USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ecological site R102AY007SD
Saline Lowland

Accessed: 05/19/2024

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.

Figure 1. Mapped extent

Areas shown in blue indicate the maximum mapped extent of this ecological site. Other ecological sites likely occur within the highlighted areas. It is also possible for this ecological site to occur outside of highlighted areas if detailed soil survey has not been completed or recently updated.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 102A–Rolling Till Prairie

For further information on this Ecological Site Description (ESD), view on South Dakota Electronic Field Office Technical Guide (EFOTG), contact the NRCS State Office in Huron, SD, or MLRA Soil Survey Office in Redfield, SD.

Classification relationships

Level IV Ecoregions of the Conterminous United States: 46e – Tewaukon Dead Ice Moraine, 46k – Prairie Coteau, 46l – Prairie Coteau Escarpment, 46m – Big Sioux Basin, 46o – Minnesota River Prairie, 47b – Des Moines Lobe, 48d – Lake Agassiz Plain, 51j – Alexandria Moraines and Detroit Lakes Outwash Plain.

Associated sites

R102AY004SD	**Wet Meadow**
R102AY036SD	**Saline Subirrigated**

Similar sites

R102AY006SD	**Limy Subirrigated** (R102AY006SD) – Saline Subirrigated [less prairie cordgrass, more big bluestem & Indiangrass]

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	(1) *Spartina pectinata* (2) *Spartina gracilis*

Physiographic features

This site occurs on nearly level flood plains, flats, or depressions.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Flat (2) Pothole (3) Flood plain
Flooding duration	Long (7 to 30 days)
Flooding frequency	None to frequent
Ponding duration	Very long (more than 30 days)
Ponding frequency	None to frequent
Elevation	305–610 m
Slope	0–1%
Ponding depth	0–30 cm
Water table depth	25–76 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

MLRA 102A is considered to have a continental climate – cold winters and relatively hot summers, low to moderate humidity, light rainfall, and much sunshine. Extremes in temperature may also abound. The climate is the result of this MLRA's location near the geographic center of North America. There are few natural barriers on the Northern Great Plains and air masses move freely across the plains and account for rapid changes in temperature.

Annual precipitation typically ranges from 21 to 27 inches per year. The average annual temperature is about 43°F. January is the coldest month with average temperatures ranging from about 5°F (Mahnomen 1 W, Minnesota (MN)), to about 14°F (Tracy, MN). July is the warmest month with temperatures averaging from about 69°F (Mahnomen 1 W, MN), to about 73°F (Tracy, MN). The range of normal average monthly temperatures between the coldest and warmest months is about 62°F. This large annual range attests to the continental nature of this area's climate. Hourly winds are estimated to average about 11 miles per hour (mph) annually, ranging from about 13 mph during the spring to about 10 mph during the summer. Daytime winds are generally stronger than nighttime and occasional strong storms may bring brief periods of high winds with gusts to more than 50 mph.

Growth of cool-season plants begins in early to mid-March, slowing or ceasing in late June. Warm-season plants begin growth about mid-May and continue to early or mid-September. Greenup of cool-season plants may occur in September and October when adequate soil moisture is present.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	152 days
Freeze-free period (average)	174 days

Precipitation total (average)	686 mm

Influencing water features

Soil features

The common features of soils in this site are the silty clay loam to clay textured subsoil and slopes of zero to one percent. The soils in this site are poorly drained and formed in alluvium or glaciolacustrine deposits. The silty clay to silty clay loam surface layer is typically 8 to 10 inches thick. The soils have a very slow infiltration rate. Areas within this site can become nearly barren due to the accumulation of sodium at the surface. Where vegetation is present, this site should show no evidence of rills, wind scoured areas, or pedestalled plants. The soil surface is stable and intact. Subsurface soil layers are nonrestrictive to water movement and root penetration. These soils are somewhat susceptible to water erosion. Slow permeability and salt accumulation strongly influences the soil-water-plant relationship.

