	**Subirrigated Cool Woodland Group** The Subirrigated Cool Woodland site shares a similar state and transition model and has some plant community overlap.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) *Picea engelmannii* (2) *Abies lasiocarpa*
Shrub	(1) *Alnus incana* (2) *Symphoricarpos oreophilus*
Herbaceous	(1) *Calamagrostis canadensis* (2) *Clintonia uniflora*

Physiographic features

Site occurs on low terraces adjacent to flood plains or perennial or intermittent streams, near springs and seeps, or other areas having permanent or perched water tables. Slopes will vary from nearly level to less than 15 percent. This ecological site exists between 6000 and 10000 feet elevation.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Mountains > Stream terrace
Elevation	6,000–10,000 ft
Slope	0–15%
Water table depth	0–40 in
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

This climate of this site is considered cold and exists in the cryic soil temperature regime and in the the udic soil moisture regime. Average Relative Effective Annual Precipitation is 20 to 70 inches and 20 to 70 days frost-free.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	3-23 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	40-74 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	16-26 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	2-32 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	40-91 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	13-28 in
Frost-free period (average)	14 days
Freeze-free period (average)	59 days
Precipitation total (average)	21 in

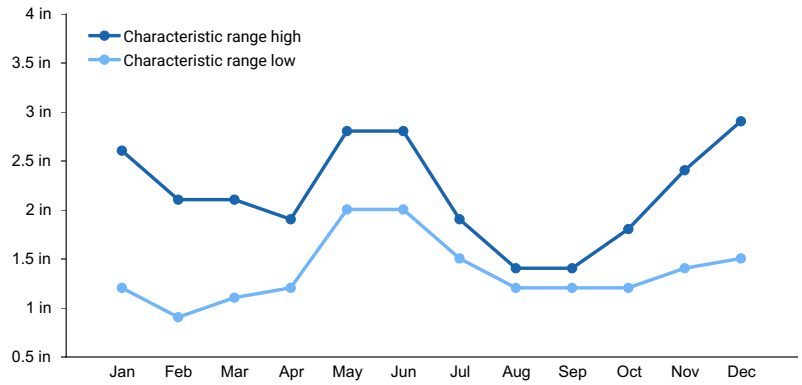


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range

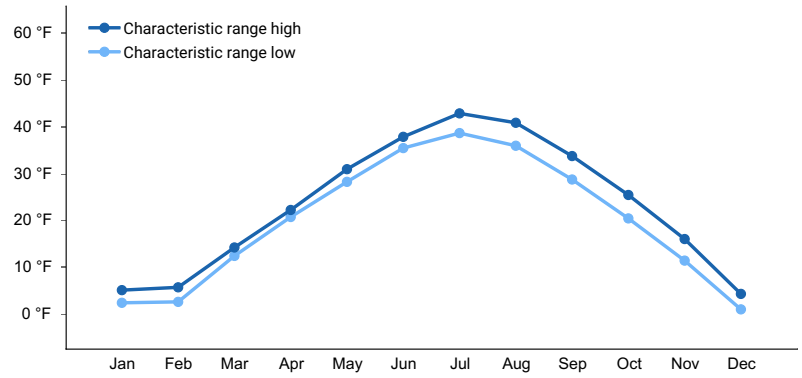


Figure 2. Monthly minimum temperature range

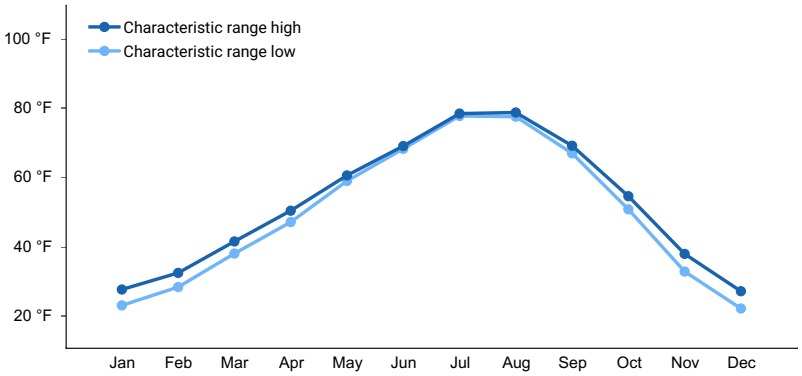


Figure 3. Monthly maximum temperature range

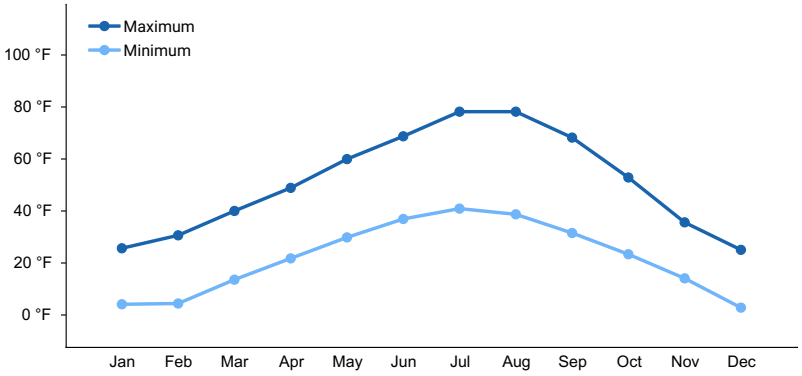


Figure 4. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature

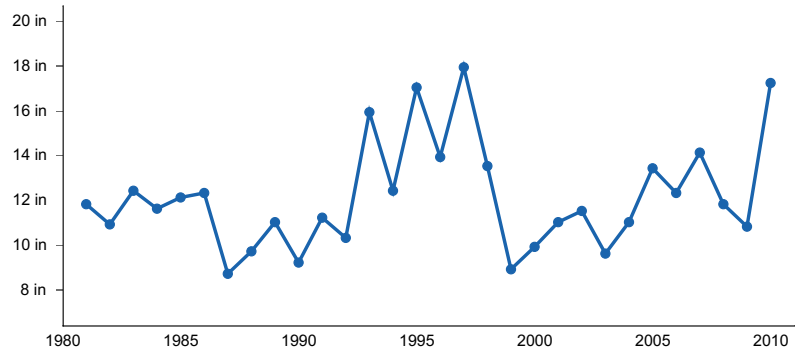


Figure 5. Annual precipitation pattern

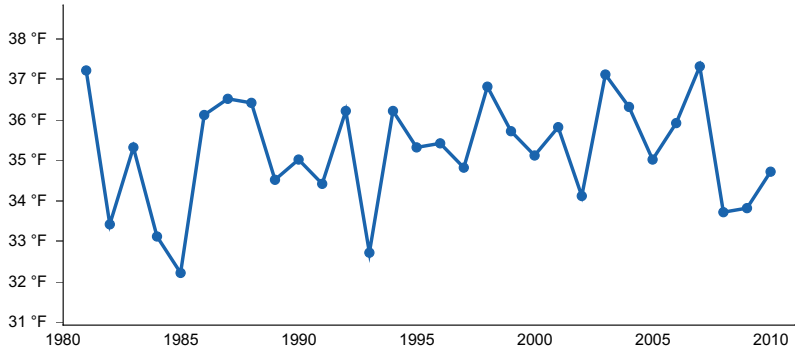


Figure 6. Annual average temperature pattern

Climate stations used

- (1) WEST YELLOWSTONE [USC00248857], West Yellowstone, MT
- (2) WISE RIVER 3 WNW [USC00249082], Wise River, MT
- (3) HEBGEN DAM [USC00244038], West Yellowstone, MT

Influencing water features

Site is located adjacent to the flood plain of perennial or intermittent streams; however, the site is not located in the floodplain. Site receives additional moisture from these nearby streams and will have a water table within 40 inches of the soil surface.

