

Ecological site R026XY004NV

SALINE BOTTOM

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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): 026X–Carson Basin and Mountains

The area lies within western Nevada and eastern California, with about 69 percent being within Nevada, and 31 percent being within California. Almost all this area is in the Great Basin Section of the Basin and Range Province of the Intermontane Plateaus. Isolated north-south trending mountain ranges are separated by aggraded desert plains. The mountains are uplifted fault blocks with steep side slopes. Most of the valleys are drained by three major rivers flowing east across this MLRA. A narrow strip along the western border of the area is in the Sierra Nevada Section of the Cascade-Sierra Mountains Province of the Pacific Mountain System. The Sierra Nevada Mountains are primarily a large fault block that has been uplifted with a dominant tilt to the west. This structure leaves an impressive wall of mountains directly west of this area. This helps create a rain shadow affect to MLRA 26. Parts of this eastern face, but mostly just the foothills, mark the western boundary of this area. Elevations range from about 3,806 feet (1,160 meters) on the west shore of Pyramid Lake to 11,653 feet (3,552 meters) on the summit of Mount Patterson in the Sweetwater Mountains. Valley areas are dominantly composed of Quaternary alluvial deposits with Quaternary playa or alluvial flat deposits often occupying the lowest valley bottoms in the internally drained valleys, and river deposited alluvium being dominant in externally drained valleys. Hills and mountains are dominantly Tertiary andesitic flows, breccias, ash flow tuffs, rhyolite tuffs or granodioritic rocks. Quaternary basalt flows are present in lesser amounts, and Jurassic and Triassic limestone and shale, and Precambrian limestone and dolomite are also present in very limited amounts. Also of limited extent are glacial till deposits along the east flank of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the result of alpine glaciation. The average annual precipitation in this area is 5 to 36 inches (125 to 915 millimeters), increasing with elevation. Most of the rainfall occurs as high-intensity, convective storms in spring and autumn. Precipitation is mostly snow in winter. Summers are dry. The average annual temperature is 37 to 54 degrees F (3 to 12 degrees C). The freeze-free period averages 115 days and ranges from 40 to 195 days, decreasing in length with elevation. The dominant soil orders in this MLRA are Aridisols and Mollisols. The soils in the area dominantly have a mesic soil temperature regime, an aridic or xeric soil moisture regime, and mixed or smectitic mineralogy. They generally are well drained, are clayey or loamy and commonly skeletal, and are very shallow to moderately deep. This area supports shrub-grass vegetation characterized by big sagebrush. Low sagebrush and Lahontan sagebrush occur on some soils. Antelope bitterbrush, squirreltail, desert needlegrass, Thurber needlegrass, and Indian ricegrass are important associated plants. Green ephedra, Sandberg bluegrass, Anderson peachbrush, and several forb species also are common. Juniper-pinyon woodland is typical on mountain slopes. Jeffrey pine, lodgepole pine, white fir, and manzanita grow on the highest mountain slopes. Shadscale is the typical plant in the drier parts of the area. Sedges, rushes, and moisture-loving grasses grow on the wettest parts of the wet flood plains and terraces. Basin wildrye, alkali sacaton, saltgrass, buffaloberry, black greasewood, and rubber rabbitbrush grow on the drier sites that have a high concentration of salts. Some of the major wildlife species in this area are mule deer, coyote, beaver, muskrat, jackrabbit, cottontail, raptors, pheasant, chukar, blue grouse, mountain quail, and mourning dove. The species of fish in the area include trout and catfish. The Lahontan cutthroat trout in the Truckee River is a threatened and endangered species.

LRU notes

The Semiarid Fans and Basins LRU includes basins, alluvial fans and adjacent hill slopes immediately east of the Sierra Nevada mountain range and are affected by its climate or have its granitic substrate. Elevations range from 1355 to 1920 meters and slopes range from 0 to 30 percent, with a median value of 6 percent. Frost free days range from 121 to 170.

Ecological site concept

The Saline Bottom site occurs on flood plains. Slopes range from 0 to 2 percent. Elevations are 4400 to 4600 feet. The Saline Bottom site is rarely flooded for brief periods of time. The water table is typically between 36 and 60 inches deep. The soil surface texture is fine sandy loam. The soil is moderately deep to a duripan and somewhat poorly drained. The dominant plants are black greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) and basin wildrye (*Leymus cinereus*).

Associated sites

R026XY001NV	MOIST FLOODPLAIN
R026XY012NV	DRY FLOODPLAIN 8-10 P.Z.
R026XY030NV	LOAMY BOTTOM 8-12 P.Z.

Similar sites

R026XY032NV	DEEP SODIC FAN ATCA2-ATTO codominant
R026XY001NV	MOIST FLOODPLAIN LETR5 codominant grass; more productive site
R026XY030NV	LOAMY BOTTOM 8-12 P.Z. SAVE4 & DISP absent
R026XY012NV	DRY FLOODPLAIN 8-10 P.Z. ARTR2 dominant shrub

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Sarcobatus vermiculatus</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Leymus cinereus</i>

Physiographic features

This site occurs on flood plains. Slopes range from 0 to 2 percent. Elevations are 4400 to 4600 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Flood plain
Flooding duration	Very brief (4 to 48 hours)

Flooding frequency	Rare
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	1,340 – 1,400 m
Slope	0 %
Water table depth	90 – 150 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The climate associated with this site is semiarid, characterized by cool, moist winters and warm, dry summers. Mean annual precipitation is 8 to 10 inches. Mean annual air temperature is 48 to 50 degrees F. The average growing season is about 90 to 120 days.

Nevada's climate is predominantly arid, with large daily ranges of temperature, infrequent severe storms, heavy snowfall in the higher mountains, and great location variations with elevation. Three basic geographical factors largely influence Nevada's climate: continentality, latitude, and elevation. Continentality is the most important factor. The strong continental effect is expressed in the form of both dryness and large temperature variations. Nevada lies on the eastern, lee side of the Sierra Nevada Range, a massive mountain barrier that markedly influences the climate of the State. The prevailing winds are from the west, and as the warm moist air from the Pacific Ocean ascend the western slopes of the Sierra Range, the air cools, condensation occurs and most of the moisture falls as precipitation. As the air descends the eastern slope, it is warmed by compression, and very little precipitation occurs. The effects of this mountain barrier are felt not only in the West but throughout the state, with the result that the lowlands of Nevada are largely desert or steppes. The temperature regime is also affected by the blocking of the inland-moving maritime air. Nevada sheltered from maritime winds, has a continental climate with well-developed seasons and the terrain responds quickly to changes in solar heating.

Nevada lies within the mid-latitude belt of prevailing westerly winds which occur most of the year. These winds bring frequent changes in weather during the late fall, winter and spring months, when most of the precipitation occurs. To the south of the mid-latitude westerlies, lies a zone of high pressure in subtropical latitudes, with a center over the Pacific Ocean. In the summer, this high-pressure belt shifts northward over the latitudes of Nevada, blocking storms from the ocean. The resulting weather is mostly clear and dry during the summer and early fall, with scattered thundershowers. The eastern portion of the state receives significant summer thunderstorms generated from monsoonal moisture pushed up from the Gulf of California, known as the North American monsoon. The monsoon system peaks in August and by October the monsoon high over the Western U.S. begins to weaken and the precipitation retreats southward towards the tropics (NOAA 2004).

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	200-250 mm
Frost-free period (average)	110 days
Freeze-free period (average)	

Precipitation total (average)	230 mm
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Influencing water features

These soils are subject to periodic flooding and may be ponded for short periods in the spring.

Soil features

The soils are moderately deep to very deep and somewhat poorly drained. The available water capacity is moderate. These soils are moderately to highly salt and sodium affected. The soil surface will crust and bake upon drying. The water table fluctuates between 36 inches in spring to over 60 inches during drier periods. These soils are subject to periodic flooding and may be ponded for short periods in the spring. Soil series associated with this site include: Vamp.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium
Surface texture	(1) Fine sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Somewhat poorly drained
Permeability class	Slow to moderate
Soil depth	50 – 210 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	Not specified
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	11.94 – 14.48 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10 mmhos/cm

Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	10 – 30
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	7.9 – 9.6
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 10 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified

Ecological dynamics

As ecological condition declines, black greasewood, and inland saltgrass become dominant as basin wildrye decreases in the plant community. Rubber rabbitbrush often dominates the visual aspect of this site in lower condition classes. Species most likely to invade this site are annuals.

Fire Ecology:

Black greasewood communities have been historically subject to stand-replacing fire regimes with intervals of

State and transition model

Figure 5. Similar STM in the Disturbance Response Group.

