

Ecological site R027XY049NV

COBBLY CLAYPAN 8-10 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): 027X–Fallon-Lovelock Area

Physiography Found in the Great Basin Section of the Basin and Range Province of the Intermontane Plateaus this area is characterized by isolated uplifted fault block mountain ranges trending north to south that are separated by broad, hydrologically closed basins. The entire area occurs in the rain-shadow of the Sierra Nevada mountains and is influenced by Pleistocene Lake Lahontan which reached its most recent high stand about 12,000 years ago. There is substantial evidence suggesting the western Great Basin has been the site of pluvial-interpluvial cycles for at least the past two million years. The mountains and valleys are dissected by the Humboldt, Truckee, Carson, and Walker Rivers and their tributaries, all of which terminate within MLRA 27. Extensive playas can be found throughout this area and are the result of drying of ancient Lake Lahontan. Elevation generally ranges from 3,300 to 5,900 feet (1,005 to 1,800 meters) in valleys, but on some mountain peaks it is more than 7,870 feet (2,400 meters). Geology Landforms and soils of this MLRA have been heavily influenced by fluctuating lake level over the last 40,000 years. There is a level line evident on the higher slopes marking the former extent of glacial Lake Lahontan. Almost half of this area has surface deposits of alluvial valley fill influenced by lacustrine sediment. The rest has andesite and basalt rocks of different ages. Mesozoic and Tertiary intrusives are concentrated along the western border of the area, and Lower Volcanic Rocks (17 to 43 million years old) are common on the eastern side of the area. Also, some scattered outcrops of Mesozoic sedimentary and volcanic rocks and tuffaceous sedimentary rocks are in the mountains within the interior of this MLRA. Climate The average annual precipitation is 5 to 10 inches (125 to 255 millimeters) in most of the area but is as much as 19 inches (485 millimeters) on high mountain slopes. Most of the rainfall occurs as high-intensity, convective thunderstorms during the growing season. The amount of precipitation is very low from summer to midautumn. The precipitation in winter occurs mainly as snow. The average annual temperature is 43 to 54 degrees F (6 to 12 degrees C). The freeze-free period averages 155 days and ranges from 110 to 195 days, decreasing in length with elevation. Water The amount of precipitation is very low, and water for irrigation is obtained principally from diversions on the four large rivers in the area and from water stored in the Lahontan, Rye Patch, and Weber Reservoirs. Pyramid Lake and Walker Lakes are terminal lakes for the Truckee and Walker Rivers, respectively. Much of the annual flow of both rivers is diverted for irrigation, causing lake levels to fall and levels of dissolved salts to increase causing problems for the native Lahontan cutthroat trout. Soils The dominant soil orders are Aridisols and Entisols. The soils in the area are predominantly a mesic temperature regime, aridic moisture regime, and have a mixed mineralogy. They are generally well drained, loamy or sandy, commonly skeletal, and shallow to very deep. Accumulation of salts, tufa deposits, and eolian sediments with soluble salts over lacustrine deposits influence most of the soils in the basin landforms of this MLRA. Soils on bedrock-controlled landforms are typically comprised of volcanic or tuffaceous sedimentary colluvium over residuum. Biological Resources This area supports extensive areas of salt-desert shrub vegetation. Shadscale and Bailey's greasewood are widespread, occurring both individually and together. Grasses are generally sparse, although Indian ricegrass is prominent, especially on the sandy soils. Fourwing saltbush, winterfat, spiny hopsage, wolfberry, ephedra, dalea, and bud sagebrush are common shrubs. Basin wildrye, creeping wildrye, alkali sacaton, saltgrass, black greasewood, rubber rabbitbrush, and big saltbush are important plants on saline bottom lands and terraces. A few marsh areas support cattail, bulrushes, sedges, and rushes. Big sagebrush, along with scattered Utah juniper and singleleaf pinyon, is associated with Thurber needlegrass, desert needlegrass, Sandberg bluegrass, and squirreltail on the higher elevation piedmont slopes and mountains.

Ecological site concept

The Cobbly Claypan 8-10 P.Z. site occurs on hills, fan remnants, and mountain slopes on all aspects. Slope gradients of 2 to 50 percent are typical. Elevations are 5500 to about 7500 feet. The soils are very shallow to shallow. The site has a high amount of cobbles, stones, or boulders with a total surface cover of rock fragments over 60 percent.

Associated sites

R027XY037NV	LOAMY SLOPE 5-8 P.Z. Found associated with more loamy soils.
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Similar sites

R027XY087NV	CLAYPAN 14+ P.Z. More productive site; surface rock fragments typically <45%; gentler slopes
R027XY083NV	MOUNTAIN RIDGE Less productive site

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Artemisia arbuscula</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Achnatherum thurberianum</i>

Physiographic features

The Cobbly Claypan 8-10 P.Z. site occurs on hills, fan remnants, and mountain slopes on all aspects. Slope gradients of 2 to 50 percent are typical. Elevations are 5500 to about 7500 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Mountain slope (2) Hill (3) Fan remnant
Runoff class	Medium to very high
Elevation	1,680 – 2,290 m
Slope	0 – 50 %
Water table depth	180 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The climate associated with this site is arid, characterized by cool, moist winters and hot, dry summers. Average annual precipitation is 8 to 10 inches. Mean annual air temperature is 49 to 54 degrees F. The average growing season is about 90 to 120 days. There is no climate station available for this site.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	120 days
Freeze-free period (average)	
Precipitation total (average)	250 mm

Influencing water features

There is no influencing water features associated with this site.