Wetland description

Site is not a wetland

Soil features

Soils are derived from alluvium or alluvium over colluvium. Textures will vary based on local geology; however, the profile will typically have a deep organic layer over mineral soil. Soils will express multiple C-horizons with limited development. Soil surface textures are sandy or loamy with gravelly or cobbly modifiers

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium–igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rock (2) Colluvium–igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rock
Surface texture	(1) Gravelly sandy loam (2) Gravelly, cobbly loam
Drainage class	Somewhat poorly drained to somewhat excessively drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderately rapid

Soil depth	40 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0–20%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–20%
Available water capacity (0-40in)	1.9–5.8 in
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-10in)	4–7.3
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (10-20in)	0–42%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (10-20in)	0–25%

Ecological dynamics

1 - Reference State
1.1 Englemann’s spruce and subalpine fir dominated forest. Shrubs dominate understory canopy.

T1A Post-disturbance includes stand replacement fire (primary driver in this community), insect pestilence and disease. Fire frequency is long but fire is intense.

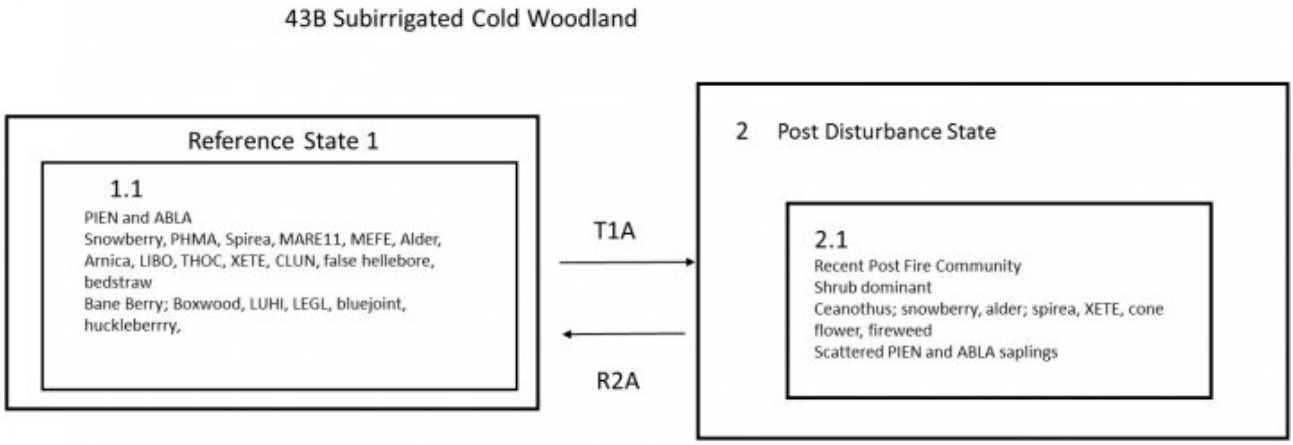
2 - Post-disturbance State
2.1 Shrub dominant condition post-disturbance. Saplings of multiple trees present. Forbs increase in composition particularly colonizing species like fireweed and coneflower

2.1A Time where trees start to re-establish

R2A Restoration pathway where the site, over time, without fire, insect pestilence, or disease moves back to the Reference State. Englemann’s spruce with subalpine fir comes back in and shades out the other tree species. This process can take over 150 years.

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 are 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



1.1 Englemann's Spruce and Subalpine Fir dominated forest. Shrubs dominate understory canopy.
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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 marginal to poor for livestock grazing.

Hydrological functions

Site is adjacent to stream and water sources. The plant community typically acts as a buffer for these smaller

systems. Degradation of the site may result in increased seasonal runoff and stream sedimentation.

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. Site location adjacent to stream acts as a forest riparian buffer and not considered appropriate for timber harvest as per Best Management Practices (BMPs).

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:**