

Ecological site R010XY019ID

South Slope Loamy 12-16 PZ ARTRX/PSSPS

Last updated: 9/23/2020
Accessed: 08/28/2026

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.

Associated sites

R010XY001ID	North Slope Loamy 12-16 PZ FEID-PSSPS
R010XY007ID	Loamy 12-16 PZ
R010XY011ID	South Slope Stony 12-16 PZ ARTRT/PSSPS
R010XY016ID	Shallow South Stony 12-16 PZ ARTRX/PSSPS

Similar sites

R010XY016ID	Shallow South Stony 12-16 PZ ARTRX/PSSPS
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site occurs on steep to very steep south and west facing slopes. Slopes are generally greater than 30 percent. Elevation ranges from 3000 to 4800 feet (914-1463m). This site occurs on all aspects.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Mountain slope (2) Hill (3) Terrace
Flooding frequency	None
Elevation	910 – 1,460 m
Slope	30 – 70 %
Water table depth	150 cm
Aspect	S, W

Climatic features

The elevation of MLRA 10 ranges from 1791 feet to 9236 feet, with a mean of 4602 feet. Overall, elevation increases from west to east. However, average annual precipitation decreases from west to east, ranging from 16.59 inches to 22.17 inches, with a mean of 19.56 inches, based on 7 long term climate stations throughout the MLRA. In general, precipitation peaks in December and January, with a steady decline to a low in July and August, then a steep increase during the autumn months. Most of the winter precipitation falls as snow, and maximum annual snowfalls of up to 82 inches have been recorded.

There is considerable variation in temperature throughout the year. Temperatures as low as -52° Fahrenheit and as high as 117° Fahrenheit are on record. Some areas have recorded the occurrence of more than 50 days with temperatures above 90° Fahrenheit. The average maximum annual temperature is 63 degrees F, while the average minimum temperature is 36.2 degrees F. The frost-free period can range from 128 to 152 days, while the freeze-free period can be from 164 to 189 days.

Both the average morning and average afternoon relative humidity values are lowest in July and August, and are below the national average. The number of clear, sunny days peaks during this same period, and is higher than the national average. During the Spring and Summer months high-intensity convective thunderstorms are not unusual.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	150 days
Freeze-free period (average)	190 days
Precipitation total (average)	560 mm

Influencing water features

This site is not influenced by adjacent wetlands, streams or run on.

Soil features

The soils on this site are shallow to moderately deep over bedrock. The soils are well drained, with predominately moderately slow permeability. Runoff is very high. The erosion hazard is severe by water. The available water capacity is low to moderate. The surface texture is very stony clay loams and silty clay loams. They are formed in acid igneous alluvial or lacustrine deposits. Some of the soils have small gravels throughout the profile. These soils are characterized by a xeric soil moisture regime. Soil temperature regime is mesic.

Soil Series Correlated to this Ecological Site

Deshler
Gem
Oldsferry

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Very stony clay loam (2) Sandy clay loam
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderate
Soil depth	50 – 100 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 – 20 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	0 – 30 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	8.38 – 15.49 cm
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	6.1 – 7.8
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 40 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 40 %

Ecological dynamics

The dominant visual aspect of this site is bluebunch wheatgrass and foothill sagebrush. Composition by weight is approximately 65-75% grass, 10-20% forbs and 10-20% shrubs.

In the last few thousand years, this site has evolved in a semi-arid climate characterized by dry summers and cold, wet winters. Herbivory has historically occurred on this site at low levels of utilization. Herbivores include mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, lagomorphs and small rodents. Fire has historically occurred on the site at intervals of 20-50 years.

The Reference State (State 1), moves through many phases depending on the natural and man-made forces that impact the community over time. State 1, described later, indicates some of these phases. The Reference Plant Community Phase is Phase A. The plant species composition of Phase A is listed later under "Reference Plant Community Phase Plant Species Composition". The Reference Plant Community Phase, Phase A is dominated by bluebunch wheatgrass in the understory and foothills sagebrush in the overstory. Antelope bitterbrush is usually present. Subdominant species include western yarrow, Sandberg bluegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, arrowleaf balsamroot, tapertip hawksbeard and lupine.

Total annual production is 900 pounds per acre (1000 kilograms per hectare) in a normal year. Production in a favorable year is 1300 pounds per acre (1444 kilograms per hectare). Production in an unfavorable year is 500 pounds per acre (555 kilograms per hectare). Structurally, cool season deep rooted perennial bunchgrasses are very dominant, followed by tall shrubs being co-dominant with forbs while shallow rooted bunchgrasses are subdominant.

This site is suited for grazing by domestic livestock in the spring and fall. The site provides good habitat for upland wildlife, especially mule deer in the winter due to the southerly exposure and the browse component.

Due to the rainfall, elevation, and steep topography on this site, it is susceptible to degradation from erosion. Infiltration is good where the community is in mid to late seral status. The site has moderately low runoff potential. Runoff, when it does occur, can be erosive on steeper slopes particularly during high intensity convection storms.

Impacts on the Plant Community.

Influence of fire:

In the absence of normal fire frequency, foothills sagebrush and antelope bitterbrush can gradually increase on the site. Grasses and forbs decrease as shrubs increase. With the continued absence of fire, foothills sagebrush can displace most of the primary understory species.

When fires become more frequent than historic levels (20-50 years), foothills sagebrush and bitterbrush are reduced significantly. Rabbitbrush can increase slightly. With continued short fire frequency, foothills sagebrush and bitterbrush can be completely eliminated along with many of the desirable understory species such as bluebunch wheatgrass. These species may be replaced by cheatgrass, Sandberg bluegrass and bulbous bluegrass along with a variety of annual and perennial forbs including noxious and invasive plants. These fine fuels will increase the fire frequency.

Influence of improper grazing management:

Season-long grazing and/or excessive utilization can be very detrimental to this site. This type of management leads to reduced vigor of the bunchgrasses. With reduced vigor, recruitment of these species declines. As these species decline, the plant community becomes susceptible to an increase in foothills sagebrush and noxious and invasive plants.

Continued improper grazing management influences fire frequency by increasing fine fuels. If cheatgrass increases and becomes co-dominant with Sandberg bluegrass and other annuals, fires become more frequent, particularly at lower elevations.

Proper grazing management that addresses frequency, duration, and intensity of grazing, can also keep fine fuels from developing, thereby reducing fire frequency. This can lead to gradual increases in foothills sagebrush. A planned grazing system can be developed to intentionally accumulate fine fuels in preparation for a prescribed burn. Any brush management should be carefully planned, as a reduction in shrubs without a suitable understory of perennial bunchgrasses can increase cheatgrass which will lead to more frequent fire intervals.

Weather influences:

Above normal precipitation in March, April and May can dramatically increase total annual production of the plant community. These weather patterns can also increase viable seed production of desirable species to provide for recruitment. Likewise, below normal precipitation during these spring months can significantly reduce total annual production and be detrimental to viable seed production. Overall plant composition is normally not affected when perennials have good vigor.

Below normal temperatures in the spring can have an adverse impact on total production regardless of the precipitation. An early, hard freeze can occasionally kill some plants.

Prolonged drought adversely affects this plant community in several ways. Vigor, recruitment, and production are usually reduced. Mortality can occur. Prolonged drought can lead to a reduction in fire frequency.

Influence of Insects and disease:

Outbreaks can affect vegetation health. Bitterbrush can be severely affected by the western tent caterpillar (*Malacosoma fragilis*). Two consecutive years of defoliation by the tent caterpillar can cause mortality in bitterbrush. Mormon cricket and grasshopper outbreaks occur periodically. These outbreaks seldom cause plant mortality since defoliation of the plant occurs only once during the year of the outbreak.

Influence of noxious and invasive plants:

Many of these species add to the fine-fuel component and lead to increased fire frequency.

Many of the perennial and annual invasive species compete with desirable plants for moisture and nutrients. The result is reduced production and change in composition of the understory.

Influence of wildlife:

Big game animals use this site in the spring, summer and fall and in moderate winters. Their numbers are seldom high enough to adversely affect the plant community. Herbivory can be detrimental to bitterbrush when livestock grazing and browsing by big game occurs at the same time and season. This will occur when both kinds of animal are using the plant in the late summer or fall. The adverse impact is excessive use of the current year's leader growth. The deer mouse is beneficial to this site as it is the principal vector for planting bitterbrush seed.

Watershed:

Decreased infiltration and increased runoff occur with an increase in foothill sagebrush. Desired understory species can be reduced. This composition change can affect nutrient and water cycles. Increased runoff also causes sheet and rill erosion. Abnormally short fire frequency also gives the same results, but to a lesser degree. The long-term effect is a transition to a different state.

Plant Community and Sequence:

Transition pathways between common vegetation states and phases:

State 1.

Phase A to B. Develops with improper grazing management and in the absence of fire.

Phase A to C. Develops with fire.

Phase B to A. Develops with prescribed grazing and no fire.

Phase C to A. Develops with prescribed grazing and no fire.

State 1 Phase C to State 2. Develops through frequent fire with or without prescribed grazing management. This site has crossed the threshold. It is economically impractical to return this state to State 1 with accelerated practices.

State 2 to unknown site. Excessive soil loss and changes in the hydrologic cycle caused by continued improper grazing management and/or frequent fire cause this state to cross the threshold and retrogress to a new site with reduced potential. It is economically impractical to return this state to State 1 with accelerated practices.

Practice Limitations.

Mechanical seeding and brush control is generally not feasible on the steeper slopes on this site. Brush management can occur with aerial chemical application or prescribed burning.