Access Web Soil Survey (http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm) for specific local soils information.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Silty clay (2) Silty clay loam
Family particle size	(1) Clayey
Drainage class	Poorly drained
Permeability class	Very slow to slow
Soil depth	203 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0–3%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0–1%
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	10.16–17.78 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	5–30%
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	4–16 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0–5
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	6.6–8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0–5%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0–2%

Ecological dynamics

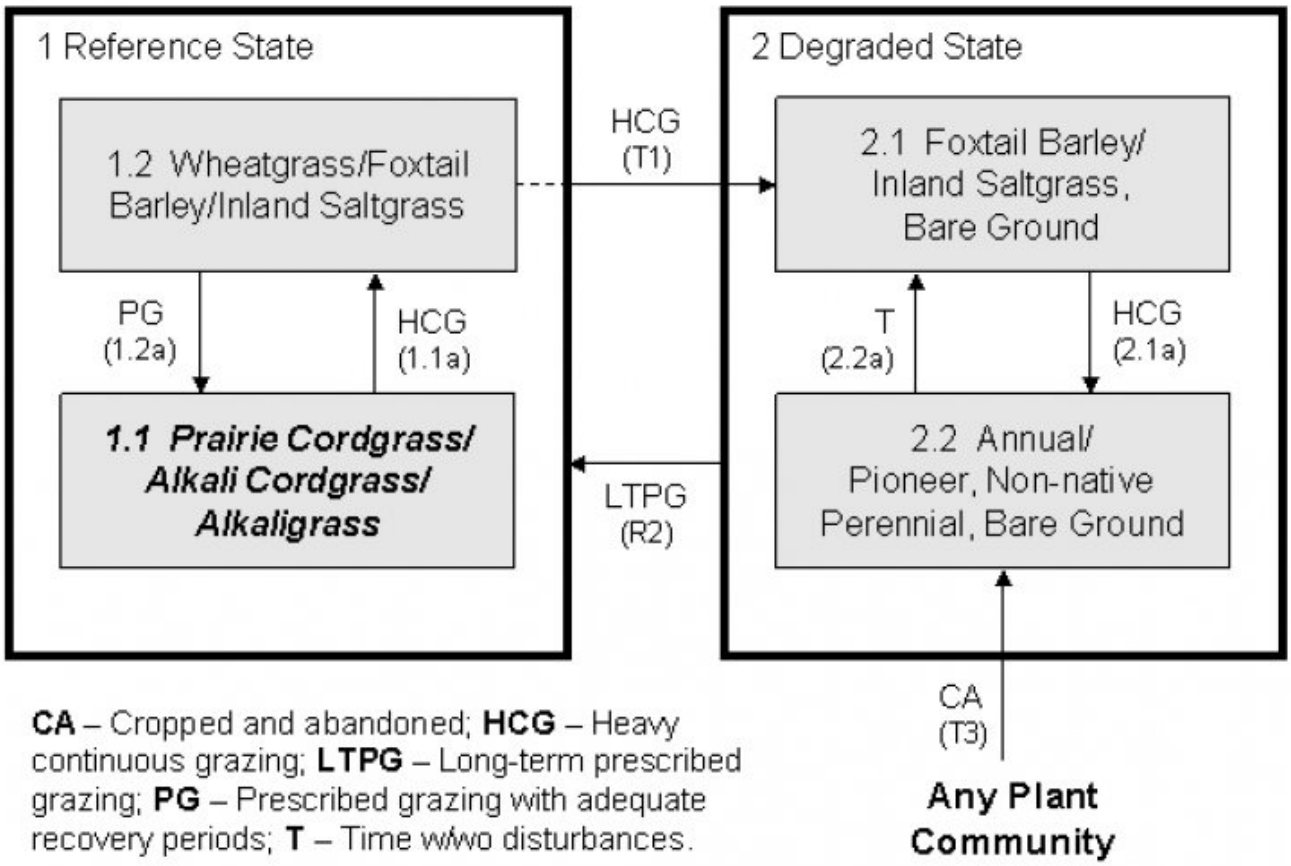
This site developed under Northern Great Plains climatic conditions, light to severe grazing by bison and other large herbivores, sporadic natural or man-caused wildfire (often of light intensities), and other biotic and abiotic factors that typically influence soil/site development. Changes will occur in the plant communities due to short-term weather variations, impacts of native and/or exotic plant and animal species, and management actions. While the following plant community descriptions describe more typical transitions that will occur, severe disturbances, such as periods of well below average precipitation, can cause significant shifts in plant communities and/or species composition.

