

Ecological site R026XY029NV

ERODED SLOPE 10-12 P.Z.

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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 Sierra Influenced Ranges LRU is characterized by wooded great basin mountains with climatic and biotic affinities to the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The Sierra Influences Ranges LRU receives greater precipitation than the mountain ranges of central NV. Amount of precipitation varies in relation to the local strength of the Sierra NV rain shadow, characterized by pinyon and juniper trees. The White, Sweetwater, Pine Nut, Wassuk, and Virginia ranges of Nevada support varying amounts of Sierra Nevada flora, such as ponderosa pine. Elevations range from 1610 to 2420 meters and slopes range from 5 to 49 percent, with a median value of 22 percent. Frost free days (FFD) ranges from 92 to 163.

Ecological site concept

The Eroded Slope 10-12 P.Z. site occurs on side slopes of dissected piedmont slopes. Slopes range from 8 to 50 percent. Elevations are 4,400 to 6,800 feet. Average annual precipitation is 8 to 12 inches. The soils on this site are very shallow and well drained. The available

water capacity is very low. Loss of the soil surface layer through erosion is a severely limiting factor to plant establishment and development. A thin surface layer or exposed subsoil restricts infiltration of moisture. Because of the low infiltration rate and steepness of slope, runoff is high. The plant community is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *wyomingensis*), desert and/or Thurber's needlegrass (*Achnatherum speciosum/thurberianum*), Indian ricegrass (*Achnatherum hymenoides*), and bottlebrush squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*). Total annual production ranges from 100 to 200 lbs./acre.

Associated sites

R026XY010NV	LOAMY 10-12 P.Z.
R026XY011NV	SOUTH SLOPE 8-12 P.Z.
R026XY016NV	LOAMY 8-10 P.Z.

Similar sites

R026XY017NV	LOAMY HILL 10-12 P.Z. ACTH7 dominant grass; more productive site
R026XY011NV	SOUTH SLOPE 8-12 P.Z. ACSP12 dominant grass; more productive site
R026XY022NV	STONY SLOPE 8-10 P.Z. ACSP12 dominant grass; more productive site
R026XY015NV	SHALLOW LOAM 10-12 P.Z. ACTH7 dominant grass; more productive site

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Artemisia tridentata</i> ssp. <i>wyomingensis</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i> (2) <i>Elymus elymoides</i>

Physiographic features

This site occurs on hills and sideslopes of dissected pediments. Slopes range from 8 to 50 percent. Elevations are 4400 to 6800 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Pediment
Elevation	1,340 – 2,070 m
Slope	10 – 50 %
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The climate associated with this site is arid, characterized by cool, moist winters and warm, dry summers. Average annual precipitation is 10 to 12 inches. Mean annual air temperature is 49 to 51 degrees F. The average growing season is about 60 to 130 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)	250-310 mm
Frost-free period (average)	100 days
Freeze-free period (average)	
Precipitation total (average)	250 mm

Influencing water features

There are no influencing water features associated with this site.

Soil features

The soils associated with this site are very shallow and well drained. The available water capacity is very low. Loss of the soil surface layer through erosion is a severely limiting factor to plant development. A thin surface layer or exposed subsoil restricts infiltration of moisture. Because of the low infiltration rate and steepness of slope, runoff is high. The soils associated with this site are classified as Lithic Xeric Torriorthents. The associated soil series are Aquinas, Boondock, Celeton, Chalco, Crunkvar, Mizel, Pula, and Skedaddle.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Residuum – rhyolite (2) Alluvium – granite (3) Colluvium – tuff
Surface texture	(1) Gravelly sandy loam (2) Very gravelly coarse sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy (2) Loamy-skeletal
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Moderate
Soil depth	10 – 30 cm
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	10 – 50 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	0 – 10 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	0.51 – 5.33 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	Not specified

Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	6.6 – 7.8
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 80 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified

Ecological dynamics

As ecological conditions declines , Douglas' rabbitbrush and Wyoming big sagebrush become more dominant. Potential invasive plant species include cheatgrass, horsebrush, snakeweed, russian thistle, filaree, annual mustards, and bassia.

Fire Ecology:

The fire return interval for Wyoming big sagebrush communities ranges from 10 to 70 years. Fire is the principal means of renewal for decadent stands of Wyoming big sagebrush. Wyoming big sagebrush establishes after fire from a seedbank; from seed produced by remnant plants that escaped fire; and from plants adjacent to the burn that seed in. Fires in Wyoming big sagebrush communities are usually not continuous, and remnant plants are the principal means of postfire reproduction.

Desert needlegrass has persistent dead leaf bases, which make it susceptible to burning. Fire removes the accumulation; a rapid, cool fire will not burn deep into the root crown.

Thurber's needlegrass is classified as moderately resistant, but depending on season of burn, phenology, and fire severity, this perennial bunchgrass is moderately to severely damaged by fire. Burning has been found to decrease the vegetation and reproductive vigor. Early season burning is more damaging to this needlegrass than late season burning.

Indian ricegrass can be killed by fire, depending on severity and season of burn. Indian ricegrass reestablishes on burned sites through seed dispersed from adjacent unburned areas.

Bottlebrush squirreltail's small size, coarse stems, and sparse leafy material aid in its tolerance of fire. Postfire regeneration occurs from surviving root crowns and from on- and off-site seed sources. Frequency of disturbance greatly influences postfire response of bottlebrush squirreltail. Undisturbed plants within a 6 to 9 year age class generally contain large amounts of dead material, increasing bottlebrush squirreltail's susceptibility to fire.

Reference State 1.0:

The Reference State 1.0 is a representative of the natural range of variability under pristine conditions. The reference state has three general community phases; a shrub-grass dominant phase, a perennial grass dominant phase and a shrub dominant phase. State dynamics are maintained by interactions between climatic patterns and disturbance regimes. Negative feedbacks enhance ecosystem resilience and contribute to the stability of the state. These include the presence of all structural and functional groups, low fine fuel loads, and retention of organic matter and nutrients. Plant community phase changes are primarily driven by fire, periodic drought and/or insect or disease attack.

Community Phase 1.1:

Wyoming big sagebrush, Thurber's needlegrass, desert needlegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail and Indian ricegrass dominate the site. Douglas rabbitbrush, purple sage and antelope bitterbrush are also common on this site. Utah juniper and singleleaf pinyon are described in the site concept and may be present in minor amounts.

Community Phase Pathway 1.1a, from Phase 1.1 to 1.2:

Fire would decrease or eliminate the overstory of sagebrush and allow for the perennial bunchgrasses to dominate the site. Fires would typically be small and patchy due to low fuel loads. A fire following an unusually wet spring or a change in management may be more severe and reduce sagebrush cover to trace amounts. A severe infestation of Aroga moth could also cause a large decrease in sagebrush within the community, giving a competitive advantage to the perennial grasses and forbs.

Community Phase Pathway 1.1b, Phase 1.1 to 1.3:

Long-term drought, time and/or herbivory favor an increase in Wyoming big sagebrush over deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses. Combinations of these would allow the sagebrush overstory to increase and dominate the site, causing a reduction in the perennial bunchgrasses.

Community Phase 1.2:

This community phase is characteristic of a post-disturbance, early to mid-seral community phase. Thurber's needlegrass, desert needlegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, Indian ricegrass and other perennial grasses are common. Sprouting shrubs are present. Wyoming big sagebrush is killed by fire, therefore decreasing within the burned community. Sagebrush could still be present in unburned patches. Needlegrasses can experience high mortality from fire and may be reduced in the community for several years.

Community Phase Pathway 1.2a, Phase 1.2 to 1.1:

Time and lack of disturbance allows for sagebrush to reestablish.