State and transition model

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 6. Community 2.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 7. Community 3.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 8. Community 4.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 9. Community 5.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Animal community

Wildlife Interpretations. Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations This rangeland ecological site provides diverse habitat for many native wildlife species. Habitat is provided for resident and migratory animals including western toad, sagebrush lizard, western rattlesnake, shrews, bats, jackrabbits, ground squirrels, mice, coyote, red fox, badger, sage-grouse, Ferruginous hawk, prairie falcon, horned lark and western meadowlark. The south facing slopes can provide winter foraging habitat for mule deer and elk. The diverse shrub cover provides suitable habitat for brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, sage grouse, and sage thrasher. In some areas encroachment of noxious and invasive plant species (cheatgrass, Medusahead) can replace native plant species which provide critical feed, brood-rearing and nesting cover for a variety of native wildlife. Water features are sparse provided by seasonal streams, artificial water catchments and springs. State 1 Phase 1.1 - Foothills Big Sagebrush/ Bluebunch Wheatgrass Reference Plant Community (RPC): This plant community provides a diversity of grasses, forbs and shrubs used by native insect communities that assist in pollination. The reptile and amphibian community is represented by leopard lizard, short horned lizard, sagebrush lizard, western skink, western rattlesnake, western toad, boreal chorus frog and northern leopard frog. Amphibians are associated with springs and isolated water bodies adjacent to this plant community. Spring developments that capture all available water would preclude the use of these sites by amphibians. The plant community provides habitat for prey species and cover for these resident reptiles and amphibians. Shrub-steppe obligate avian species include the Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, sage thrasher and sage-grouse. Critical habitat (lek sites, nesting areas, winter cover and food) for sage-grouse is provided throughout this ecological site. The plant community supports needs of large mammals (mule deer and elk) providing food and cover on a seasonal basis. Antelope bitterbrush is preferred browse for mule deer, available during the winter season on these sites. A diverse small mammal population including golden-mantled ground squirrels, chipmunks and yellow-bellied marmots would utilize this plant community. The deer mouse is the primary vector for planting bitterbrush seed. State 1 Phase 1.2 – Foothills Big Sagebrush/Sandberg Bluegrass/ Plant Community: This phase has developed due to the lack of fire and improper grazing management. An increase in canopy cover of sagebrush contributes to a sparse herbaceous understory. Grasses, forbs and shrubs, are used by native insects that assist in pollination but the reduced herbaceous understory results in lower diversity and numbers of insects. The reptile community is represented by leopard lizard, short horned lizard, sagebrush lizard, western skink and western rattlesnake. Diversity and populations of the reptile community would decline with a reduced understory and associated loss of invertebrate habitat. Spring developments that capture all available water would preclude the use of these sites by amphibians. Key shrub-steppe obligate avian species include Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, sage thrasher and sage-grouse. Reduced herbaceous understory is a key factor in limiting the use of this plant community by avian species. Critical habitat (lek sites, nesting areas, winter cover and food) for sage grouse is limited due to a less diverse herbaceous plant community. The plant community supports winter needs of large mammals (mule deer and elk) providing food and cover. The increase in big sagebrush reduces the density of antelope bitterbrush and the value of winter forage habitat. A diverse small mammal population including golden-mantled ground squirrels, chipmunks, deer mouse and yellow-bellied marmots would utilize the habitat. The deer mouse is the primary vector for planting bitterbrush seed. State 1 Phase 1.3 - Bluebunch Wheatgrass/ Sandberg Bluegrass/ Bottlebrush Squirreltail Plant Community: This plant community is the result of fire. The plant community, dominated by herbaceous vegetation with little to no sagebrush or antelope bitterbrush reduces vertical structure for wildlife. Insect diversity would be reduced. A diverse native forb plant community would still support select pollinators, and an increase in rabbitbrush would provide fall pollinator habitat. Reptile use including short horned lizard, sagebrush lizard and western rattlesnakes, would be limited due to the absence of sagebrush and antelope bitterbrush. The dominance of herbaceous vegetation with no sagebrush or antelope bitterbrush canopy cover would eliminate use of these areas for nesting by Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, sage thrasher, and sage-grouse. This plant community provides limited brood-rearing habitat for sage-grouse when sagebrush cover is adjacent to the site. Sage-grouse would not use the area for winter habitat. The dominant herbaceous vegetation improves habitat for grassland avian species (horned lark and western meadowlark). Mule deer and elk forage use would be seasonal (early spring through fall) but the site would offer little thermal cover and young of year cover. The populations of small mammals would be dominated by open grassland species like the Columbian ground squirrel. State 2 –Sandberg Bluegrass/ Cheatgrass/ Medusahead Rye Plant Community: This plant community is the result of continued improper grazing management and/or frequent fire. Vertical structure is provided by rabbitbrushes and horsebrush. Insect diversity would be reduced with the loss of forbs and change in dominant shrub species. Limited habitat is provided for native reptile species. Vertical structure is present but the reduced insect community will reduce quality of reptile habitat. This plant community does not support the habitat requirements for sage-grouse and provides limited habitat for sage thrasher, Brewer's sparrow or sage sparrow. Birds of prey including hawks and falcons may range throughout these areas looking for prey species. Large mammals may utilize the herbaceous vegetation in the early part of the year when the invasive annuals (cheatgrass) are more palatable. At other times of the year large mammals would not regularly utilize these areas due to poor food and cover conditions. Small mammal populations and diversity would be reduced due to less favorable understory vegetation and reduced insect populations. Grazing Interpretations: This site is best suited for grazing by livestock in spring and fall. Estimated initial stocking rate will be determined with the landowner or decision-maker. They will be based on the inventory which includes species, composition, similarity index, production, past use history, season of use, and seasonal preference. Calculations used to determine estimated initial stocking rate will be based on forage preference ratings.