As this site deteriorates, species such as inland saltgrass and foxtail barley increase and annual species may invade the site. Grasses such as alkali sacaton, western wheatgrass, slender wheatgrasses, and Nuttall's alkaligrass will decrease in frequency and production. The high sodium content of the soils greatly influences the plant species present. Plant vigor can vary on a year-to-year basis in relation to current precipitation amounts, which influences the translocation of salts in the soil profile. Typically, only salt tolerant plants are found on this site.

The Cordgrass/Wheatgrass/Alkaligrass Plant Community Phase is the plant community upon which interpretations are primarily based. This plant community has been determined by studying rangeland relic areas, areas protected from excessive disturbance, and areas under long-term rotational grazing regimes. Trends in plant community dynamics ranging from heavily grazed to lightly grazed areas, seasonal use pastures, and historical accounts also have been used. Plant communities, states, transitional pathways, and thresholds have been determined through similar studies and experience.

The following is a diagram that illustrates the common plant community phases that can occur on the site and the transition pathways between communities. These are the most common plant community phases based on current knowledge and experience and changes may be made as more data is collected. Narratives following the diagram contain more detail pertaining to the ecological processes.

State and transition model



State 1
Reference

This state represents the natural range of variability that dominates the dynamics of this ecological site (ES). This state is codominated by cool- and warm-season grasses. Pre-European settlement, the primary disturbance mechanisms for this site in the reference condition included frequent fire and grazing by large herding ungulates.

Timing of fires and grazing coupled with weather events dictated the dynamics that occurred within the natural range of variability. Today the primary disturbance is from a lack of fire and concentrated livestock grazing. Grasses that are desirable for livestock and wildlife can decline and a corresponding increase in less desirable grasses will occur.

Community 1.1
Prairie Cordgrass/Alkali Cordgrass/Alkaligrass Plant Community Phase

This community evolved with grazing by large herbivores, occasional prairie fires, and periodic flooding events and can be found on areas that are properly managed with grazing and/or prescribed burning, and sometimes on areas receiving occasional short periods of rest. The potential vegetation is about 85 percent grasses and grass-like plants and 15 percent forbs. The major grasses include prairie cordgrass, alkali cordgrass, Nuttall's alkaligrass, and western wheatgrass. Other grass and grass-like species present include slender wheatgrass, inland saltgrass, switchgrass, sedge, and foxtail barley. Salt tolerant forbs such as alkali plantain, western dock, and seepweed are common. Interpretations are based primarily on this plant community phase. This community phase is diverse, stable, productive, and well adapted to both saline soils and the Northern Great Plains climatic conditions. Community dynamics, nutrient cycle, water cycle, and energy flow are functioning properly. Litter is properly distributed with very little movement offsite and natural plant mortality is very low. This community is resistant to many disturbances except continuous grazing, tillage, and/or development into urban or other uses. The diversity in plant species allows for both the fluctuation of flooding, as well as, large variations in climate.

Table 5. Annual production by plant type

Plant Type	Low (Kg/Hectare)	Representative Value (Kg/Hectare)	High (Kg/Hectare)
Grass/Grasslike	3598	4439	5167
Forb	213	493	885
Total	**3811**	**4932**	**6052**

Figure 5. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). SD0208, Rolling Till Prairie, lowland cool-season/warm-season codominant.. Cool-season, warm-season codominant, lowland..

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	4	11	19	23	20	12	6	5	0	0

Community 1.2
Wheatgrass/Foxtail Barley/Inland Saltgrass Plant Community Phase

This community develops with heavy continuous grazing with lack of adequate recovery periods during the growing season, and/or annual, early spring seasonal grazing. Lack of litter and reduced plant heights result in higher soil temperatures, poor water infiltration rates, high evapotranspiration, and increased percolation of the high water table, which increases salt concentrations on the surface. This gives inland saltgrass and other salt tolerant species a competitive advantage over less tolerant species. Nuttall's alkaligrass, slender wheatgrass, prairie cordgrass, and alkali cordgrass have decreased while western wheatgrass and inland saltgrass will initially increase in composition. Alkali muhly, foxtail barley, silverleaf cinquefoil, dock, and plantain will also increase in composition. As long as the herbaceous component remains intact, the plant community tends to be resilient. However, species composition can be further altered through long-term heavy continuous grazing. With loss of Nuttall alkaligrass, cordgrasses, slender wheatgrass, and much of the western wheatgrass, inland saltgrass, and foxtail barley will eventually become the dominant species. This plant community is relatively stable and well adapted to increased salinity. Plant vigor, litter, plant density, and production have decreased. The biological integrity, water, and nutrient cycles of this plant community are becoming impaired.

Table 6. Annual production by plant type

Plant Type	Low (Kg/Hectare)	Representative Value (Kg/Hectare)	High (Kg/Hectare)
Grass/Grasslike	2528	3236	3822
Forb	163	463	885
Total	**2691**	**3699**	**4707**

Figure 7. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). SD0207, Rolling Till Prairie, cool-season dominant, warm-season subdominant.. Cool-season dominant, warm-season subdominant, lowland..

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	5	13	20	25	18	11	5	3	0	0

Pathway 1.1a
Community 1.1 to 1.2

Heavy continuous grazing (stocking rates well above capacity for extended portions of the growing season without adequate recovery) or heavy seasonal grazing (stocking rates well above capacity for a portion of the growing season, but at the same time of year every year and without adequate recovery) will shift the plant community phase to the 1.2 Wheatgrass/Foxtail Barley/Inland Saltgrass Plant Community Phase. In pre-European times, this transition would have occurred following multiple disturbances such as extended periods of below average precipitation followed by heavy concentrations of large ungulate herbivory.

Pathway 1.2a
Community 1.2 to 1.1

Prescribed grazing (alternating season of use and providing adequate recovery periods) or periodic light to moderate grazing possibly including periodic rest will convert this plant community to the 1.1 Prairie Cordgrass/Alkali Cordgrass/Alkaligrass Plant Community Phase.

Conservation practices

Prescribed Grazing

State 2
Degraded

This State is characterized by the dominance of the shorter-statured, more saline tolerant species such as foxtail barley and inland saltgrass, the increase in bare ground, and the increased presence of salt accumulations on the soil surface. Infiltration is reduced, which allows the moisture and the salts carried by the moisture to be wicked up to the soil surface. The short-statured and shallow rooted species are more capable of withstanding the higher concentrations of salts in the soil surface. As the disturbance level increases, plant density decreases even more, giving way to annual species and invasive perennial species, as well as, a further increase in bare ground.

Community 2.1
Foxtail Barley/Inland Saltgrass, Bare Ground Plant Community Phase

This plant community developed with heavy continuous season-long grazing where adequate recovery periods between grazing events were not allowed. Patches of inland saltgrass sod are typical and foxtail barley is well distributed throughout the community. Tall warm-season grasses are nearly absent, and slender wheatgrass and western wheatgrass have been greatly reduced and may persist in remnant amounts, reduced in vigor. Bare ground may develop in micro lows where salt concentrations are highest. A white salt crust may form on the soil surface. The forb component is comprised of salt tolerant species such as Pursh seepweed and silverleaf cinquefoil. This plant community is resistant to change due to the grazing tolerance of inland saltgrass and increased surface salts. A significant amount of production and diversity has been lost when compared to community phase 1.1. Loss of key warm-season grasses and increased bare ground has negatively impacted energy flow and nutrient cycling. Water

infiltration is reduced significantly due to the shallow rooting depth of inland saltgrass and increased bare ground.

