

## Ecological site R083AY010TX Vega

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### 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.

### MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 083A–Northern Rio Grande Plain

This area is entirely in Texas and south of San Antonio. It makes up about 11,115 square miles (28,805 square kilometers). The towns of Uvalde, Cotulla, and Hondo are in the western part of the area, and Beeville, Goliad, and Kenedy are in the eastern part. The town of Alice is just outside the southern edge of the area. Interstate Highways 35 and 37 cross this area. This area is comprised of inland, dissected coastal plains.

### Classification relationships

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2006.  
-Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 83A

### Ecological site concept

Sites have deep sands, high levels of calcium carbonates, and are prone to flooding.

### Associated sites

R083AY022TX	Loamy Sand
R083AY023TX	Sandy Loam
R083AY024TX	Tight Sandy Loam

### Similar sites

R083BY010TX	Vega
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Trichloris</i> (2) <i>Setaria vulpiseta</i>

### Physiographic features

These are nearly flat soils found in river valleys. Slopes range from 0 to 1 percent and occasionally flood. Due to the sandy nature of the soil, flooding is not lengthy. This area is comprised of inland, dissected coastal plains.

**Table 2. Representative physiographic features**

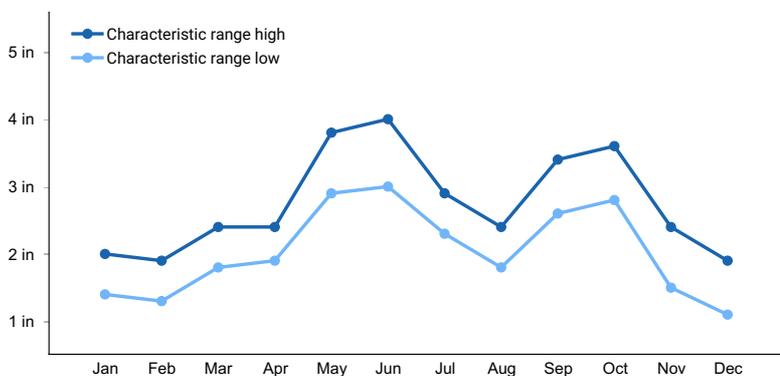
Landforms	(1) River valley > Flood plain (2) Coastal plain > Flood plain
Runoff class	Negligible
Flooding duration	Extremely brief (0.1 to 4 hours) to very brief (4 to 48 hours)
Flooding frequency	Occasional
Elevation	200–1,000 ft
Slope	0–1%
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

**Climatic features**

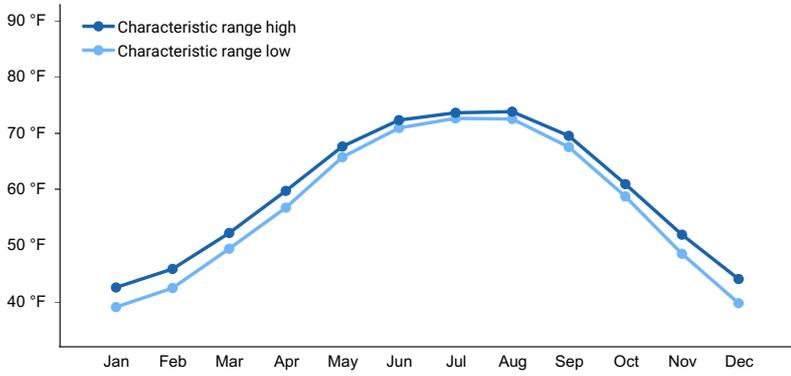
MLRA 83A is subtropical, subhumid on the western boundary and subtropical humid on the eastern boundary. Winters are dry and mild and the summers are hot and humid. Tropical maritime air masses predominate throughout spring, summer, and fall. Modified polar air masses exert considerable influence during winter, creating a continental climate characterized by large variations in temperature. Average precipitation for MLRA 83A is 20 inches on the western boundary and 35 inches on the eastern boundary. Peak rainfall, because of rain showers, occurs late in spring and a secondary peak occurs early in fall. Heavy thunderstorm activities increase in April, May, and June. July is hot and dry with little weather variations. Rainfall increases again in late August and September as tropical disturbances increase and become more frequent. Tropical air masses from the Gulf of Mexico dominate during the spring, summer, and fall. Prevailing winds are southerly to southeasterly throughout the year except in December when winds are predominately northerly.

