

Ecological site R069XY026CO Sandy Plains

Last updated: 9/07/2023
Accessed: 04/29/2024

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)	Ben Berlinger, Kimberly Diller, Daniel Nosal
Contact for lead author	Ben Berlinger, Area Rangeland Management Specialist, La Junta, CO,
Date	01/12/2005
Approved by	Rachel E. Murph, State Rangeland Management Specialist
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** None

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Typically none. If present, water flow patterns are broken, irregular in appearance or discontinuous with numerous debris dams or vegetative barriers, usually following intense rainfall events.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** None.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Five (5) percent or less bare ground, with bare patches ranging from 3-5 inches in diameter. Prolonged drought, or wildfire events causes bare ground to increase upwards to 15-20 percent with bare patches ranging from 8-12 inches in diameter.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** None

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Litter should be uniformly distributed with little movement.
-
8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Stability class rating is anticipated to be 4-5 in interspaces at soil surface.
-
9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Average SOM ranges from 1-3 percent. Soils are very deep, light brownish gray, weak, fine crumb structure at a 0-4 inch depth.
-
10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Raindrop impact is reduced by the diverse grass, forb, shrub functional/structural groups and root structure. This slows overland flow and provides increased time for infiltration to occur. Extended drought, wildfire or both may reduce basal density, canopy cover, and litter amounts (primarily from tall, warm-season bunch and rhizomatous grasses), resulting in decreased infiltration and increased runoff on steep slopes following intense rainfall events.
-
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: Warm-season short bunchgrass >
- Sub-dominant: Warm-season tall bunchgrass > warm-season tall rhizomatous > cool-season mid bunch = warm-season mid bunch > shrubs >
- Other: Leguminous forbs = warm-season forbs > cool-season forbs > cool-season mid rhizomatous > warm-season mid rhizomatous
- Additional:
-
13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Typically minimal. Expect slight short- and mid bunchgrass and shrub mortality/decadence during and following drought.
-
14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter cover during and following drought can range from 15-25 percent, and 5-15 percent following wildfire.
-
15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 950 lbs./ac. low precipitation years; 1,500 lbs./ac. average precipitation years; 2,000 lbs./ac. high precipitation years. After extended drought or the first growing season following wildfire, production may be significantly

reduced by 300 – 600 lbs./ac.

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: Invasive plants should not occur in reference plant community. Following fire or extended drought, cheatgrass, Russian thistle, and burningbush may invade assuming a seed source is available.
-
17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** The only limitations are weather-related, wildfire, and natural disease that may temporarily reduce reproductive capability.
-