Table 7. Annual production by plant type

Plant Type	Low (Kg/Hectare)	Representative Value (Kg/Hectare)	High (Kg/Hectare)
Grass/Grasslike	1132	1973	2477
Forb	213	493	885
Total	**1345**	**2466**	**3362**

Figure 9. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). SD0208, Rolling Till Prairie, lowland cool-season/warm-season codominant.. Cool-season, warm-season codominant, lowland..

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	4	11	19	23	20	12	6	5	0	0

Community 2.2
Annual/Pioneer, Non-Native Perennial, Bare Ground Plant Community Phase

This plant community developed under continuous heavy grazing or other excessive disturbances. The potential plant community is made up of approximately 40 to 80 percent grasses and grass-like species and 20 to 60 percent forbs. The species present in this phase are highly variable, but often include nonnative invasive and/or early seral species. Plant diversity is low (plant richness may be high, but areas are often dominated by a few species). The ecological processes are difficult to restore because of the loss of plant diversity and overall soil disturbance. Soil erosion is potentially very high because of the bare ground and shallow rooted herbaceous plant community. Water runoff will increase and infiltration will decrease due to animal related soil compaction and loss of root mass due to low plant diversity and vigor. This plant community will require significant economic inputs and time to move towards another plant community. This movement is highly variable in its succession. This is due to the loss of diversity (including the loss of the seed bank), within the existing plant community and the plant communities on adjacent sites.

Pathway 2.1a
Community 2.1 to 2.2

Heavy continuous grazing (stocking rates well above capacity for extended portions of the growing season without adequate recovery) or heavy seasonal grazing (stocking rates well above capacity for a portion of the growing season but at the same time of year every year and without adequate recovery) will shift the plant community phase to the 2.2 Annual/Pioneer, Non-Native Perennial, Bare Ground Plant Community Phase.

Pathway 2.2a
Community 2.2 to 2.1

This community pathway occurs with the passage of time as successional processes take place and perennial plants gradually begin to establish on the site again. This pathway will lead to the 2.1 Foxtail Barley/Inland Saltgrass, Bare Ground Plant Community Phase.

Transition T1
State 1 to 2

Heavy continuous grazing which includes herbivory at moderate to heavy levels at the same time of year each year without adequate recovery periods, or a combination of disturbances such as extended periods of below average precipitation coupled with periodic or chronic heavy grazing will shift this community to the 2.1 Foxtail Barley/Inland Saltgrass, Bare Ground Plant Community Phase within the Degraded State (State 2).

Transition T3
State 1 to 2

Encroachment of non-native invasive/noxious species, abandonment of cropping, or seeding of introduced and/or native improved varieties of forage species may lead this plant community phase over a threshold to the Degraded State (State 2) and more specifically to the 2.2 Annual/Pioneer, Non-native Perennial, Bare Ground Plant Community Phase. In the case of a seeding, refer to the corresponding Forage Suitability Group (FSG) description for adapted species and expected production (production estimates in the FSG description may be unrealistically high due to the degraded condition of the site at this phase).

Transition T3
State 1 to 2

Encroachment of non-native invasive/noxious species, abandonment of cropping, or seeding of introduced and/or native improved varieties of forage species may lead this plant community phase over a threshold to the Degraded State (State 2) and more specifically to the 2.2 Annual/Pioneer, Non-native Perennial, Bare Ground Plant Community Phase. In the case of a seeding, refer to the corresponding Forage Suitability Group (FSG) description for adapted species and expected production (production estimates in the FSG description may be unrealistically high due to the degraded condition of the site at this phase).

Restoration pathway R2
State 2 to 1

Long-term prescribed grazing (moderate stocking levels coupled with adequate recovery periods, or other grazing systems such as high-density, low-frequency intended to treat specific species dominance, or periodic light to moderate stocking levels possibly including periodic rest) may lead this plant community phase over a threshold to the Reference State (State 1). Wetland restoration techniques may be necessary to restore biotic integrity and plant diversity and productivity.