Soil features

The soils associated with this site are very shallow to shallow and have formed in alluvium from mixed parent materials or residuum from volcanic rocks. These soils are well drained with very high runoff. Available water capacity is very low. The soil surface has a high amount of cobbles, stones, or boulders with a total surface cover of rock fragments over 60 percent. These rock fragments help reduce erosion and retain soil moisture. The soil series associated with this site include: Antholop, Mickey, Ravenell, Rowel, and Zyzzi.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium (2) Residuum (3) Residuum – igneous rock (4) Residuum – volcanic rock
Surface texture	(1) Very stony sandy loam (2) Very cobbly sandy loam (3) Very gravelly sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Very slow to moderately slow
Soil depth	10 – 50 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	20 – 70 %

Surface fragment cover >3"	0 – 30 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	1.02 – 6.1 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10 %
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)	10 – 60 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 50 %

Ecological dynamics

As ecological condition deteriorates, low sagebrush, Douglas' rabbitbrush, and Sandberg's bluegrass increase while Thurber's needlegrass decreases. When this site is in low ecological condition, galleta may become dominant following wildfire. Species likely to invade this site are annuals such as cheatgrass.

Fire Ecology:

Prior to 1897 mean fire return intervals have been estimated to be from 12 to 15 years with intervals ranging from 3 to 28 years. Fire most often occurs during wet years with high forage production. Low sagebrush is very susceptible to fire damage. Low sagebrush is usually killed by fire and does not re-sprout. The recovery in burned areas is usually via small, light, wind-dispersed seed for all low sagebrush subspecies. Partially injured low sagebrush may re-grow from living branches, but sprouting does not occur.

Thurber needlegrass is classified a "moderately" resistant, but depending on season of burn, phenology, and fire severity, this perennial bunchgrass is moderately to severely damaged by fire. Aboveground vegetation of needlegrass is often consumed by fire. Thurber needlegrass is the least fire-resistant needlegrass, due to its densely tufted stems. Burning has been found to decrease the vegetation and reproductive vigor. Early season burning is more damaging to this needlegrass than late season 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 (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	Primary Perennial Grasses			108-215	
	Thurber's needlegrass	ACTH7	<i>Achnatherum thurberianum</i>	90-157	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	9-36	–
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	9-22	–
2	Secondary Perennial Grasses			9-36	
	desert needlegrass	ACSP12	<i>Achnatherum speciosum</i>	2-13	–
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	2-13	–
	James' galleta	PLJA	<i>Pleuraphis jamesii</i>	2-13	–
Forb					
3	Perennial Forbs			9-36	
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	2-13	–
	phlox	PHLOX	<i>Phlox</i>	2-13	–
	globemallow	SPHAE	<i>Sphaeralcea</i>	2-13	–
Shrub/Vine					
4	Primary Shrubs			152-202	
	little sagebrush	ARAR8	<i>Artemisia arbuscula</i>	135-157	–
	Nevada jointfir	EPNE	<i>Ephedra nevadensis</i>	9-22	–
	spiny hopsage	GRSP	<i>Grayia spinosa</i>	9-22	–
5	Secondary Shrubs			22-45	
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	2-13	–
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	2-13	–

Animal community

Livestock Interpretations: This site is suited for livestock grazing. Grazing management should be keyed to Thurber needlegrass. Thurber needlegrass is valuable forage for livestock and wildlife. Thurber needlegrass produces a fairly large amount of leafage that is usually of "good," although not choice, palatability for all classes of livestock. It is most palatable in the spring and early summer while the plants are young and succulent. Domestic sheep and to a much lesser degree cattle consume low sagebrush, particularly during the spring, fall and winter. 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: Low sagebrush is considered a valuable browse plant during the spring, fall and winter months. In some areas it is of little value in winter due to heavy snow. Low sagebrush is an important food source for sage grouse throughout the year, especially between October and April. Mule deer utilize and sometimes prefer low sagebrush, particularly in winter and early spring.

Hydrological functions

Runoff is very high. Permeability is very slow to moderately slow.

Other information

Low sagebrush can be successfully transplanted or seeded in restoration.

Inventory data references

NASIS soil component data.

Type locality

Location 1: Lyon County, NV	
Township/Range/Section	T16N R25E S26
General legal description	At higher elevations in Cleaver Peak area, Desert Mountains, Lyon County NV. This site also occurs in Churchill and Mineral Counties, 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

GKB

Approval

Kendra Moseley, 6/03/2024

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	09/21/2026
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:
