USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Ecological site R052XN168MT
Silty-Steep (SiStp) 10-14" p.z.

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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.

Author(s)/participant(s)	Siddoway/Bandy
Contact for lead author	Great Falls Area Office, Great Falls, MT Reference site used? No
Date	04/19/2005
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 15–45% and with at least 90% 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 5 feet in length.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Will be rare, generally, on this site, but with the steeper slopes, and up to 10% bare ground, there may be areas which show accumulations of litter due to water movement, especially after severe storms.

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

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground should be 10% or less on this site.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Gully erosion will not be evident on this site.

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):** Because the site is dominated by the taller bunchgrasses, litter size will reflect the height and diameter of the reproductive culms and leaves of these grasses as well as the lesser dominate mid-size grasses.

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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 under plant canopies; areas of bare soil on this site may have values between 1 and 4 if not 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 granular; A horizon depth is 1 – 3".

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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:

    Sub-dominant:

    Other:

    Additional: Cool season, taller grasses (Bluebunch wheatgrass) >> cool season mid-grasses (Needleandthread) = cool season rhizomatous grasses (Western wheatgrass) > cool season short grasses (Sandberg bluegrass) = perennial forbs > warm season shortgrass (Blue grama) = shrubs.

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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):**

15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 850 - 1450 #/acre. This would be the expected production for the reference state during adequate moisture years. 1200 pounds would be the expected production in a 12 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:** Dense clubmoss, blue grama, Red threeawn, Japanese brome, a variety of annual or biennial weedy forbs, fringed sagewort, broom snakeweed, 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.