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	Primary Perennial Grasses			958-1395	
	basin wildrye	LECI4	<i>Leymus cinereus</i>	841-1009	–
	saltgrass	DISP	<i>Distichlis spicata</i>	84-252	–
	beardless wildrye	LETR5	<i>Leymus triticoides</i>	34-135	–
2	Secondary Perennial Grasses			34-168	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	9-50	–
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	9-50	–
	bluegrass	POA	<i>Poa</i>	9-50	–
Forb					
3	Perennial			34-135	
	beardless wildrye	LETR5	<i>Leymus triticoides</i>	34-135	–
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	9-50	–
4	Annual			17-50	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	9-50	–
	bluegrass	POA	<i>Poa</i>	9-50	–

Shrub/Vine				
5	Primary Shrubs			118-336
	greasewood	SAVE4	Sarcobatus vermiculatus	84-252
	rubber rabbitbrush	ERNA10	Ericameria nauseosa	34-84
6	Secondary Shrubs			336-135
	shadscale saltbush	ATCO	Atriplex confertifolia	9-34
	Torrey's saltbush	ATTO	Atriplex torreyi	9-34
	spiny hopsage	GRSP	Grayia spinosa	9-34
	bud sagebrush	PIDE4	Picrothamnus desertorum	9-34
	seepweed	SUAED	Suaeda	9-34

Animal community

Livestock Interpretations: The early growth and abundant production of basin wildrye make it a valuable source of forage for livestock. It is important forage for cattle and is readily grazed by cattle and horses in early spring and fall. Though coarse-textured during the winter, basin wildrye may be utilized more frequently by livestock and wildlife when snow has covered low shrubs and other grasses. Saltgrass's value as forage depends primarily on the relative availability of other grasses of higher nutritional value and palatability. It can be an especially important late summer grass in arid environments after other forage grasses have deceased. Saltgrass is rated as a fair to good forage species only because it stays green after most other grasses dry. Livestock generally avoid saltgrass due to its coarse foliage. Saltgrass is described as an "increaser" under grazing pressure. Creeping wildrye can be used for forage and is very palatable to all livestock. Once established it is very rhizomatous and maintains stands for many years. Black greasewood is an important winter browse plant for domestic sheep and cattle. It also receives light to moderate use by domestic sheep and cattle during spring and summer months. Black greasewood contains soluble sodium and potassium oxalates that may cause poisoning and death in domestic sheep and cattle if large amounts are consumed in a short time. In general, livestock forage only lightly on rubber rabbitbrush during the summer, but winter use can be heavy in some locations. Fall use is variable, but flowers are often used by livestock. A few leaves and the more tender stems may also be used. Stocking rates vary over time depending upon season of use, climate variations, site, and previous and current management goals. A safe starting stocking rate is an estimated stocking rate that is fine tuned by the client by adaptive management through the year and from year to year. Wildlife Interpretations: Black greasewood is an important winter browse plant for big game animals and a food source for many other wildlife species. It also receives light to moderate use by mule deer and pronghorn during spring and summer months. Wildlife forage only lightly on rubber rabbitbrush during the summer, but winter use can be heavy in some locations. Fall use is variable, but flowers are often used by wildlife. A few leaves and the more tender stems may also be used. The forage value of rubber rabbitbrush varies greatly among subspecies and ecotypes. Basin wildrye provides winter forage for mule deer, though use is often low compared to other native grasses. Basin wildrye provides summer forage for black-tailed jackrabbits. Because basin wildrye remains green throughout early summer, it remains available for small mammal forage for a longer time than other grasses. Saltgrass provides cover for a variety of bird species, small mammals, and arthropods and is on occasion used as forage for several big game wildlife species. Creeping wildrye is used for forage for many wildlife species and is often used for cover.

Hydrological functions

Runoff is medium. Permeability is moderate.

Recreational uses

Aesthetic value is derived from the floral and faunal composition. This site offers rewarding opportunities to photographers and for nature study. This site can be used for hiking and has potential for hunting.

Other products

The leaves, seeds and stems of black greasewood are edible. Basin wildrye was used as bedding for various Native American ceremonies, providing a cool place for dancers to stand.

Other information

Black greasewood is useful for stabilizing soil on wind-blown areas. Basin wildrye is useful in mine reclamation, fire rehabilitation and stabilizing disturbed areas. Its usefulness in range seeding, however, may be limited by initially weak stand establishment. Given its extensive system of rhizomes and roots which form a dense sod, saltgrass is considered a suitable species for controlling wind and water erosion. Creeping wildrye is primarily used for reclamation of wet, saline soils.

Type locality

Location 1: Douglas County, NV	
Township/Range/Section	T13N R20E S16
General legal description	Eastern edge of Douglas County airport, Douglas County, Nevada.

Other references

Fire Effects Information System (Online; <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/>).

USDA-NRCS Plants Database (Online; <http://www.plants.usda.gov>).

Contributors

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Approval

Kendra Moseley, 4/10/2024

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)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	02/25/2007
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. Number and extent of rills:

2. Presence of water flow patterns:

3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:

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

5. Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:

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

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

8. Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):

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

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

11. Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):

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:

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

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):

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:

17. Perennial plant reproductive capability:
