

Ecological site R028AY126NV

COBBLY CLAYPAN

12-14 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): 028A–Ancient Lake Bonneville

MLRA 28A occurs in Utah (82%), Nevada (16%), and Idaho (2%). It makes up about 36,775 square miles. A large area west and southwest of Great Salt Lake is a salty playa. This area is the farthest eastern extent of the Great Basin Section of the Basin and Range Province of the Intermontane Plateaus. It is an area of nearly level basins between widely separated mountain ranges trending north to south. The basins are bordered by long, gently sloping alluvial fans. The mountains are uplifted fault blocks with steep side slopes. They are not well dissected because of low rainfall in the MLRA. Most of the valleys are closed basins containing sinks or playa lakes. Elevation ranges from 3,950 to 6,560 ft. in the basins and from 6,560 to 11,150 ft. in the mountains. Most of this area has alluvial valley fill and playa lakebed deposits at the surface. Great Salt Lake is all that remains of glacial Lake Bonneville. A level line on some mountain slopes indicates the former extent of this glacial lake. Most of the mountains in the interior of this area consist of tilted blocks of marine sediments from Cambrian to Mississippian age. Scattered outcrops of Tertiary continental sediments and volcanic rocks are throughout the area. The average annual precipitation is 5 to 12 ins. in the valleys and is as much as 49 ins. in the mountains. Most of the rainfall occurs as high-intensity, convective thunderstorms during the growing season. The driest period is from midsummer to early autumn. Precipitation in winter typically occurs as snow. The average annual temperature is 39 to 53 °F. The freeze-free period averages 165 days and ranges from 110 to 215 days, decreasing in length with elevation. The dominant soil orders in this MLRA are Aridisols, Entisols, and Mollisols. The soils in the area dominantly have a mesic or frigid soil temperature regime, an aridic or xeric soil moisture regime, and mixed mineralogy. They generally are well drained, loamy or loamy-skeletal, and very deep.

Ecological site concept

This site occurs on shoulders, backslopes and footslopes of hills and mountains. Slopes range from 2 to 50 percent, but slope gradients of 8 to 30 percent are most typical. Elevations are 6100 to 9200 feet. Average annual precipitation is 12 to 14 inches. Mean annual air temperature is 43 to 45 degrees F. The average growing season is about 70 to 100 days. The soils in this site are well to excessively drained and have a shallow effective rooting depth. The soils are formed in residuum derived from welded tuff. A combination of impermeable bedrock at a shallow depth and the swelling of the heavy textured subsoil when wet, results in poor soil aeration and a perched water table within the root zone during the spring. The Reference state is characterized by an open stand of soft-woody shrubs and perennial forbs and grasses. The plant community is dominated by low sagebrush, bluebunch wheatgrass and Thurber needlegrass. Production ranges from 200 to 500 pounds per acre.

Associated sites

F028AY075NV	PIMO-JUOS/ARAR8/PSSPS-POFE
R028AY061NV	CLAYPAN 14+ P.Z.
R028AY062NV	MOUNTAIN RIDGE

Similar sites

R028AY061NV	CLAYPAN 14+ P.Z. More productive site, ACTH7 is a minor species.
R028AY062NV	MOUNTAIN RIDGE Less productive site, ACTH7 is a minor species or absent. Site occurs at higher elevations.
R028AY125NV	GRAVELLY CLAYPAN 14+ P.Z. More productive site, PUTR co-dominant shrub
R028AY094NV	CLAYPAN 12-14 P.Z. More productive site.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Artemisia arbuscula</i> (2) <i>Purshia tridentata</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i> (2) <i>Achnatherum thurberianum</i>

Physiographic features

This site occurs on shoulders, backslopes and footslopes of hills and mountains. Slopes range from 2 to 50 percent, but slope gradients of 8 to 30 percent are most typical. Elevations are 6100 to 9200 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Mountain (2) Hill
Flooding duration	Very brief (4 to 48 hours)
Flooding frequency	Rare
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	1,860 – 2,800 m
Slope	0 – 50 %

Aspect	N, E, W
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Climatic features

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).

Average annual precipitation is 12 to 14 inches. Mean annual air temperature is 43 to 45 degrees F. The average growing season is about 70 to 100 days.

Mean annual precipitation at Spring Valley State Park Climate Station(267750) is 11.89 in. Monthly mean precipitation is: January 0.87; February 1.21; March 1.32; April 0.92; May 1.07; June 0.42; July 0.88; August 1.29; September 1.23; October 1.2; November 0.66; December 0.82.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	0 days
Freeze-free period (average)	90 days
Precipitation total (average)	330 mm

Influencing water features

There are no influencing water features associated with this site.

Soil features

The soils associated with this site are well to excessively drained and have a shallow effective rooting depth. The soils are formed in residuum derived from welded tuff and have a high amount of volcanic glass in the profile. A combination of impermeable bedrock at a shallow depth and the swelling of the heavy textured subsoil when wet, results in poor soil aeration and a perched water table within the root zone during the spring. Soils typically have a 50 to 60% surface cover of gravel, cobbles, or stones. Available water holding capacity is very low to low. The soil moisture regime is typic aridic and the soil temperature regime is frigid. Soil series associated with this site include: Schoolmarm.

The representative soil series is Schoolmarm, a Ashy-skeletal, glassy, frigid Aridic Lithic Argixerolls . Diagnostic horizons include an mollic epipedon from the soil surface to 28 cm, argillic horizon from 8 to 28 cm, with lithic contact at 28 cm. Clay content in the particle control section averages 27 to 35 percent. Volcanic glass content ranges from 30 to 60 percent in the 0.02 to 2 mm fraction. Rock fragments range from 35 to 60 percent mainly gravel. Reaction is neutral. Effervescence is none. Lithology consists of fragments is welded tuff.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Residuum – welded tuff
Surface texture	(1) Gravelly coarse sandy loam (2) Ashy
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Well drained to moderately well drained
Permeability class	Moderate to moderately rapid
Soil depth	30 cm
Surface fragment cover $\leq 3"$	30 – 40 %
Surface fragment cover $> 3"$	20 – 30 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	0.76 – 11.94 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)	6.8 – 10
Subsurface fragment volume $\leq 3"$ (Depth not specified)	40 – 60 %

Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified
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Ecological dynamics

An ecological site is the product of all the environmental factors responsible for its development and it has a set of key characteristics that influence a site's resilience to disturbance and resistance to invasives. Key characteristics include 1) climate (precipitation, temperature), 2) topography (aspect, slope, elevation, and landform), 3) hydrology (infiltration, runoff), 4) soils (depth, texture, structure, organic matter), 5) plant communities (functional groups, productivity), and 6) natural disturbance regime (fire, herbivory, etc.) (Caudle 2013). Biotic factors that influence resilience include site productivity, species composition and structure, and population regulation and regeneration (Chambers et al. 2013).

This ecological site is dominated by deep-rooted cool season, perennial bunchgrasses and long-lived shrubs (50+ years) with high root to shoot ratios. The dominant shrubs usually root to the full depth of the winter-spring soil moisture recharge, which ranges from 1.0 to over 3.0 m (Dobrowolski et al. 1990). Root length of mature sagebrush plants was measured to a depth of 2 meters in alluvial soils in Utah (Richards and Caldwell 1987). However, community types with low sagebrush as the dominant shrub were found to have soil depths and thus available rooting depths of 71 to 81 cm in a study in northeast Nevada (Jensen 1990). These shrubs have a flexible generalized root system with development of both deep taproots and laterals near the surface (Comstock and Ehleringer 1992).

Periodic drought regularly influences sagebrush ecosystems and drought duration and severity as increased throughout the 20th century in much of the Intermountain West. Major shifts away from historical precipitation patterns have the greatest potential to alter ecosystem function and productivity. Species composition and productivity can be altered by the timing of precipitation and water availability with the soil profile (Bates et al. 2006).

Low sagebrush is fairly drought tolerant but also tolerates perched water tables during some portion of the growing season. Low sagebrush is also susceptible to the sagebrush defoliator, Aroga moth. Aroga moth can partially or entirely kill individual plants or entire stands of big sagebrush (Furniss and Barr 1975), but the research is inconclusive of the damage sustained by low sagebrush populations.

The Great Basin sagebrush communities have high spatial and temporal variability in precipitation both among years and within growing seasons. Nutrient availability is typically low but increases with elevation and closely follows moisture availability. The invasibility of plant communities is often linked to resource availability. Disturbance can decrease resource uptake due to damage or mortality of the native species and depressed competition or can increase resource pools by the decomposition of dead plant material following disturbance. The invasion of sagebrush communities by cheatgrass has been linked to disturbances (fire, abusive grazing) that have resulted in fluctuations in resources (Chambers et al. 2007).