**Table 3. Representative climatic features**

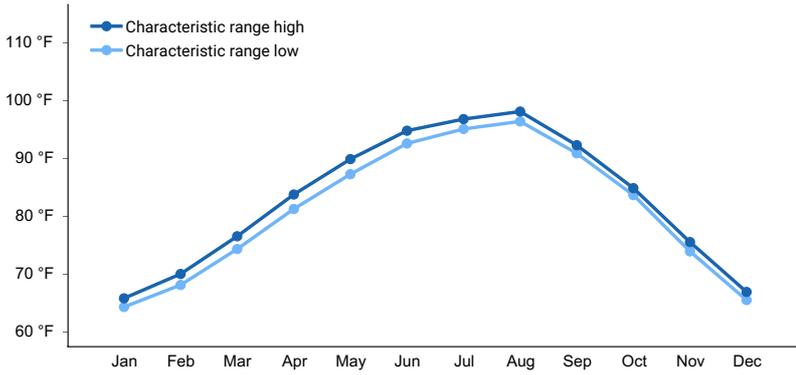
Frost-free period (characteristic range)	223-251 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	263-365 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	25-32 in
Frost-free period (actual range)	208-263 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	254-365 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	24-37 in
Frost-free period (average)	235 days
Freeze-free period (average)	314 days
Precipitation total (average)	29 in



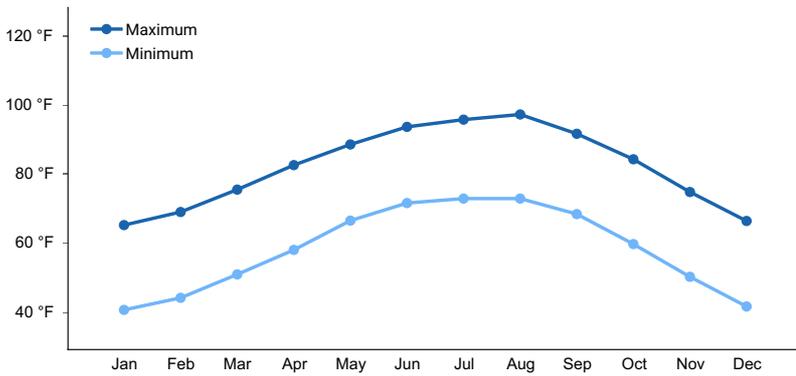
**Figure 1. Monthly precipitation range**



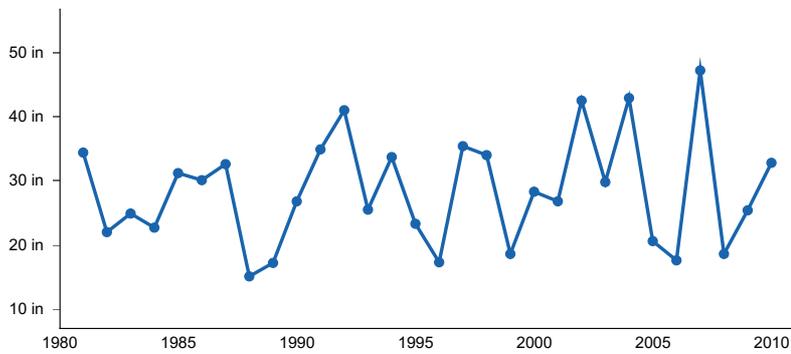
**Figure 2. Monthly minimum temperature range**



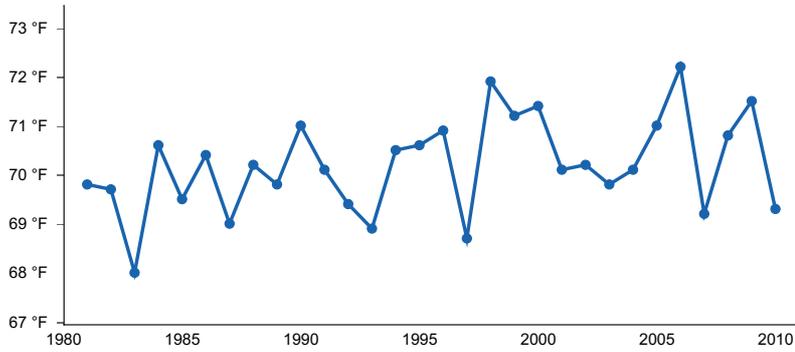
**Figure 3. Monthly maximum temperature range**



**Figure 4. Monthly average minimum and maximum temperature**



**Figure 5. Annual precipitation pattern**



**Figure 6. Annual average temperature pattern**

### Climate stations used

- (1) BEEVILLE 5 NE [USC00410639], Beeville, TX
- (2) GOLIAD [USC00413618], Goliad, TX
- (3) CARRIZO SPRINGS 3W [USC00411486], Carrizo Springs, TX
- (4) CUERO [USC00412173], Cuero, TX
- (5) FOWLERTON [USC00413299], Fowlerton, TX
- (6) HONDO [USC00414254], Hondo, TX
- (7) KARNES CITY 2N [USC00414696], Karnes City, TX
- (8) MATHIS 4 SSW [USC00415661], Mathis, TX
- (9) NIXON [USC00416368], Stockdale, TX
- (10) POTEET [USC00417215], Poteet, TX
- (11) UVALDE 3 SW [USC00419268], Uvalde, TX
- (12) CHARLOTTE 5 NNW [USC00411663], Charlotte, TX
- (13) CROSS [USC00412125], Tilden, TX
- (14) PEARSALL [USC00416879], Pearsall, TX
- (15) TILDEN 4 SSE [USC00419031], Tilden, TX
- (16) CHEAPSIDE [USC00411671], Gonzales, TX
- (17) DILLEY [USC00412458], Dilley, TX
- (18) FLORESVILLE [USC00413201], Floresville, TX
- (19) LYTLE 3W [USC00415454], Natalia, TX
- (20) PLEASANTON [USC00417111], Pleasanton, TX
- (21) HONDO MUNI AP [USW00012962], Hondo, TX
- (22) CALLIHAM [USC00411337], Calliham, TX

### Influencing water features

Sites occasionally flood but water permeates quickly due to their sandiness.

### Wetland description

N/A

### Soil features

The soils are very deep, somewhat excessively drained, rapidly permeable soils that formed in sandy alluvium derived from mixed sources. Zalla is the only series correlated to this site and is classified as a sandy, mixed, hyperthermic Aridic Ustifluvents. There is only one soil component correlated to this ecological site.

**Table 4. Representative soil features**

Parent material	(1) Alluvium–sedimentary rock
Surface texture	(1) Fine sand
Family particle size	(1) Sandy

Drainage class	Somewhat excessively drained
Permeability class	Moderately rapid
Soil depth	80 in
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (0-40in)	3 in
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-40in)	0-25%
Electrical conductivity (0-40in)	0-2 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-40in)	0
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-40in)	6.6-8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0-2%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0%

## Ecological dynamics

The Northern Rio Grande Plain MLRA was a disturbance-maintained system. Prior to European settlement (pre-1825), fire and grazing were the two primary forms of disturbance. Grazing by large herbivores included antelope, deer, and small herds of bison. The infrequent but intense, short-duration grazing by these species suppressed woody species and invigorated herbaceous species. The herbaceous savannah species adapted to fire and grazing disturbances by maintaining belowground tissues. Wright and Bailey (1982) report that there are no reliable records of fire frequency for the Rio Grande Plains because there are no trees to carry fire scars from which to estimate fire frequency. Because savannah grassland is typically of level or rolling topography, a natural fire frequency of three to seven years seems reasonable for this site.

Precipitation patterns are highly variable. Long-term droughts, occurring three to four times per century, cause shifts in species composition by causing die-off of seedlings, less drought-tolerant species, and some woody species. Droughts also reduce biomass production and create open space, which is colonized by opportunistic species when precipitation increases. Wet periods allow midgrasses to increase in dominance.

Historical accounts prior to 1800 identify grazing by herds of wild horses, followed by heavy grazing by sheep and cattle as settlement progressed. Grazing on early ranches changed natural graze-rest cycles to continuous grazing and stocking rates exceeded the carrying capacity. These shifts in grazing intensity and the removal of rest from the system reduced plant vigor for the most palatable species, which on this site were mid-grasses and palatable forbs. Shortgrasses and less palatable forbs began to dominate the site. This shift resulted in lower fuel loads, which reduced fire frequency and intensity. The reduction in fires resulted in an increase in size and density of woody species.

Today, primarily beef cattle graze rangeland and pastureland. However, horse numbers are increasing rapidly on small acreage properties in the region. There are some areas where dairy cattle, poultry, goats, and sheep are locally important. Whitetail deer, wild turkey, bobwhite quail, and dove are the major wildlife species, and hunting leases are a major source of income for many landowners in this area. Introduced pasture has been established on many acres of old cropland and in areas with deeper soils. Buffelgrass is the most common introduced plant on the site and to a lesser extent bermudagrass, guineagrass (*Urochloa maxima*), and kleingrass, which are more commonly used for hay. Cropland is found in the valleys, bottomlands, and deeper upland soils. Wheat (*Triticum* spp.), oats *Avena* spp.), forage and grain sorghum (*Sorghum* spp.), cotton (*Gossypium* spp.), and corn (*Zea mays*) are major crops in the region.

## State and transition model

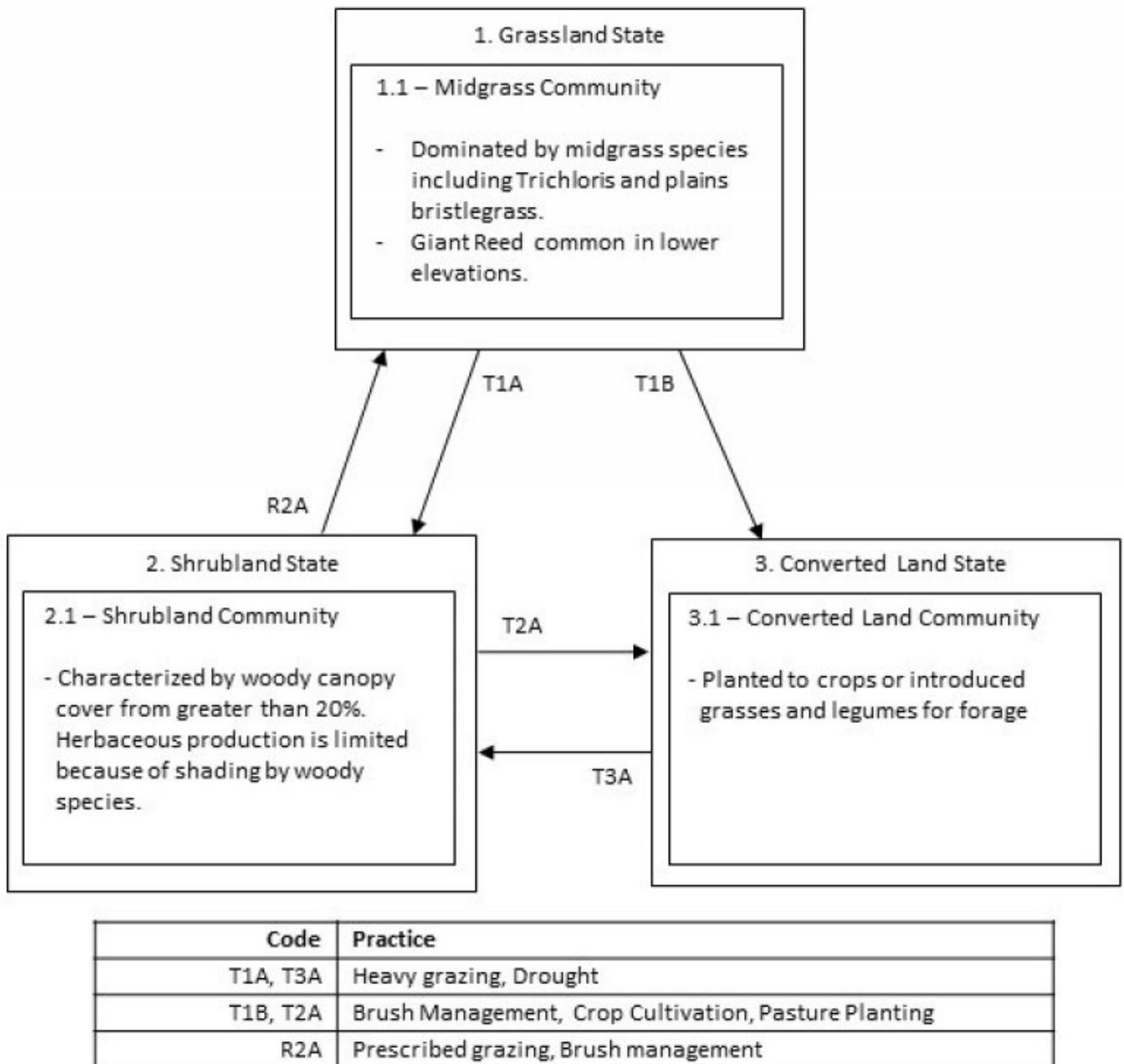


Figure 7. STM

### State 1 Grassland

#### Dominant plant species

- false Rhodes grass (*Trichloris*), grass
- plains bristlegrass (*Setaria vulpiseta*), grass

### Community 1.1 Midgrass

Vegetation consists of sparse bunches of trichloris (*Trichloris* spp.), plains bristlegrass (*Setaria vulpiseta*), hooded windmillgrass (*Chloris cucullata*), and grassbur (*Cenchrus* spp.). Higher elevations will contain scattered mesquite (*Prosopis* spp.) and lower elevations will have dense stands of giant reed (*Arundo donax*). Bare ground is common between plants due to the sandiness.

## **State 2 Shrubland**

### **Dominant plant species**

- mesquite (*Prosopis*), shrub

## **Community 2.1 Shrubland**

Heavy grazing and drought will cause woody species to increase. Mesquite and a variety of mixed brush will occupy the area. Woody cover greater than 20 percent begins to affect the already diminishing herbaceous production. Bare ground also increases.

## **State 3 Converted Land**

### **Dominant plant species**

- buffelgrass (*Pennisetum ciliare*), grass
- Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*), grass

## **Community 3.1 Converted Land**

Typically, rootplowing and raking is utilized to remove the woody vegetation. A seedbed is then prepared, and the area is planted into grass or crops. This site has historically been planted to buffelgrass, bermudagrass, or introduced bluestems. Now, because of the availability of seed, landowners can also replant with native species. To maintain this seeded state, herbicides must be used to control woody seedlings that invade as soon as the pasture is established. Not only is there a long-lived seed source of woody species, additional seeds are brought in by grazing animals and domestic livestock.

## **Transition T1A State 1 to 2**

Heavy continuous grazing and drought will transition this site into a Shrubland State (2). The site is characterized by greater than 20 percent woody canopy cover.

## **Transition T1B State 1 to 3**

Land managers may wish to use this site as pasture, or less commonly cropland. If woody species are present, brush management is necessary to remove trees and shrubs. Seedbed preparation and pasture planting are the final steps needed.

## **Restoration pathway R2A State 2 to 1**

Prescribed grazing and brush management are required to restore the community back to a Grassland State (1). Removal of woody species below 20 percent allows more light and nutrients to herbaceous species. Reducing grazing pressure will allow plants to regain vigor and re-establish.

## **Transition T2A State 2 to 3**

Land managers may wish to use this site as pasture, or less commonly cropland. Brush management, followed by seedbed preparation and pasture planting are needed to create a successful pasture.

## **Transition T3A**

### **State 3 to 2**

Without brush management, woody species will encroach and grow into the overstory. The site will transition to a Shrubland State (2) once the woody canopy cover is greater than 20 percent.

### **Additional community tables**

#### **Animal community**

As a historic tall/midgrass prairie, this site was occupied by bison, antelope, deer, quail, turkey, and dove. This site was also used by many species of grassland songbirds, migratory waterfowl, and coyotes. This site now provides forage for livestock and is still used by quail, dove, migratory waterfowl, grassland birds, coyotes, and deer.

Feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*) can be found on most ecological sites in Texas. Damage caused by feral hogs each year includes, crop damage by rutting up crops, destroyed fences, livestock watering areas, and predation on native wildlife. Feral hogs have few natural predators, thus allowing their population to grow to high numbers.

Wildlife habitat is a complex of many different plant communities and ecological sites across the landscape. Most animals use the landscape differently to find food, shelter, protection, and mates. Working on a conservation plan for the whole property, with a local professional, will help managers make the decisions that allow them to realize their goals for wildlife and livestock.

Grassland State (1): This state provides the maximum amount of forage for livestock such as cattle. It is also utilized by deer, quail and other birds as a source of food. When a site is in the reference plant community phase (1.1) it will also be used by some birds for nesting if other habitat requirements like thermal and escape cover are near.

Tree/Shrubland Complex (2): This state can be maintained to meet the habitat requirements of cattle and wildlife. Land managers can find a balance that meets their goals and allows them flexibility to manage for livestock and wildlife. Forbs for deer and birds like quail will be more plentiful in this state. There will also be more trees and shrubs to provide thermal and escape cover for birds as well as cover for deer.

Converted Land State (3): The quality of wildlife habitat this site will produce is extremely variable and is influenced greatly by the timing of rain events. This state is often manipulated to meet landowner goals. If livestock production is the main goal, it can be converted to pastureland. It can also be planted to a mix of grasses and forbs that will benefit both livestock and wildlife. A mix of forbs in the pasture could attract pollinators, birds and other types of wildlife. Food plots can also be planted to provide extra nutrition for deer.

### **Inventory data references**

Information presented was derived from the revised Range Site, literature, limited NRCS clipping data (417s), field observations, and personal contacts with range-trained personnel.

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## Approval

Bryan Christensen, 9/19/2023

## 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)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	04/26/2024
Approved by	Bryan Christensen
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

## Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:**

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2. **Presence of water flow patterns:**

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3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:**

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4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):**

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5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:**

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6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:**

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7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):**

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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):**

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9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):**

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10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:**

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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):**

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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:

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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):**

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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth ( in):**

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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):**

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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:

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17. Perennial plant reproductive capability:

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