Hydrological functions

Soils on this site are in hydrologic group B. When hydrologic condition of the vegetation cover is good, natural erosion hazard is slight.

Recreational uses

This site offers fair value for observing early spring blooming forbs. Viewing big game during the winter is usually possible on this site.

Wood products

None

Other products

None

Other information

Field Offices Weiser, ID Emmett, ID Mountain Home, ID Meridian, ID Cascade, ID

Inventory data references

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS clipping and other inventory data. Also, field knowledge of range-trained personnel was used. Those involved in developing this site description include: Dave Franzen, co-owner, Intermountain Rangeland Consultants, LLC Jacy Gibbs, co-owner, Intermountain Rangeland Consultants, LLC Jim Cornwell, Rangeland Management Specialist, IASCD Brendan Brazee, State Rangeland Management Specialist, NRCS, Idaho Lee Brooks, Rangeland Management Specialist, IASCD Leah Juarros, Resource Soil Scientist, NRCS, Idaho

Type locality

Location 1: Washington County, ID	
Township/Range/Section	T12N R6W S19
Location 2: Washington County, ID	
Township/Range/Section	T16N R5W S23

Other references

Hironaka, M., M.A. Fosberg, A. H. Winward. 1983. Sagebrush- Grass Habitat Types of Southern Idaho. University of Idaho. Moscow, Idaho. Bulletin Number 35

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USDI Bureau of Land Management, US Geological Survey; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Agricultural Research Service; Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health. Technical Reference 1734-6; version 4-2005.

Approval

Kendra Moseley, 9/23/2020

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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Date	03/25/2008
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** can occur on this site. If rills are present they are likely to occur immediately following wildfire. Rills are most likely to occur on soils with surface textures of silt loam and clay loam.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** occur on this site. When they occur, they are short and disrupted by cool season grasses and tall shrubs and are not extensive. Gravelly surface texture interrupts flows.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** occur on this site but are not extensive. In areas where flow patterns and/or rills are present, a few pedestals may be expected. Terracettes also occur on the site uphill from tall shrub bases and large bunchgrasses.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** data is not available. On sites in mid-seral status bare ground may range from 25-45 percent.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** do not occur on this site.

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** usually not present. Immediately following wildfire some soil movement may occur on lighter textured soils.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** fine litter in the interspaces may move up to 3 feet following a significant run-off event. Coarse litter generally does not move. Gravels on the surface help reduce fine litter movement.

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Values should range from 4 to 6 but needs to be tested.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** the A or A1 horizon is typically 3 to 8 inches thick. Structure ranges from weak thin platy to moderate very fine granular. Soil organic matter (SOM) ranges from 1 to 4 percent.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** bunchgrasses, especially deep-rooted perennials, slow run-off and increase infiltration. Tall shrubs catch blowing snow in the interspaces.

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** not present.

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 deep rooted perennial bunchgrasses.

Sub-dominant: tall shrubs=perennial forbs>shallow rooted bunchgrasses.

Other:

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** mountain big sagebrush will become decadent in the absence of normal fire frequency and ungulate grazing. Grass and forb mortality will occur as tall shrubs increase.

14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** additional litter cover data is needed but is expected to be 15-20 percent to a depth of 0.1 inches. Under mature shrubs litter is >0.5 inches deep and is 90-100 percent ground cover.

15. Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production): is 900 pounds per acre (1008 kilograms per hectare) in a year with normal temperatures and precipitation. Perennial grasses produce 65-75 percent of the total production, forbs 10-20 percent and shrubs 10-20 percent.
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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: include cheatgrass, bulbous bluegrass, rush skeletonweed, musk and scotch thistle and diffuse and spotted knapweed.
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17. Perennial plant reproductive capability: all functional groups have the potential to reproduce in most years.
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