

# Ecological site R043BY162WY Shallow Loamy High Mountains

Accessed: 04/20/2024

## 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.

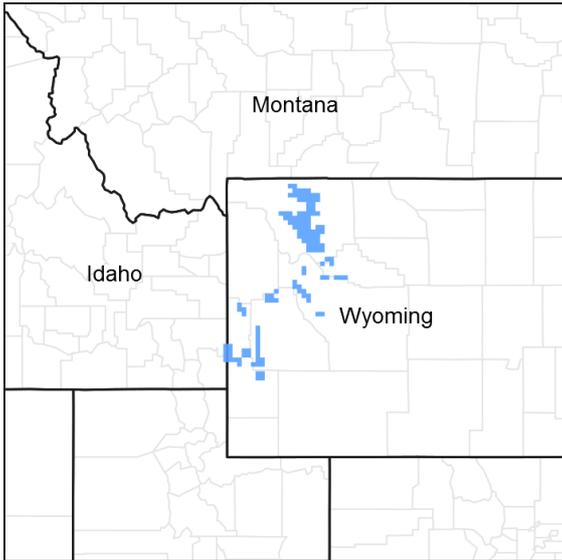


Figure 1. Mapped extent

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.

## Associated sites

R043BY122WY	<b>Loamy High Mountains</b> Loamy
-------------	--------------------------------------

## Similar sites

R043BY122WY	<b>Loamy High Mountains</b> Loamy (Ly) 20+M has higher production and higher shrub density.
R043BY262WY	<b>Shallow Loamy Foothills and Mountains West</b> Shallow Loamy (SwLy) 15-19W has lower production.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

## Physiographic features

This site occurs on rolling to steep slopes and ridges.

**Table 2. Representative physiographic features**

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Ridge (3) Escarpment
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	6,500–12,000 ft
Slope	5–60%
Ponding depth	0 in

## **Climatic features**

Annual precipitation is fairly evenly distributed through the year and averages over 20 inches. Snows are heavy and usually remain in place during the winter. Annual snowfall averages 150 to 200 inches per year. Wide fluctuations may occur in yearly precipitation and result in more dry years than those with more than normal precipitation. Temperatures show a wide range between summer and winter and between daily maximums and minimums. This is predominantly due to the high elevation and dry air, which permits rapid incoming and outgoing radiation. Cold air outbreaks in winter move rapidly from northwest to southeast and account for extreme minimum temperatures.

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.

Growth of native cool season plants begins about June 1 at lower elevations, as late as July 15 at higher elevations, and continues until the beginning of September.

The following information is from the “Moran 5 WNW” climate station:

Minimum Maximum 5 yrs. out of 10 between  
Frost-free period (days): 31 78 June 30 – August 24  
Freeze-free period (days): 65 118 June 5 – September 9

Annual Precipitation (inches): <20.78 >29.35 (2 years in 10)

Mean annual precipitation: 25.23 inches

Mean annual air temperature: 36.5°F (22.1°F Avg. Min. to 50.9°F Avg. Max.)

For detailed information visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service National Water and Climate Center at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/cgibin/state.pl?state=wy> website. Other climate station representative of this precipitation zone include “Alta 1 NW”, “Lake Yellowstone”, “Moose”, “Old Faithful”, and “Snake River” in Teton County; “Bedford 3 SE” in Lincoln County; and “Bondurant” in Sublette County.

**Table 3. Representative climatic features**

Frost-free period (average)	78 days
Freeze-free period (average)	118 days
Precipitation total (average)	29 in

## **Influencing water features**

## **Soil features**

The soils of this site are shallow (10-20" to bedrock) well-drained soils formed in residuum. Textures range from very fine sandy loams to clay loams. Bedrock is commonly limestone, siltstone, or shale. This site may also include some deep gravelly and/or cobbly soils on south and west facing slopes which react like shallow soils.

**Table 4. Representative soil features**

Surface texture	(1) Gravelly loam (2) Cobbly clay loam (3) Channery sandy clay loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Well drained to somewhat excessively drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderate
Soil depth	10–20 in
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	0–20%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–10%
Available water capacity (0-40in)	1–4 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-40in)	0–10%
Electrical conductivity (0-40in)	0–4 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-40in)	0–5
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-40in)	7.4–8.4
Subsurface fragment volume ≤3" (Depth not specified)	0–30%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0–15%

## Ecological dynamics

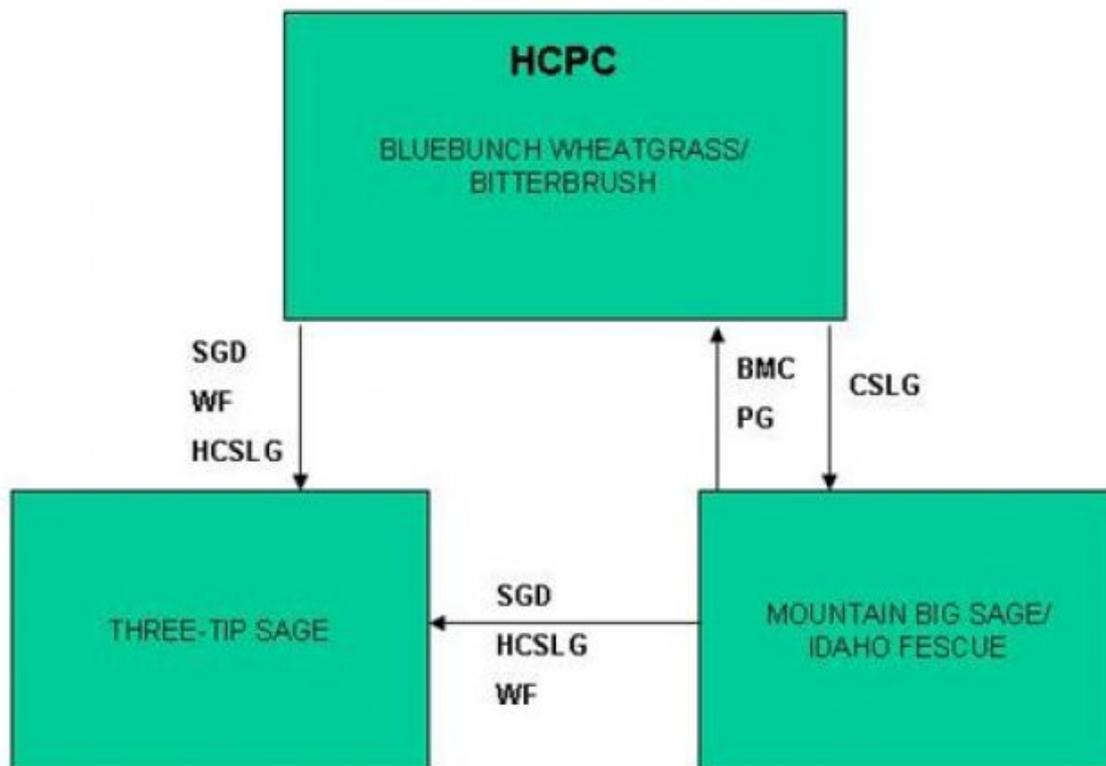
Ecological Dynamics of the Site:

As this site deteriorates, species such as rhizomatous wheatgrass, snowbrush ceanothus, snowberry, and mountain big sagebrush will increase. Bitterbrush and cool season bunchgrasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass and spike fescue will decrease in frequency and production.

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

### Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush Plant Community (HCPC)

#### Community 1.1

##### Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush Plant Community (HCPC)

The interpretive plant community for this site is the Historic Climax Plant Community. Potential vegetation is about 65% grasses or grass-like plants, 10% forbs, and 25% woody plants. The major grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, spike trisetum, spike fescue, and slender wheatgrass. Other grasses include Canby, mutton, big, and Cusick bluegrass, Letterman, Columbia, and western needlegrass, bentgrass, mountain brome, California and timber oatgrass, thickspike wheatgrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, oniongrass, and prairie junegrass. Bitterbrush is the major woody plant. Other woody plants include mountain big, three-tip, and silver sagebrush, snowbrush ceanothus, snowberry, serviceberry, and chokecherry. A typical plant composition for this state consists of bluebunch wheatgrass 25-35%, Idaho fescue 15-25%, spike fescue 10-20%, spike trisetum 10-20%, slender wheatgrass 5-10%, other grasses and grass-like plants 10-20%, perennial forbs 5-10%, bitterbrush 5-10%, and 5-15% other woody species. Ground cover, by ocular estimate, varies from 30-65%. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 1700 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 1300 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) The state is extremely stable and well adapted to the Central Rocky Mountains climatic conditions. The diversity in plant species allows for high drought resistance. 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: • Wildfire or Severe Ground Disturbance followed by Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the Three-tip Sage State. • Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue State.

Figure 3. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). WY0101, 20+ upland sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
				5	30	40	20	5			

## State 2

### Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue Plant Community

#### Community 2.1

##### Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue Plant Community

This plant community is the result of continuous season-long grazing. Mountain big and other sagebrush species are significant components of this plant community, often making up 15-40% of the annual production. Idaho fescue, thickspike wheatgrass, Letterman needlegrass, and unpalatable annual and perennial forbs dominate the herbaceous understory. Bitterbrush is present, but greatly suppressed by sage species. Bare ground has increased. Western yarrow and phlox are often significant components of this state. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 1200 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 800 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 1600 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 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: • Chemical Brush Management 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 (Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush State). Care should be taken when planning brush management to consider wildlife habitat and critical winter ranges. • Severe Ground Disturbance and/or Heavy Continuous Season-long Grazing will convert this plant community to the Three-tip Sage State.

Figure 4. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).

WY0101, 20+ upland sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
				5	30	40	20	5			

### State 3 Three-tip Sage Plant Community

#### Community 3.1 Three-tip Sage Plant Community

This plant community is the result of severe ground disturbance, including very severe grazing. Dominant species include sprouting shrubs such as green rabbitbrush and three-tip sagebrush. A variety of grasses and forbs are found in the understory. The total annual production (air-dry weight) of this state is about 800 pounds per acre, but it can range from about 500 lbs./acre in unfavorable years to about 1200 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 vulnerable to excessive erosion. The biotic integrity of this plant community is at risk depending on how far a shift has occurred in plant composition toward sprouting shrubs. The watershed is at risk as bare ground increases. Transitional pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows: It is not often practicable or economically feasible to convert this plant community.

Figure 5. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month).  
WY0101, 20+ upland sites.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
				5	30	40	20	5			

### Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Lb/Acre)	Foliar Cover (%)
<b>Grass/Grasslike</b>					
1				425–595	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	425–595	–
2				255–425	
	Idaho fescue	FEID	<i>Festuca idahoensis</i>	255–425	–
3				170–340	
	spike trisetum	TRSP2	<i>Trisetum spicatum</i>	170–340	–
4				170–340	
	spike fescue	LEK12	<i>Leucopoa kingii</i>	170–340	–
5				85–170	
	slender wheatgrass	ELTR7	<i>Elymus trachycaulus</i>	85–170	–
6				170–340	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0–85	–
	Letterman's needlegrass	ACLE9	<i>Achnatherum lettermanii</i>	0–85	–
	Columbia needlegrass	ACNE9	<i>Achnatherum nelsonii</i>	0–85	–
	western needlegrass	ACOC3	<i>Achnatherum occidentale</i>	0–85	–
	bentgrass	AGROS2	<i>Agrostis</i>	0–85	–

	mountain brome	BRMA4	<i>Bromus marginatus</i>	0-85	-
	California oatgrass	DACA3	<i>Danthonia californica</i>	0-85	-
	timber oatgrass	DAIN	<i>Danthonia intermedia</i>	0-85	-
	squirreltail	ELELE	<i>Elymus elymoides ssp. elymoides</i>	0-85	-
	thickspike wheatgrass	ELLAL	<i>Elymus lanceolatus ssp. lanceolatus</i>	0-85	-
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	0-85	-
	oniongrass	MEBU	<i>Melica bulbosa</i>	0-85	-
	mountain muhly	MUMO	<i>Muhlenbergia montana</i>	0-85	-
	alpine timothy	PHAL2	<i>Phleum alpinum</i>	0-85	-
	Cusick's bluegrass	POCU3	<i>Poa cusickii</i>	0-85	-
	muttongrass	POFE	<i>Poa fendleriana</i>	0-85	-
<b>Forb</b>					
7				85-170	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0-85	-
	common yarrow	ACMI2	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	0-85	-
	agosaris	AGOSE	<i>Agoseris</i>	0-85	-
	pussytoes	ANTEN	<i>Antennaria</i>	0-85	-
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	0-85	-
	balsamroot	BALSA	<i>Balsamorhiza</i>	0-85	-
	Indian paintbrush	CASTI2	<i>Castilleja</i>	0-85	-
	larkspur	DELPH	<i>Delphinium</i>	0-85	-
	fleabane	ERIGE2	<i>Erigeron</i>	0-85	-
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	0-85	-
	geranium	GERAN	<i>Geranium</i>	0-85	-
	sunflower	HELIA3	<i>Helianthus</i>	0-85	-
	flax	LINUM	<i>Linum</i>	0-85	-
	stoneseed	LITHO3	<i>Lithospermum</i>	0-85	-
	desertparsley	LOMAT	<i>Lomatium</i>	0-85	-
	lupine	LUPIN	<i>Lupinus</i>	0-85	-
	creeping barberry	MARE11	<i>Mahonia repens</i>	0-85	-
	bluebells	MERTE	<i>Mertensia</i>	0-85	-
	ragwort	PACKE	<i>Packera</i>	0-85	-
	phlox	PHLOX	<i>Phlox</i>	0-85	-
	stonecrop	SEDUM	<i>Sedum</i>	0-85	-
	ragwort	SENEC	<i>Senecio</i>	0-85	-
	aster	SYMPH4	<i>Symphyotrichum</i>	0-85	-
	clover	TRIFO	<i>Trifolium</i>	0-85	-
	American vetch	VIAM	<i>Vicia americana</i>	0-85	-
<b>Shrub/Vine</b>					
8				85-170	
	antelope bitterbrush	PUTR2	<i>Purshia tridentata</i>	85-170	-
9				85-255	
	Shrub, deciduous	2SD	<i>Shrub, deciduous</i>	0-85	-

	Shrub, evergreen	ZSE	<i>Shrub, evergreen</i>	0-85	-
	Tree, deciduous	2TD	<i>Tree, deciduous</i>	0-85	-
	Tree, evergreen	2TE	<i>Tree, evergreen</i>	0-85	-
	Saskatoon serviceberry	AMAL2	<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	0-85	-
	silver sagebrush	ARCA13	<i>Artemisia cana</i>	0-85	-
	threetip sagebrush	ARTR4	<i>Artemisia tripartita</i>	0-85	-
	mountain big sagebrush	ARTRV	<i>Artemisia tridentata ssp. vaseyana</i>	0-85	-
	snowbrush ceanothus	CEVE	<i>Ceanothus velutinus</i>	0-85	-
	chokecherry	PRVI	<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	0-85	-
	snowberry	SYMPH	<i>Symphoricarpos</i>	0-85	-

## Animal community

### Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations

Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush Plant Community (HCPC): Suitable thermal and escape cover for most wildlife is limited due to the low height and density of woody plants. However, sagebrush and bitterbrush provide important winter forage for mule deer and elk. Birds that would frequent this plant community include horned larks and golden eagles.

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 exhibits a low level of plant species diversity. In most cases it is not a desirable plant community to select as a wildlife habitat management objective.

### 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)

Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Bitterbrush (HCPC) 1300-2000 0.5

Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue 800-1600 0.25

Three-tip Sage 500-1200 0.1

\* - 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 D. Infiltration is low when soils are wet due to shallow depth to bedrock and/or impervious subsurface layer. Runoff potential for this site varies from high to moderate depending on soil depth, bedrock type (impervious vs. permeable), and ground cover (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. 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.

## Wood products

No appreciable wood products are present on the site.

## Inventory data references

Inventory Data References (narrative)

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, and USDA NRCS Soil Surveys from various counties.

Inventory Data References

Data Source Number of Records Sample Period State County

## Contributors

K. Clause

## 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
Contact for lead author	karen.clause@wy.usda.gov or 307-367-2257
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.

- 
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 0-25%.
- 
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 and large woody litter not expected to move.
- 
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 2 (interspaces) to 6 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 3.5 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 4-16% 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 65-80% grasses, 10% forbs, and 10-25% shrubs. Evenly distributed plant canopy (50-75%) and litter plus moderate infiltration rates result in minimal runoff. Basal cover is typically more than 10% and affects runoff on this site. Surface rock fragments of 5-30% provide stability to the site, but reduce infiltration.
- 
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:
- Sub-dominant:
- Other:

Additional: Mid-size, cool season bunchgrasses>> perennial shrubs=perennial forbs=cool season rhizomatous grasses>short cool season bunchgrasses

---

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.  

---
14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth ( in):** Litter ranges from 15-20% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 50-80% expected. Herbaceous litter depth typically ranges from 3-10mm. Woody litter can be up to a couple inches (4-6 cm).  

---
15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** English: 1300-2000 lb/ac (1700 lb/ac average); Metric 1456-2240 kg/ha (1904 kg/ha average).  

---
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 40% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Rabbitbrush, Sandberg bluegrass, buckwheat, yarrow, and phlox are common increasers. Thistles and annual weeds are common invasive species in disturbed sites.  

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

---