Community Phase 1.3:

Wyoming big sagebrush increases in the absence of disturbance. Decadent sagebrush dominates the overstory and the deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses in the understory are reduced either from competition with shrubs or from herbivory. Squirreltail will likely increase in the understory and may be the dominant grass on the site.

Community Phase Pathway 1.3a, from Phase 1.3 to 1.2:

Fire would decrease or eliminate the overstory of sagebrush and allow for the perennial bunchgrasses to dominate the site. Fires would typically be small and patchy due to low fuel loads. A fire following an unusually wet spring or a change in management may be more severe and reduce sagebrush cover to trace amounts. A severe infestation of Aroga moth could also cause a large decrease in sagebrush within the community, giving a competitive advantage to the perennial grasses and forbs.

T1A: Transition from Reference State 1.0 to Current Potential State 2.0:

Trigger: This transition is caused by the introduction of non-native annual weeds, such as cheatgrass and mustards.

Slow variables: Over time the annual non-native plants will increase within the community decreasing organic matter inputs from deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses resulting in reductions in soil water availability for perennial bunchgrasses.

Threshold: Any amount of introduced non-native species causes an immediate decrease in the resilience of the site. Annual non-native species cannot be easily removed from the system and have the potential to significantly alter disturbance regimes from their historic range of variation.

Current Potential State 2.0:

This state is similar to the Reference State 1.0. Ecological function has not changed, however the resiliency of the state has been reduced by the presence of invasive weeds. This state has the same three general community phases. Negative feedbacks enhance ecosystem resilience and contribute to the stability of the state. These include the presence of all structural and functional groups, low fine fuel loads and retention of organic matter and nutrients. Positive feedbacks decrease ecosystem resilience and stability of the state. These include the non-natives high seed output, persistent seed bank, rapid growth rate, ability to cross-pollinate and adaptations for seed dispersal. Additionally, the presence of highly flammable, non-native species reduces state resilience because these species can promote fire where historically fire has been infrequent leading to positive feedbacks that further the degradation of the system.

Community Phase 2.1:

Wyoming big sagebrush, desert needlegrass and Thurber's needlegrass dominate the site. Bottlebrush squirreltail, Indian ricegrass, Douglas rabbitbrush, purple sage and antelope bitterbrush are also common on this site. Utah juniper and singleleaf pinyon may be present. Non-native annual species are present in minor amounts.

Community Phase Pathway 2.1a, from Phase 2.1 to 2.2:

Fire would decrease or eliminate the overstory of sagebrush and allow perennial bunchgrasses to dominate the site. Fires would typically be small and patchy due to low fuel loads. A fire following an unusually wet spring or a change in management may be more severe and reduce sagebrush cover to trace amounts. A severe infestation of Aroga moth could also cause a large decrease in sagebrush within the community, giving a competitive advantage to the perennial grasses and forbs. Annual non-native species generally respond well after fire and may be stable or increasing within the community.

Community Phase Pathway 2.1b, from Phase 2.1 to 2.3:

Time, long-term drought, grazing management that favors shrubs or combinations of these would allow the sagebrush overstory to increase and dominate the site, causing a reduction in the perennial bunchgrasses. However, squirreltail may increase in the understory depending on the grazing management. Heavy spring grazing will favor an increase in sagebrush. Annual non-native species may be stable or increasing within the understory.

Community Phase 2.2:

This community phase is characteristic of a post-disturbance, early seral community phase. Thurber's needlegrass, desert needlegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, Indian ricegrass and other perennial grasses are common. Sprouting shrubs are present. Wyoming big sagebrush is killed by fire, therefore decreasing within the burned community. Sagebrush could still be present in unburned patches. Perennial forbs may increase or dominate after fire for several years. Thurber's needlegrass can experience high mortality from fire and may be reduced in the community for several years. Annual non-native species generally respond well after fire and may be stable or increasing within the

community. Rabbitbrush may dominate the aspect for a number of years following wildfire.

Community Phase Pathway 2.2a, from Phase 2.2 to 2.1:

Absence of disturbance over time allows for the sagebrush to recover. This transition may be combined with grazing management that favors shrubs.

Community Phase 2.3 (At-Risk):

Wyoming big sagebrush increases and the perennial understory is reduced. Decadent sagebrush dominates the overstory and the deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses in the understory are reduced either from competition with shrubs or from inappropriate grazing management. Squirreltail will likely increase in the understory and may be the dominant grass on the site. Utah juniper and singleleaf pinyon may be present. Annual non-native species present.

Community Phase Pathway 2.3a, from Phase 2.3 to 2.2:

Low severity fire or Aroga moth infestation creates sagebrush/grass mosaic. Other disturbances/practices include brush management with minimal soil disturbance; late-fall/winter grazing causing mechanical damage to sagebrush.

T2A: Transition from Current Potential State 2.0 to Shrub State 3.0:

Trigger: Inappropriate, long-term grazing of perennial bunchgrasses during growing season would favor shrubs and initiate transition to Community Phase 3.1. Fire would cause a transition to Community Phase 3.2.

Slow variables: Long term decrease in deep-rooted perennial grass density resulting in a decrease in organic matter inputs and subsequent soil water decline.

Threshold: Loss of deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses changes spatial and temporal nutrient cycling and nutrient redistribution, and reduces soil organic matter.

T2B: Transition from Current Potential State 2.0 to Annual State 4.0:

Trigger: Fire leads to Community Phase 4.1. Inappropriate grazing management that favors shrubs in the presence of non-native annual species leads to Community Phase 4.2.

Slow variables: Increased production and cover of non-native annual species.

Threshold: Cheatgrass or other non-native annuals dominate understory.

Shrub State 3.0:

This state has two community phases; a Wyoming big sagebrush dominated phase and a sprouting shrub dominated phase. This state is a product of many years of heavy grazing during time periods harmful to perennial bunchgrasses. Squirreltail will increase with a reduction in deep-rooted perennial bunchgrass competition and become the dominant grass. Sagebrush dominates the overstory and rabbitbrush may be a significant component. Sagebrush canopy cover is high and sagebrush may be decadent, reflecting stand maturity and lack of seedling establishment due to competition with mature plants. The shrub overstory and squirreltail understory dominate site resources such that soil water, nutrient capture, nutrient cycling and soil organic matter are temporally and spatially redistributed.

Community Phase 3.1:

Wyoming big sagebrush dominates overstory and sprouting shrubs may be a significant component. Squirreltail dominates the understory and may also be a significant component of the plant community. Utah juniper and singleleaf pinyon may be present or increasing. Annual non-native species are present to increasing. Understory may be sparse, with bare ground increasing.

Community Phase Pathway 3.1a, from Phase 3.1 to 3.2:

Fire would decrease or eliminate the overstory of sagebrush. A severe infestation of Aroga moth could also cause a large decrease in sagebrush within the community, giving a competitive advantage to sprouting shrubs. Heavy fall grazing causing mechanical damage to shrubs, and/or brush treatments with minimal soil disturbance, would greatly reduce the overstory shrubs and allow for squirreltail to dominate the site.

Community Phase 3.2:

Sprouting shrubs such as Douglas rabbitbrush, littleleaf horsebrush, desert peach and antelope bitterbrush dominate the understory; annual non-natives are present but are not dominant. Trace amounts of sagebrush may be present.

Community Phase Pathway 3.2a, from Phase 3.2 to 3.1:

Absence of disturbance over time would allow for sagebrush and other shrubs to recover.

T3A: Transition from Shrub State 3.0 to Annual State 4.0:

Trigger: Fire or inappropriate grazing management can eliminate the squirreltail understory and transition to community Phase 4.1 or 4.2.

Slow variable: Increased seed production and cover of annual non-native species.

Threshold: Increased, continuous fine fuels modify the fire regime by changing intensity, size and spatial variability of fires. Changes in plant community composition and spatial variability of vegetation due to the loss of perennial bunchgrasses and sagebrush truncate energy capture and impact the nutrient cycling and distribution.

T3B: Transition from Shrub State 3.0 to Tree State 5.0:

Trigger: Lack of fire allows for trees to dominate site; may be coupled with inappropriate grazing management that reduces fine fuels.

Slow variables: Increased establishment and cover of juniper/pinyon trees, reduction in organic matter inputs.
Threshold: Trees overtop Wyoming big sagebrush and out-compete shrubs for water and sunlight. Shrub skeletons exceed live shrubs with minimal recruitment of new cohorts.

Annual State 4.0:
This state has two community phases; one dominated by annual non-native species and the other is a shrub dominated state. This state is characterized by the dominance of annual non-native species such as cheatgrass in the understory. Sagebrush and/or rabbitbrush may dominate the overstory. Annual non-native species dominate the understory.

Community Phase 4.1:
Annual non-native plants dominate the site. Sagebrush and sprouting shrubs may be present.

Community Phase Pathway 4.1a, from Phase 4.1 to 4.2:
Time and lack of disturbance allows for shrubs to reestablish. Sprouting shrubs such as rabbitbrush will be the first to reappear after fire. Probability of sagebrush establishment is extremely low.

Community Phase 4.2:
Sprouting shrubs and/or sagebrush remains in the overstory with annual non-native species, likely cheatgrass, dominating the understory. Trace amounts of desirable bunchgrasses may be present.

Community Phase Pathway 4.2a, from Phase 4.2 to 4.1:
Fire allows for annual, non-native species to dominate site.

Tree State 5.0:
This state has two community phases that are characterized by the dominance of Utah juniper and singleleaf pinyon in the overstory. Wyoming big sagebrush and perennial bunchgrasses may still be present, but they are no longer controlling site resources. Soil moisture, soil nutrients, soil organic matter distribution and nutrient cycling have been spatially and temporally altered.

Community Phase 5.1:
Juniper trees dominate overstory, sagebrush is decadent and dying, deep rooted perennial bunchgrasses are decreasing. Recruitment of sagebrush cohorts is minimal. Annual non-natives may be present or increasing.

Community Phase Pathway 5.1a, from Phase 5.1 to 5.2:
Absence of disturbance over time allows for tree cover and density to further increase and out-compete the herbaceous understory species for sunlight and water.

Community Phase 5.2:
Utah juniper dominates the site and tree leader growth is minimal; annual non-native species may be the dominant understory species and will typically be found under the tree canopies. Trace amounts of sagebrush may be present however dead skeletons will be more numerous than living sagebrush. Bunchgrasses may or may not be present. Squirreltail or mat forming forbs may be present in trace amounts. Bare ground interspaces are large and connected. Soil redistribution is evident.

Community Phase Pathway 5.2a, from Phase 5.2 to 5.1:
Manual or mechanical thinning of trees allows understory regrowth due to less competition for resources.

T5A: Transition from Tree State 5.0 to Annual State 4.0:
Trigger: Catastrophic crown fire would reduce or eliminate trees to transition the site to 4.1. Tree removal when annual non-natives such as cheatgrass are present would also transition the site to state 4.0.

Slow variable: Increased seed production and cover of annual non-native species.

Threshold: Increased, continuous fine fuels modify the fire regime by changing intensity, size and spatial variability of fires. Changes in plant community composition and spatial variability of vegetation due to the loss of perennial bunchgrasses and sagebrush truncate energy capture and impact the nutrient cycling and distribution.

