

Ecological site EX044B01B038 Droughty Steep (DrStp) LRU 01 Subset B

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

Indicators

- Number and extent of rills:** Rills are not present in the reference condition, however, may be visible on south facing steep slopes. If present rills will be short and inconspicuous.
- Presence of water flow patterns:** Water flow patterns are rare in the reference condition. If present, they are most likely to occur on south facing slopes when runoff has the potential to exceed infiltration.
- Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Pedestals are not evident in the reference condition
- Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground is less than 15 percent
- Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Gullies are not present in the reference condition
- Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Wind scoured or depositional areas are not evident in the reference condition.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Movement of fine herbaceous litter may occur within less than a foot from where it originated.
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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):** Soil Surface Stable with Stability Ratings of 4-6 (both under canopy and bare). Small patches of dense sagebrush canopy may exhibit lower stability ratings. Abiotic crusts and or root mats may be present. The A horizon is 4-5 inches thick.
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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Soil Structure at the surface is typically strong to medium fine granular. The A horizon should be 4-5 inches thick with color, when wet, typically ranging in Value of 4 or less and Chroma of 2 or less. Local geology may affect color in which it is important to reference the Official Series Description (OSD).
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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Evenly distributed across the site, bunchgrasses improve infiltration while rhizomatous grass protects the surface from runoff forces. The Droughty Steep ecological site is well drained and has a high infiltration rate. An even distribution of mid stature bunchgrasses, cool season shortgrass, cool season rhizomatous grasses, forbs, shrubs, and rarely tall shrubs/tree
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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):** Not 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: Mid-statured, cool season, perennial bunchgrasses (Primarily bluebunch wheatgrass, rough fescue, green needlegrass)
- Sub-dominant: perennial shortgrasses and grasslikes > rhizomatous grasses > shrubs ≥ forbs ≥ subshrubs
- Other:
- Additional:
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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Mortality in herbaceous species is not evident. Species with bunch growth forms may have some natural mortality in centers.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Total litter cover ranges from 35 to 45%. Most litter is irregularly distributed on the soil surface and is not at a measurable depth.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-**

production): Average annual production is 1175 pounds per acre (lbs/ac) or 1317 kilograms per hectare (kg/ha)

Low: 780 lbs/ac or 874 kg/ha

High 1550 lbs/ac or 1737 kg/ha

Production varies based on effective precipitation and natural variability of soil properties for this ecological site.

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: Potential invasive (including noxious) species (native and non-native). Invasive species on this ecological site include (but not limited to) annual brome spp., spotted knapweed, yellow toadflax, leafy spurge, ventenata, dandelion, etc.

Native species such as rocky mtn juniper, ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, broom snakeweed, rabbitbrush, blue grama, Sandberg's bluegrass, etc. when their populations are significant enough to affect ecological function, indicate site condition departure.

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** In the reference condition, all plants are vigorous enough for reproduction either by seed or rhizomes in order to balance natural mortality with species recruitment. Density of plants indicates that plants reproduce at level sufficient to fill available resource.
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