Conservation practices

Prescribed Grazing

Additional community tables

Table 8. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Kg/Hectare)	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	**Warm-season Grasses**			740–2219	
	alkali cordgrass	SPGR	*Spartina gracilis*	247–1480	–
	prairie cordgrass	SPPE	*Spartina pectinata*	247–1480	–
	switchgrass	PAVI2	*Panicum virgatum*	0–493	–
2	**Wheatgrass**			493–986	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	*Pascopyrum smithii*	247–740	–
	slender wheatgrass	ELTR7	*Elymus trachycaulus*	247–493	–
3	**Cool-season Grasses**			493–1233	
	Nuttall's alkaligrass	PUNU2	*Puccinellia nuttalliana*	493–1233	–
	foxtail barley	HOJU	*Hordeum jubatum*	49–247	–
	plains bluegrass	POAR3	*Poa arida*	49–247	–
4	**Short Warm-season Grasses**			148–493	
	saltgrass	DISP	*Distichlis spicata*	99–493	–
	scratchgrass	MUAS	*Muhlenbergia asperifolia*	49–148	–
5	**Grass-likes**			247–740	
	sedge	CAREX	*Carex*	99–493	–
	spikerush	ELEOC	*Eleocharis*	49–247	–
	rush	JUNCU	*Juncus*	49–247	–
	Grass-like (not a true grass)	2GL	*Grass-like (not a true grass)*	0–148	–
Forb					
6	**Forbs**			247–740	
	Forb, native	2FN	*Forb, native*	49–197	–
	aster	ASTER	*Aster*	49–148	–
	annual marsh elder	IVAN2	*Iva annua*	0–148	–
	povertyweed	IVAX	*Iva axillaris*	0–99	–
	Pursh seepweed	SUCA2	*Suaeda calceoliformis*	49–99	–
	redwool plantain	PLER	*Plantago eriopoda*	49–99	–
	silver cinquefoil	POAR8	*Potentilla argentea*	49–99	–
	western dock	RUAQ	*Rumex aquaticus*	49–99	–
	Cuman ragweed	AMPS	*Ambrosia psilostachya*	49–99	–
	lambsquarters	CHAL7	*Chenopodium album*	49–99	–
	mealy goosefoot	CHIN2	*Chenopodium incanum*	49–99	–
	Flodman's thistle	CIFL	*Cirsium flodmanii*	0–99	–
	scouringrush horsetail	EQHY	*Equisetum hyemale*	0–49	–
	silverscale saltbush	ATAR2	*Atriplex argentea*	0–49	–
	red swampfire	SARU	*Salicornia rubra*	0–49	–
	rush skeletonplant	LYJU	*Lygodesmia juncea*	0–49	–

Table 9. Community 1.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Kg/Hectare)	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	**Warm-season Grasses**			0–370	
	alkali cordgrass	SPGR	*Spartina gracilis*	0–370	–
	prairie cordgrass	SPPE	*Spartina pectinata*	0–370	–
2	**Wheatgrass**			555–1110	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	*Pascopyrum smithii*	370–925	–
	slender wheatgrass	ELTR7	*Elymus trachycaulus*	74–370	–
3	**Cool-season Grasses**			185–925	
	foxtail barley	HOJU	*Hordeum jubatum*	185–740	–
	Nuttall's alkaligrass	PUNU2	*Puccinellia nuttalliana*	0–370	–
	plains bluegrass	POAR3	*Poa arida*	37–185	–
4	**Short Warm-season Grasses**			185–740	
	saltgrass	DISP	*Distichlis spicata*	185–740	–
	scratchgrass	MUAS	*Muhlenbergia asperifolia*	37–222	–
5	**Grass-likes**			185–555	
	spikerush	ELEOC	*Eleocharis*	37–296	–
	sedge	CAREX	*Carex*	37–259	–
	rush	JUNCU	*Juncus*	37–185	–
	Grass-like (not a true grass)	2GL	*Grass-like (not a true grass)*	0–111	–
Forb					
6	**Forbs**			185–740	
	Forb, introduced	2FI	*Forb, introduced*	0–185	–
	Forb, native	2FN	*Forb, native*	37–185	–
	lambsquarters	CHAL7	*Chenopodium album*	37–111	–
	aster	ASTER	*Aster*	37–111	–
	Pursh seepweed	SUCA2	*Suaeda calceoliformis*	37–111	–
	cocklebur	XANTH2	*Xanthium*	0–74	–
	curly dock	RUCR	*Rumex crispus*	0–74	–
	burningbush	BASC5	*Bassia scoparia*	0–74	–
	scouringrush horsetail	EQHY	*Equisetum hyemale*	0–74	–
	povertyweed	IVAX	*Iva axillaris*	0–74	–
	prickly lettuce	LASE	*Lactuca serriola*	0–74	–
	redwool plantain	PLER	*Plantago eriopoda*	37–74	–
	mealy goosefoot	CHIN2	*Chenopodium incanum*	37–74	–
	Cuman ragweed	AMPS	*Ambrosia psilostachya*	37–74	–
	redroot amaranth	AMRE	*Amaranthus retroflexus*	0–74	–
	Flodman's thistle	CIFL	*Cirsium flodmanii*	0–37	–
	silver cinquefoil	POAR8	*Potentilla argentea*	0–37	–
	western dock	RUAQ	*Rumex aquaticus*	0–37	–
	annual marsh elder	IVAN2	*Iva annua*	0–37	–
	silverscale saltbush	ATAR2	*Atriplex argentea*	0–37	–
	red swampfire	SARU	*Salicornia rubra*	0–37	–

Table 10. Community 2.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Kg/Hectare)	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	**Wheatgrass**			0–247	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	*Pascopyrum smithii*	0–247	–
2	**Cool-season Grasses**			370–1110	
	foxtail barley	HOJU	*Hordeum jubatum*	370–1110	–
	plains bluegrass	POAR3	*Poa arida*	0–123	–
	Nuttall's alkaligrass	PUNU2	*Puccinellia nuttalliana*	0–123	–
3	**Short Warm-season Grasses**			247–740	
	saltgrass	DISP	*Distichlis spicata*	247–740	–
	scratchgrass	MUAS	*Muhlenbergia asperifolia*	25–123	–
4	**Grass-likes**			25–123	
	spikerush	ELEOC	*Eleocharis*	25–123	–
	rush	JUNCU	*Juncus*	0–99	–
	sedge	CAREX	*Carex*	0–74	–
	Grass-like (not a true grass)	2GL	*Grass-like (not a true grass)*	0–49	–
Forb					
5	**Forbs**			247–740	
	burningbush	BASC5	*Bassia scoparia*	49–616	–
	Forb, introduced	2FI	*Forb, introduced*	0–247	–
	curly dock	RUCR	*Rumex crispus*	25–247	–
	cocklebur	XANTH2	*Xanthium*	0–247	–
	redroot amaranth	AMRE	*Amaranthus retroflexus*	0–197	–
	prickly lettuce	LASE	*Lactuca serriola*	0–123	–
	Pursh seepweed	SUCA2	*Suaeda calceoliformis*	25–123	–
	povertyweed	IVAX	*Iva axillaris*	0–74	–
	lambsquarters	CHAL7	*Chenopodium album*	25–74	–
	Forb, native	2FN	*Forb, native*	0–74	–
	Cuman ragweed	AMPS	*Ambrosia psilostachya*	0–49	–
	aster	ASTER	*Aster*	0–49	–
	silverscale saltbush	ATAR2	*Atriplex argentea*	0–49	–
	mealy goosefoot	CHIN2	*Chenopodium incanum*	0–49	–
	red swampfire	SARU	*Salicornia rubra*	0–49	–

Animal community

The following table lists annual, suggested initial stocking rates with average growing conditions. These are conservative estimates that should be used only as guidelines in the initial stages of conservation planning. Often, the current plant composition does not entirely match any particular plant community (as described in this ES description). Because of this, a resource inventory is necessary to document plant composition and production. More accurate carrying capacity estimates should eventually be calculated using the following stocking rate information along with animal preference data and actual stocking records, particularly when grazers other than cattle are involved. With consultation of the land manager, more intensive grazing management may result in improved harvest efficiencies and increased carrying capacity.

Prairie Cordgrass/Alkali Cordgrass/Alkaligrass (1.1)
Average Annual Production (lbs./acre, air-dry): 4400
Stocking Rate* (AUM/acre): 1.21

Wheatgrass/Foxtail Barley/Inland Saltgrass (1.2)
Average Annual Production (lbs./acre, air-dry): 3300
Stocking Rate* (AUM/acre): 0.90

Foxtail Barley/Inland Saltgrass, Bare Ground (2.2)
Average Annual Production (lbs./acre, air-dry): 2200
Stocking Rate* (AUM/acre): 0.60

Annual/Pioneer, Non-Native Perennial, Bare Ground (2.2)
Average Annual Production (lbs./acre, air-dry): 1200
Stocking Rate* (AUM/acre): 0.33

*Based on 912 lbs./acre (air-dry weight) per Animal Unit Month (AUM), and on 25 percent harvest efficiency (refer to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Range and Pasture Handbook).

Grazing by domestic livestock is one of the major income-producing industries in the area. Rangeland in this area may provide yearlong forage. During the dormant period, the forage for livestock will likely be lacking protein to meet livestock requirements and added protein will allow ruminants to better utilize the energy stored in grazed plant materials. A forage quality test (either directly or through fecal sampling) should be used to determine the level of supplementation needed.

Hydrological functions

Water is the principal factor limiting forage production on this site. This site is dominated by soils in hydrologic groups C and D. Infiltration is typically slow to very slow and runoff potential for this site varies from negligible to low depending on soil hydrologic group, slope, and ground cover. In many cases, areas with greater than 75 percent ground cover have the greatest potential for high infiltration and lower runoff. An example of an exception would be where shortgrasses form a strong sod and dominate the site. Dominance by inland saltgrass and/or foxtail barley will result in reduced infiltration and increased runoff. Areas where ground cover is less than 50 percent have the greatest potential to have reduced infiltration and higher runoff (refer to Section 4, NRCS National Engineering Handbook for runoff quantities and hydrologic curves).

Recreational uses

This site provides hunting, hiking, photography, bird watching, and other opportunities. The wide varieties of plants that bloom from spring until fall have an esthetic value that appeals to visitors.

Wood products

No appreciable wood products are typically present on this site.

Other products

Seed harvest of native plant species can provide additional income on this site.

Inventory data references

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS clipping data and other inventory data. Field observations from range-trained personnel were also used. Those involved in developing this site include: Stan Boltz, Range Management Specialist, NRCS; and Bruce Kunze, Soil Scientist, NRCS.

Other references

High Plains Regional Climate Center, University of Nebraska, 830728 Chase Hall, Lincoln, NE 68583-0728. (http://www.hprcc.unl.edu/)
USDA, NRCS. National Water and Climate Center, 101 SW Main, Suite 1600, Portland, OR 97204-3224. (http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov)
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Contributors

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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)	David Schmidt, Tim Nordquist, Stan Boltz
Contact for lead author	
Date	12/04/2007
Approved by	Stan Boltz
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Rills should not be present.

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

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3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Essentially, non-existent.

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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 less than 5% and less than 2 inches in diameter.

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5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Active gullies should not be present.

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

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Little to no plant litter movement. Plant litter remains in place and is not moved by erosional forces.

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Stability class typically 5-6. Typically high root content. Soil surface is very resistant to erosion.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Use soil series description for depth and color of A-horizon.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Healthy, deep rooted native grasses enhance infiltration and reduce runoff.

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** No compaction layer should be evident.

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: Tall warm-season rhizomatous grass >> mid cool-season bunch grass

    Sub-dominant: > mid cool-season rhizomatous grass = short warm-season grass = short cool-season grass = forb

    Other:

    Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Very little to no evidence of decadence or mortality.

14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** 85-90%, roughly 0.5 inch thick or less. Litter cover is in contact with soil surface.

15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 3800 – 5000 lbs./acre air-dry weight, average 4,400 lbs./acre air-dry weight

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: Refer to State and Local Noxious Weed List

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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing.
