Ecological site R046XN589MT
Shallow Clay (SwC) RRU 46-N 13-16 PZ

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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

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Slopes most common on this site are between 15–35% and with at least 85% of the soil surface well-covered, rills, if evident will be rare, but may occur in bare areas after extreme convection storms – rills in this case would be narrow and less than 10 feet in length.

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2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Will be evident on this site with the steeper slopes, and with areas of bare ground, there may be areas which show accumulations of litter due to water movement, even after minor storm events.

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3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Wind erosion will be rare on this site, but water erosion on the steeper slopes may have plants that could have pedestals and terracettes which could be 0.5 inch in height at the top of the slope and 1.0 inch towards the bottom of the slope.

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4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground should be 15% or less on this site.

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5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Current gully erosion will not be evident on this site, but there may be gullies which have “healed” from the distant past.

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6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Appearance or evidence of these erosional features or the landscape would not be present on this site.

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7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Litter movement will be minimal on the gradual slopes, however on the steeper slopes there will be evidence of litter movement (i.e. debris dams) which may travel up to 10 feet.

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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):** Resistance to erosion will be high with soil stability values of 5 or 6; areas of bare soil on this site may have values between 1 and 4 under plant canopy.

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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Soil surface structure is blocky; A horizon depth is 2 – 4 ”.

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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Dominance of taller, deep rooted bunchgrasses will maximize infiltration and minimize runoff throughout the site.

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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):** Will not be present generally, but there may be areas that have “healed” from former bison trails and wallows as well as more current livestock trails which could have a compaction layer below the soil surface.

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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: Cool season, taller bunchgrasses (bluebunch wheatgrass, rough fescue)

    Sub-dominant: cool season mid grasses (Idaho fescue) > cool season rhizomatous grasses (western wheatgrass) = perennial forbs > cool season short grasses (Sandberg bluegrass) = perennial forbs > shrubs = warm season shortgrass (blue grama) = sedges

    Other:

    Additional:

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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Will be low for all functional groups in a given year. Prolonged droughts which last more than 3 years may show increases in mortality and decadence for all plant groups.

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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Moderate litter cover that tends to be thin in depth.

15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 1100 - 1400 #/acre. This would be the expected production for the reference state during adequate moisture years. 1300 pounds would be the expected production in a 15 inch precipitation zone.

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:** Blue grama, field brome, a variety of annual or biennial weedy forbs, fringed sagewort, broom snakeweed, curlycup gumweed, prickly pear cactus, cheatgrass.

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** During adequate moisture years bunchgrasses will generally produce seeds, however the cool season rhizomatous grasses may not necessarily produce seed even with adequate moisture.