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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Grass/Grasslike					
1	Primary Perennial Grasses			35-59	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	9-17	—
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	9-17	—
	desert needlegrass	ACSP12	<i>Achnatherum speciosum</i>	9-13	—
	Thurber's needlegrass	ACTH7	<i>Achnatherum thurberianum</i>	8-12	—
2	Secondary Perennial Grasses			3-9	
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	1-3	—
Forb					
3	Perennial			9-17	
	rockcress	ARABI2	<i>Arabis</i>	1-3	—
	tapertip hawksbeard	CRAC2	<i>Crepis acuminata</i>	1-3	—
	phlox	PHLOX	<i>Phlox</i>	1-3	—
4	Annual			2-9	
Shrub/Vine					
5	Primary Shrubs			53-84	
	Wyoming big sagebrush	ARTRW8	<i>Artemisia tridentata</i> ssp. <i>wyomingensis</i>	26-34	—
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	9-17	—
	antelope bitterbrush	PUTR2	<i>Purshia tridentata</i>	9-17	—
	purple sage	SADOD3	<i>Salvia dorrii</i> ssp. <i>dorrii</i> var. <i>dorrii</i>	9-17	—
6	Secondary Shrubs			3-9	
	little sagebrush	ARAR8	<i>Artemisia arbuscula</i>	2-3	—
	jointfir	EPHED	<i>Ephedra</i>	2-3	—
	spiny hopsage	GRSP	<i>Grayia spinosa</i>	2-3	—
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	2-3	—
	pricklyphlox	LEPTO2	<i>Leptodactylon</i>	2-3	—
	desert peach	PRAN2	<i>Prunus andersonii</i>	2-3	—
Tree					
7	Evergreen			2-7	
	Utah juniper	JUOS	<i>Juniperus osteosperma</i>	1-3	—
	singleleaf pinyon	PIMO	<i>Pinus monophylla</i>	1-3	—

Animal community

Livestock Interpretations: This site has limited use for livestock grazing due to steep slopes and low forage production. Grazing management should be keyed to needlegrasses, Indian ricegrass, and bottlebrush squirreltail. Needlegrass species begin growth early in the year and remain green throughout a relatively long growing season. This pattern of development enables animals to use needlegrass when many other grasses are unavailable. Cattle prefer needlegrass in early spring before fruits have developed as it becomes less palatable when mature. Needlegrasses are grazed in the fall only if the fruits are softened by rain. Indian ricegrass has good forage value for domestic sheep, cattle and horses. It can be important cattle forage in winter, particularly in salt desert communities. Indian ricegrass is often used most heavily in the late winter, when succulent and nutritious new green leaves are produced. It supplies a source of green feed before most other native grasses have produced much new growth. Livestock browse Wyoming big sagebrush, but may use it only lightly when palatable herbaceous species are available. 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: Wyoming big sagebrush is preferred browse for wild ungulates, and Wyoming big sagebrush communities are important winter ranges for big game. Wyoming big sagebrush communities are critical habitat for the birds. Wyoming big sagebrush is an important forage species for several wildlife species. Desert needlegrass, Thurbers needlegrass, Indian ricegrass, and bottlebrush squirreltail are also important forage for several wildlife species.

Hydrological functions

Runoff is high. Rills are common on steeper slopes and most frequently occur in areas subjected to summer convection storms or rapid spring snowmelt. Water flow patterns are rare to slight. Plant pedestalling due to erosion is slight to common and most frequently occur in areas subjected to summer convection storms or rapid spring snowmelt. Fine litter (foliage from grasses and annual & perennial forbs) is expected to move the distance of slope length during intense summer storms. Persistent litter (large woody material) will remain in place except during catastrophic events. Perennial herbaceous plants (especially deep-rooted bunchgrasses [i.e., needlegrasses] slow runoff and increase infiltration. Shrub canopy and associated litter break raindrop impact and provide opportunity for snow catch and accumulation on site.

Recreational uses

The light colored soils and steep slopes, characteristic of this site are in stark contrast to the surrounding terraces and drainages. The site has little recreational potential.

Wood products

Pinyon and utah juniper often occur on this site and provide a limited quantity of firewood, fence posts, Christmas trees and other wood products.

Other products

Native Americans made tea from big sagebrush leaves. They used the tea as a tonic, an antiseptic, for treating colds, diarrhea, and sore eyes and as a rinse to ward off ticks. Big sagebrush seeds were eaten raw or made into meal. Indian ricegrass was traditionally eaten by some Native American peoples. The Paiutes used seed as a reserve food source.

Other information

Wyoming big sagebrush is used for stabilizing slopes and gullies and for restoring degraded wildlife habitat, rangelands, mine spoils and other disturbed sites. It is particularly recommended on dry upland sites where other shrubs are difficult to establish. Indian ricegrass is well-suited for surface erosion control and desert revegetation although it is not highly effective in controlling sand movement. Bottlebrush squirreltail is tolerant of disturbance. Bottlebrush squirreltail as a high priority species for restoring native plant diversity. Desert needlegrass seeds are easily germinated and have potential for commercial use. Desert needlegrass may be used for groundcover in areas of light disturbance, but it is susceptible to excessive trampling.

Inventory data references

Type locality

Location 1: Carson City County, NV	
General legal description	This site also occurs in Douglas, Lyon, Mineral, Storey and Washoe counties, Nevada.

Other references

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

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

Contributors

DK/FR

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)	GK Brackley
Contact for lead author	State Rangeland Management Specialist
Date	06/01/1979
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

- 1. Number and extent of rills:** Rills are common on steeper slopes and most frequently occur in areas subjected to summer convection storms or rapid spring snowmelt.

- 2. Presence of water flow patterns:** Water flow patterns are rare to slight.

- 3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Plant pedestalling due to erosion is slight to common and most frequently occur in areas subjected to summer convection storms or rapid spring snowmelt.

- 4. Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):**
Bare Ground $\pm$ 50%; surface rock fragments $\pm$ 35%; shrub canopy <15%; foliar cover for perennial herbaceous plants $\pm$ 10%.

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

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

7. Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel): Fine litter (foliage from grasses and annual & perennial forbs) is expected to move the distance of slope length during intense summer storms. Persistent litter (large woody material) will remain in place except during catastrophic events.
-
8. Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values): Soil stability values should be 3 to 5 on the coarse surface soil textures found on this site. (To be field tested.)
-
9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness): Surface structure is typically thin to thick platy or massive. Soil surface colors are light and the soils are typified by an ochric epipedon. Organic carbon of the surface 2 to 3 inches is typically less than 1 percent dropping off quickly below.
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10. Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff: Perennial herbaceous plants (especially deep-rooted bunchgrasses [i.e., needlegrasses] slow runoff and increase infiltration. Shrub canopy and associated litter break raindrop impact and provide opportunity for snow catch and accumulation on site.
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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): None
-
12. Functional/Structural Groups (list in order of descending dominance by above-ground annual-production or live foliar cover using symbols: >>, >, = to indicate much greater than, greater than, and equal to):
- Dominant: Reference Plant Community: Deep-rooted, cool season, perennial bunchgrasses = tall shrubs (Wyoming big sagebrush). (By above ground production)
- Sub-dominant: Shallow-rooted, cool season, perennial grasses = deep-rooted, cool season, perennial forbs = fibrous, shallow-rooted, cool season, annual and perennial forbs. (By above ground production)
- Other:
- Additional:
-
13. Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence): Dead branches within individual shrubs are common and standing dead shrub canopy material may be as much as 30% of total woody canopy; some of the mature bunchgrasses (to 25%) have dead centers.
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14. Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in): Between plant interspaces ($\pm 2\%$)
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15. Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production): For normal or average growing season (March thru May) ± 150 lbs/ac; Spring moisture significantly affects total 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: Douglas'''' rabbitbrush is an increaser on this site. Cheatgrass, , horsebrush, snakeweed, Russian thistle, filaree, annual mustards and bassia are invaders on this site.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All functional groups should reproduce in average (or normal) and above average growing season years.
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