

Ecological site R027XY060NV

SANDY 3-5 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 Sandy 3-5 P.Z. site occurs on sand sheets over fan skirts, fan remnants, and inset fans. Slope gradients of less than 4 percent are typical. Elevations are 4000 to 6200 feet. Soils are deep aeolian sands of mixed origin.

Associated sites

R027XY009NV	SANDY 5-8 P.Z. More productive site; LYSH minor shrub, if present.
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Similar sites

R027XY023NV	DUNES 4-8 P.Z. TETE4 dominant shrub; occurs on sand hill (dune) landform.
R027XY012NV	SODIC SANDS SAVE4 dominant shrub; ATCA2 minor shrub.
R027XY016NV	SODIC DUNES SAVE4 dominant shrub; ATCA2 minor shrub; occurs on sand hill (dune) landform.
R027XY050NV	COARSE GRAVELLY LOAM 4-8 P.Z. SABA14 dominant shrub; ATCA2 minor shrub, if present; ATCO important shrub.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Atriplex canescens</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>

Physiographic features

The Sandy 3-5 P.Z. site occurs on sand sheets over fan skirts, fan remnants, and inset fans. Slope ranges from 0 to 50 percent, but slope gradients of 0 to 4 percent are most typical. Elevations are 4000 to 6200 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Fan remnant (2) Fan skirt (3) Inset fan
Runoff class	Negligible to very low
Flooding duration	Very brief (4 to 48 hours)

Flooding frequency	Rare
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	1,220 – 1,890 m
Slope	0 – 50 %
Water table depth	180 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The climate on this site is arid, characterized by cool, moist winters, and hot, dry summers. Average annual precipitation is 3 to 5 inches. Mean annual air temperature is 50 to 58 degrees F. The average growing season is about 110 to 160 days.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	160 days
Freeze-free period (average)	
Precipitation total (average)	130 mm

Influencing water features

There are no influencing water features associated with this site.

Soil features

Soils associated with this site are deep aeolian sands of mixed origin. Soils have rapid water intake rates and are well drained to excessively drained. Available water capacity is very low to low. Runoff is negligible to medium due to the rapid permeability of the soil. These soils are moderately to strongly alkaline. The potential for wind erosion is high. Soil stability values should be 1 to 4 on the sandy soil textures found on this site. The soil series associated with this site include: Eastgate, Gynelle, Inmo, Luning, and Soda Lake.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium
Surface texture	(1) Gravelly loamy sand (2) Loamy sand
Family particle size	(1) Sandy

Drainage class	Well drained to excessively drained
Permeability class	Moderate to very rapid
Soil depth	180 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 – 30 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	3.3 – 9.91 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10 %
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0 – 20 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0 – 90
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	7.4 – 9.6
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 60 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 30 %

Ecological dynamics

As ecological condition declines, Nevada dalea, Bailey's greasewood, and wolfberry increase as Indian ricegrass, fourwing saltbush, and winterfat decrease. With further site degradation, Bailey's greasewood may become a dominate shrub within the plant community. Species likely to invade this site are cheatgrass, burrobrush, Douglas' rabbitbrush, horsebrush, halogeton, annual mustards and Russian thistle.

Fire Ecology:

The mean fire return interval for Fourwing saltbush communities is highly variable ranging from 35 to 100 years. Fourwing saltbush is

most common under regimes of infrequent fire. Generally, fourwing saltbush is poorly adapted to frequent fire. Sustained surface fire top-kills or kills fourwing saltbush, depending upon ecotype. Fourwing saltbush is fire-resistant compared to most associated shrubs. The salt scurf layer on leaves inhibits burning. Ether extractives in leaves and stems promote shrub flammability. Fourwing saltbush may sprout after top-kill. Some ecotypes fail to sprout, or show only a weak sprouting response. Fire typically destroys aboveground parts of Shockley's wolfberry, but the degree of damage to the plant depends on fire severity. Winterfat is either killed or top-killed by fire, depending on fire severity. Severe fire can kill the perennating buds located several inches above the ground surface and thus kills the plant. In addition, severe fire usually destroys seed on the plant. Low-severity fire scorches or only partially consumes the aboveground portions of winterfat and thus does not cause high mortality. Communities in which Nevada dalea occur rarely burn, thus Nevada dalea has little adaptations to fire and is probably killed. Indian ricegrass reestablishes on burned sites through seed dispersed from adjacent unburned areas. Indian ricegrass plants are generally killed by fire. Rapid postfire responses such as these suggest that Indian ricegrass may also sprout from tillers.

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			127-168	
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	127-168	–
2	Secondary Perennial Grasses			6-22	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	1-9	–
	sand dropseed	SPCR	<i>Sporobolus cryptandrus</i>	1-9	–
3	Annual			0-9	
Forb					
4	Perennial			6-28	
	evening primrose	OENOT	<i>Oenothera</i>	1-11	–
	beardtongue	PENST	<i>Penstemon</i>	1-11	–
	globemallow	SPHAE	<i>Sphaeralcea</i>	1-11	–
5	Annual			0-15	
Shrub/Vine					
6	Primary Perennial Shrubs			82-164	
	fourwing saltbush	ATCA2	<i>Atriplex canescens</i>	56-84	–
	Shockley's desert-thorn	LYSH	<i>Lycium shockleyi</i>	15-43	–
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	6-22	–
	Nevada dalea	PSPO	<i>Psorothamnus polydenius</i>	6-15	–
7	Secondary Perennial Shrubs			6-28	
	shadscale saltbush	ATCO	<i>Atriplex confertifolia</i>	1-9	–
	Nevada jointfir	EPNE	<i>Ephedra nevadensis</i>	1-9	–
	bud sagebrush	PIDE4	<i>Picrothamnus desertorum</i>	1-9	–
	greasewood	SAVE4	<i>Sarcobatus vermiculatus</i>	1-9	–

Animal community

Livestock Interpretations: This site is suitable for livestock grazing. Fourwing saltbush is one of the most palatable shrubs in the West. Its protein, fat, and carbohydrate levels are comparable to alfalfa. It provides nutritious forage for all classes of livestock. Palatability is rated as good for domestic sheep, and domestic goats; fair for cattle; fair to good for horses in winter, and poor for horses in other seasons. 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 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. Consequently, Indian

ricegrass is often heavily grazed before animals leave winter ranges. Shockley's wolfberry is sometimes used as forage by livestock. Palatability of Shockley's wolfberry browse is presumably fair to low. This species is used as forage only when more desirable species are unavailable. The fruit, however, appears to be moderately palatable. Winterfat is an important forage plant for livestock, especially during winter when forage is scarce. Abusive grazing practices have reduced or eliminated winterfat on some areas even though it is fairly resistant to browsing. Effects depend on severity and season of grazing. Nevada dalea is of little importance to livestock due to its low palatability. 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: Fourwing saltbush provides valuable habitat and year-round browse for wildlife. Fourwing saltbush also provides browse and shelter for small mammals. Additionally, the browse provides a source of water for black-tailed jackrabbits in arid environments. Granivorous birds, including scaled and other quail species, grouse, and gray partridge, consume the fruits. Wild ungulates, rodents, and lagomorphs readily consume all aboveground portions of the plant. Palatability is rated good for deer, pronghorn antelope, and bighorn sheep. Palatability of Anderson wolfberry browse is presumably fair to low. This species is used as forage only when more desirable species are unavailable. The fruit, however, appears to be moderately palatable. Anderson wolfberry is sometimes used as forage by feral burros. The red berries are eaten by some birds and mammals. Berries of this plant constituted 2 percent of the diet of chukar partridges. In some areas of southern Nevada, the fleshy leaves and juicy berries provide part of the succulence permitting Gambel quail to occupy desert areas devoid of drinking water. In desert washes Anderson wolfberry grows in dense thorny thickets which provide good cover for quail and other small wildlife. Winterfat is an important forage plant for Wildlife, especially during winter when forage is scarce. Winterfat seeds are eaten by rodents. Winterfat is a staple food for black-tailed jackrabbit. Mule deer and pronghorn antelope browse winterfat. Winterfat is used for cover by rodents. It is potential nesting cover for upland game birds, especially when grasses grow up through its crown. Nevada dalea has low palatability to many wildlife species. Indian ricegrass is eaten by pronghorn antelope in moderate amounts whenever available and in Nevada it is consumed by desert bighorns.

Hydrological functions

Rills are rare on this site. A few can be expected on steeper slopes in areas subjected to summer convection storms or rapid spring snowmelt. Water flow patterns are none to rare. Pedestals are rare with occurrence typically limited to areas affected by wind scouring. Gullies are rare in areas of this site that occur on stable landforms. Where this site occurs on inset fans, gullies and head cuts associated with ephemeral channel entrenchment are common. Gullies and head cuts should be healing or stable. Fine litter (foliage from grasses and annual and perennial forbs) are expected to move the distance of slope length during intense summer convection storms or rapid snowmelt events. Persistent litter (large woody material) will remain in place except during catastrophic events. Perennial herbaceous plants (especially deep-rooted bunchgrasses [i.e., Indian ricegrass] slow runoff and increase infiltration. The sparse shrub canopy and associated litter break raindrop impact and provide a limited opportunity for snow catch and accumulation on this site.

Recreational uses

This site offers opportunities for photography and nature study. This site has potential for off-road vehicle use and hiking.

Other products

Fourwing saltbush is traditionally important to Native Americans. They ground the seeds for flour. The leaves, placed on coals, impart a salty flavor to corn and other roasted food. Top-growth produces a yellow dye. Young leaves and shoots were used to dye wool and other materials. Branch ashes were added to blue corn dough to make green bread. The roots and flowers were ground to soothe insect bites. Native Americans used the fleshy berries of Anderson wolfberry either fresh or boiled and then dried them for later use. This shrub is also used as an ornamental valued chiefly for its showy red berries. Indian ricegrass seeds make a gluten-free, nutritious flour with a potentially good market. Indian ricegrass was traditionally eaten by some Native American people. The Paiutes used seed as a reserve food source. The large-seeded panicle is often used in dry floral arrangements.

Other information

Fourwing saltbush is widely used in rangeland and riparian improvement and reclamation projects, including burned area recovery. It is probably the most widely used shrub for restoration of winter ranges and mined land reclamation. Fourwing saltbush is drought and cold resistant, palatable, relatively easy to establish with artificial regeneration, and establishes on harsh (and even toxic) sites. Fourwing saltbush is adaptable on sites with declining water tables, brackish groundwater, or saline soils. The deep roots help stabilize erodible soils. It can facilitate establishment of native shrubs, such as sagebrush, that are more resistant to artificial regeneration. Winterfat adapts well to most site conditions, and its extensive root system stabilizes soil. However, winterfat is intolerant of flooding, excess water, and acidic soils. Indian ricegrass is well-suited for surface erosion control and desert revegetation although it is not highly effective in controlling sand movement. Certain native ecotypes exhibit desirable characteristics such as drought and salinity tolerance, low seed dormancy, and good nutritional qualities. However, Indian ricegrass can be difficult to establish. Typical sites include those in which vegetation has been removed due to surface mining, construction activity, brush control, heavy grazing, or fire.

Inventory data references

NV-ECS-1: 5 records NRCS-RANGE-417: 1 record NASIS soil component data.

Type locality

Location 1: Lyon County, NV	
Township/Range/Section	T15 N R26 E S21
General legal description	About 6 miles east of Wabuska, Walker River Paiute Tribe, Lyon County, Nevada. This site also occurs in Churchill, Mineral, and Pershing counties, Nevada.

Other references

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

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

Contributors

GED

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)	GK BRACKLEY
Contact for lead author	State Rangeland Management Specialist
Date	06/20/2006
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Rills are rare. A few can be expected on steeper slopes in areas subjected to summer convection storms or rapid spring snowmelt.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Water flow patterns none to rare.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Pedestals are rare with occurrence typically limited to areas affected by wind scouring.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):**
Bare Ground 50-60%; surface rock fragments <15%; shrub canopy <15%; basal area for perennial herbaceous plants $\pm$ 10%.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Gullies are rare in areas of this site that occur on stable landforms. Where this site occurs on inset fans gullies and head cuts associated with ephemeral channel entrenchment are common. Gullies and head cuts should be healing or stable.

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Wind scoured areas small but not uncommon.

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 convection 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 1 to 4 on the sandy soil textures found on this site. (This will be field tested.)

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Surface structure is typically single grained. 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 1 to 1.5 percent dropping off quickly below. Organic matter content can be more or less depending on micro-topography.

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., Indian ricegrass] with shrub canopy and associated litter break raindrop impact. Coarse textured surface soils allow rapid infiltration.

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 >> fourwing saltbush. (By above ground production)

Sub-dominant: Associated shrubs > shallow-rooted, cool season, perennial bunchgrasses > 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 25% of total woody canopy; some of the mature bunchgrasses (<20%) have dead centers.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Between plant interspaces ($\pm 5\%$) and depth ($\pm \frac{1}{2}$ in.)
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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) ± 250 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: Cheatgrass, halogeton, Russian thistle, Douglas rabbitbrush, and annual mustards are invaders on this site. Bailey greasewood is an increaser 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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