The range and density of singleleaf pinyon and Utah juniper has increased since the middle of the nineteenth century (Tausch 1999, Miller and Tausch 2000). Causes for infilling or expansion of trees into sagebrush ecosystems include wildfire suppression, historic livestock grazing, and climate change (Bunting 1994). Mean fire return intervals prior to European settlement in low sagebrush ecosystems were greater than 100 years, however frequent enough to inhibit the infilling of singleleaf pinyon and Utah juniper into these low productive sagebrush cover types (Miller and Tausch 2000). Thus, trees were isolated to fire-safe areas such as rocky outcroppings and areas with low-productivity. An increase in crown density causes a decrease in understory perennial vegetation and an increase in bare ground. This allows for the invasion of non-native annual species such as cheatgrass. With annual species in the understory wildfire can become more frequent and increase in intensity. With frequent wildfires these plant communities can convert to annual species with a sprouting shrub and juvenile tree overstory.

This ecological site has low to moderate resilience to disturbance and resistance to invasion. Increased resilience increases with elevation, aspect, increased precipitation and increased nutrient availability. Four possible alternative stable states have been identified for this site.

Fire Ecology:

Fire return intervals have been estimated at 100-200 years in black sagebrush dominated sites (Kitchen and McArthur 2007) and likely is similar in the low sagebrush ecosystem; however, historically fires were probably patchy due to the low productivity of these sites. Fine fuel loads generally average 100 to 400 pounds per acre (110- 450 kg/ha) but are occasionally as high as 600 pounds per acre (680 kg/ha) in low sagebrush habitat types (Bradley et al. 1992). Low sagebrush is killed by fire and does not sprout (Young 1983). Establishment after fire is from seed, generally blown in and not from the seed bank (Bradley et al. 1992). Fire risk is greatest following a wet, productive year when there is greater production of fine fuels (Beardall and Sylvester 1976). Recovery time of low sagebrush following fire is variable (Young 1983). After fire, if regeneration conditions are favorable, low sagebrush recovers in 2 to 5 years, however on harsh sites where cover is low to begin with and/or erosion occurs after fire, recovery may require more than 10 years (Young 1983). Slow regeneration may subsequently worsen erosion (Blaisdell et al. 1982).

Antelope bitterbrush is moderately fire tolerant (McConnell and Smith 1977). It regenerates by seed and resprouting (Blaisdell and Mueggler 1956, McArthur et al. 1982), however sprouting ability is highly variable and has been attributed to genetics, plant age, phenology, soil moisture and texture and fire severity (Blaisdell and Mueggler 1956, Blaisdell et al. 1982, Clark et al. 1982, Cook et al. 1994). Bitterbrush sprouts from a region on the stem approximately 1.5 inches above and below the soil surface; the plant rarely sprouts if the root crown is killed by fire (Blaisdell and Mueggler 1956). Low intensity fires may allow for bitterbrush to sprout; however, community response also depends on soil moisture levels at time of fire (Murray 1983). Lower soil moisture allows more charring of the stem below ground level (Blaisdell and Mueggler 1956), thus sprouting will usually be more successful after a spring fire than after a fire in summer or

fall (Murray 1983, Busse et al. 2000, Kerns et al. 2006). If cheatgrass is present, bitterbrush seedling success is much lower. The factor that most limits establishment of bitterbrush seedlings is competition for water resources with the invasive species cheatgrass (Clements and Young 2002).

Fire will remove aboveground biomass from bluebunch wheatgrass but plant mortality is generally low (Robberecht and Defossé 1995) because the buds are underground (Conrad and Poulton 1966) or protected by foliage. Uresk et al. (1976) reported burning increased vegetative and reproductive vigor of bluebunch wheatgrass. Thus, bluebunch wheatgrass is considered to experience slight damage to fire but is more susceptible in drought years (Young 1983). Plant response will vary depending on season, fire severity, fire intensity and post-fire soil moisture availability.

Burning has been found to decrease the vegetative and reproductive vigor of Thurber's needlegrass (Uresk et al. 1976). Fire can cause high mortality, in addition to reducing basal area and yield of Thurber's needlegrass (Britton et al. 1990). The fine leaves and densely tufted growth form make this grass susceptible to subsurface charring of the crowns (Wright and Klemmedson 1965). Although timing of fire highly influenced the response and mortality of Thurber's needlegrass, smaller bunch sizes were less likely to be damaged by fire (Wright and Klemmedson 1965). Thurber's needlegrass often survives fire and will continue growth or regenerate from tillers when conditions are favorable (Koniak 1985, Britton et al. 1990). Reestablishment on burned sites has been found to be relatively slow due to low germination and competitive ability (Koniak 1985). Cheatgrass has been found to be a highly successful competitor with seedlings of this needlegrass and may preclude reestablishment (Evans and Young 1978).

Sandberg bluegrass, a minor component of this ecological site, has been found to increase following fire likely due to its low stature and productivity (Daubenmire 1975). Sandberg bluegrass may retard reestablishment of deeper rooted bunchgrass.

Muttongrass, a minor component on this site, is top killed by fire but will resprout after low to moderate severity fires. A study by Vose and White (1991) in an open sawtimber site, found minimal difference in overall effect of burning on mutton grass.

Singleleaf pinyon and Utah juniper are usually killed by fire, and are most vulnerable to fire when they are under four feet tall (Bradley et al. 1992). Larger trees, because they have foliage farther from the ground and thicker bark, can survive low severity fires but mortality does occur when 60% or more of the crown is scorched. With the low production of the understory vegetation, high severity fires within this plant community were not likely and rarely became crown fires (Bradley et al. 1992, Miller and Tausch 2000). Tree density on this site increases with grazing management that favors the removal of fine fuels and management focused on fire suppression. With an increase of cheatgrass in the understory, fire severity is likely to increase. Utah juniper reestablishes by seed from nearby seed source or surviving seeds. Utah juniper begins to produce seed at about 30 years old (Bradley et al. 1992). Seeds establish best through the use of a nurse plant such as sagebrush and rabbitbrush (Everett and Ward 1984, Tausch and West 1988, Bradley et al. 1992).

State and transition model

Figure 5. State and Transition Model

Figure 6. Legend

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	Perennial, cool season (mid) bunchgrasses			84-207	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSPS	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata ssp. spicata</i>	45-112	–
	Thurber's needlegrass	ACTH7	<i>Achnatherum thurberianum</i>	22-56	–
	muttongrass	POFE	<i>Poa fendleriana</i>	6-17	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	6-11	–
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	2-11	–
2	Perennial cool season (short) bunchgrasses			2-11	
	Webber needlegrass	ACWE3	<i>Achnatherum webberi</i>	2-11	–
Forb					
3	Perennial forbs			34-84	
	fleabane	ERIGE2	<i>Erigeron</i>	6-11	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	6-11	–
Shrub/Vine					
4	Evergreen shrubs			78-196	

	little sagebrush	ARAR8	<i>Artemisia arbuscula</i>	78-196	–
5	Deciduous shrubs			22-56	
	antelope bitterbrush	PUTR2	<i>Purshia tridentata</i>	11-28	–
	currant	RIBES	<i>Ribes</i>	4-11	–
	Utah serviceberry	AMUT	<i>Amelanchier utahensis</i>	4-11	–
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	1-6	–
7	Succulents			1-6	
Tree					
6	Evergreen Trees			1-2	
	Utah juniper	JUOS	<i>Juniperus osteosperma</i>	0-1	–
	singleleaf pinyon	PIMO	<i>Pinus monophylla</i>	0-1	–

Table 6. Community 1.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 7. Community 1.3 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 8. Community 2.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 9. Community 2.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 10. Community 2.3 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 11. Community 3.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 12. Community 3.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 13. Community 4.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 14. Community 4.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 15. Community 5.1 plant community composition

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

Livestock/Wildlife Grazing Interpretations: This site is suitable for livestock grazing. Considerations for grazing management including timing, intensity and duration of grazing. Targeted grazing could be used to decrease the density of non-natives. This ecological site provides valuable browse plants for wildlife and livestock (Clements and Young 1997, Sheehy and Winward 1981, Ngugi et al. 1992,). The ability of low sagebrush to grow on exposed sites provides important cover and feed for wintering animals. In other areas, low sagebrush may be used preferentially in winter when shorter grasses are buried by snow (Meuggler and Stewart 1980). Bluebunch wheatgrass is moderately grazing tolerant and is very sensitive to defoliation during the active growth period (Blaisdell and Pechanec 1949, Laycock 1967, Anderson and Scherzinger 1975, Britton et al. 1990). Herbage and flower stalk production was reduced with clipping

at all times during the growing season; however, clipping was most harmful during the boot stage (Blaisdell and Pechanec 1949). Tiller production and growth of bluebunch was greatly reduced when clipping was coupled with drought (Busso and Richards 1995). Mueggler (1975) estimated that low vigor bluebunch wheatgrass may need up to 8 years rest to recover. Although an important forage species, it is not always the preferred species by livestock and wildlife. Bunchgrasses, in general, best tolerate light grazing after seed formation. Britton et al. (1990) observed the effects of clipping date on basal area of 5 bunchgrasses in eastern Oregon, and found grazing from August to October (after seed set) has the least impact. Heavy grazing during the growing season will reduce perennial bunchgrasses and increase sagebrush. Abusive grazing by cattle or horses will likely increase low sagebrush, rabbitbrush and some forbs such as mat forming eriogonums or arrowleaf balsamroot. Annual non-native weedy species such as cheatgrass and mustards, and potentially medusahead, may invade. Thurber's needlegrass is an important forage for livestock and wildlife in the arid regions of the West (Ganskopp 1988). Although the seeds are apparently not injurious, grazing animals avoid them when they begin to mature. Sheep, however, have been observed to graze the leaves closely, leaving stems untouched (Eckert and Spencer 1987). Heavy grazing during the growing season has been shown to reduce the basal area of Thurber's needlegrass (Eckert and Spencer 1987), suggesting that both seasonality and utilization are important factors in management of this plant. A single defoliation, particularly during the boot stage, was found to reduce herbage production and root mass thus potentially lowering the competitive ability of this needlegrass (Ganskopp 1988). Muttongrass is a highly nutritious grass that is known for fattening sheep. Like sandbergs bluegrass, muttongrass greens up in early spring before many of the other perennial bunchgrasses, and is highly palatable to all classes of livestock as well as good forage to wildlife such as deer and elk (Dayton 1937). In a study by Currie et al. (1977) in a ponderosa pine forest deer preferred muttongrass which comprised up to 18% of their diet. Reduced bunchgrass vigor or density provides an opportunity for Sandberg bluegrass expansion and/or cheatgrass and other invasive species to occupy interspaces. Sandberg bluegrass increases under grazing pressure (Tisdale and Hironaka 1981) and is capable of co-existing with cheatgrass or other weedy species. Depending on the season of use, the grazer and site conditions, either Sandberg bluegrass or cheatgrass may become the dominant understory with inappropriate grazing management. Antelope bitterbrush a minor component on this site is a critical browse species for mule deer, antelope and elk and is often utilized heavily by domestic livestock (Wood 1995). Grazing tolerance is dependent on site conditions (Garrison 1953) and the shrub can be severely hedged during the dormant season for grasses and forbs. Antelope bitterbrush is an important shrub species to a variety of animals, such as domestic livestock, antelope, deer, and elk. Bitterbrush is critical browse for mule deer, as well as domestic livestock, antelope, and elk (Wood 1995, Clements and Young 2002). Antelope bitterbrush is most commonly found on soils which provide minimal restriction to deep root penetration such as coarse textured soil, or finer textured soil with high stone content (Driscoll 1964). Grazing tolerance of antelope bitterbrush is dependent on site conditions (Garrison 1953). Domestic sheep and, to a much lesser degree, cattle consume low sagebrush, particularly during the spring, fall, and winter (Sheehy and Winward 1981). Heavy dormant season grazing by sheep will reduce sagebrush cover and increase grass production (Laycock 1967). Severe trampling damage to supersaturated soils could occur if sites are used in early spring when there is abundant snowmelt. Trampling damage is likely to be localized in nature around areas where livestock or feral horses congregate. Trampling damage, particularly from cattle or horses, in low sagebrush habitat types is greatest when high clay content soils are wet. In drier areas with more gravelly soils, no serious trampling damage occurs, even when the soils are wet (Hironaka et al. 1983). 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 valuable browse in the spring, fall and winter months for wildlife. In a study by Barnett and Crawford (1994), low sagebrush-bluebunch wheatgrass community was used during the pre-laying season of sagegrouse hens, sagebrush composed 50 to 80% of the diet by dry weight. Pronghorn antelope commonly use low sagebrush ranges through the summer months (Kindschy et al. 1982) and deer make heavy use of low sagebrush community types in early spring (Urness 1965). Pygmy rabbits (*Brachylagus idahoensis*), a threatened species of conservation concern throughout California, Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and Utah (endangered in Washington) often burrow where low sagebrush mixes with mountain big sagebrush. Low sagebrush is an important shrub for pygmy rabbits and other sagebrush obligate species (Oregon Conservation Strategy, 2006). Rodents also use low sagebrush habitats. A study in northeastern Nevada showed deer mice (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), Great Basin pocket mice (*Perognathus merriami*), and Ord's kangaroo rats (*Dipodomys ordii*) used gray low sagebrush-black sagebrush communities on dry ridge tops in late spring and summer (McAdoo et al. 2006). Rodents on cold-desert warm-desert ecotones within the Nevada Test Site preferred cold-desert communities over transition and warm-desert communities in which black sagebrush communities were more abundant (Hansen et al. 1999). Black sagebrush communities also support predators. According to study by MacLaren et al. (1988) greater sage-grouse are the primary avian prey of golden eagles in a mixed big sagebrush-black sagebrush shrubland in southeastern Wyoming. Several reptiles and amphibians are distributed throughout the sagebrush steppe in the west in Nevada, where low sagebrush is known to grow (Bernard and Brown 1977). Reptile species including: eastern racers (*Coluber constrictor*), ringneck snakes (*Diadophis punctatus*), night snakes (*Hypsiglena torquata*), Sonoran mountain kingsnakes (*Lampropeltis pyromelana*), striped whipsnakes (*Masticophis taeniatus*), gopher snakes (*Pituophis catenifer*), long-nosed snakes (*Rhinocheilus lecontei*), wandering gartersnakes (*Thamnophis elegans vagrans*), Great Basin rattlesnakes (*Crotalus oreganus lutosus*), Great Basin collared lizard (*Crotaphytus bicinctores*), long-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia wislizenii*), short-horned lizard (*Phrynosoma douglassii*), desert-horned lizard (*Phrynosoma platyrhinos*), sagebrush lizards (*Sceloporus graciosus*), western fence lizards (*Sceloporus occidentalis*), northern side-blotched lizards (*Uta uta stansburiana*), western skinks (*Plestiodon skiltonianus*), and Great Basin whiptails (*Aspidoscelis tigris tigris*) occur in areas where sagebrush is dominant. Similarly, amphibians such as: western toads (*Anaxyrus boreas*), Woodhouse's toads (*Anaxyrus woodhousii*), northern leopard frogs (*Lithobates pipiens*), Columbia spotted frogs (*Rana luteiventris*), bullfrogs (*Lithobates catesbeianus*), and Great Basin spadefoots (*Spea intermontana*) also occur throughout the Great Basin in areas sagebrush species are dominant (Hamilton 2004). Studies have not determined if reptiles and amphibians prefer certain species of sagebrush; however, researchers agree that maintaining habitat where basin big sagebrush and reptiles and amphibians occur is important. In fact, wildlife biologists have noticed declines in reptiles where sagebrush steppe habitat has been seeded with introduced grasses (West 1999 and ref. therein). Indian ricegrass is eaten by pronghorn in "moderate" amounts whenever available. A number of heteromyid rodents inhabiting desert rangelands show preference for seed of Indian ricegrass. Indian ricegrass is an important component of jackrabbit diets in spring and summer. Indian ricegrass seed provides food for many species of birds. Doves,

for example, eat large amounts of shattered Indian ricegrass seed lying on the ground.

Hydrological functions

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

Recreational uses

Aesthetic value is derived from the diverse floral and faunal composition and the colorful flowering of wild flowers and shrubs during the spring and early summer. This site offers rewarding opportunities to photographers and for nature study. This site is used for hiking and has potential for upland and big game hunting.

Other information

Low sagebrush can be successfully transplanted or seeded in restoration. Antelope bitterbrush has been used extensively in land reclamation. Antelope bitterbrush enhances succession by retaining soil and depositing organic material and in some habitats and with some ecotypes, by fixing nitrogen.

Type locality

Location 1: Lincoln County, NV	
UTM zone	N
UTM northing	4240793
UTM easting	0703417
General legal description	North slopes on Fairview mountain range. This site occurs in Lincoln and White Pine Counties.
Location 2: White Pine County, NV	
UTM zone	N
UTM northing	4241417
UTM easting	0706416
General legal description	North end of Fairview mountain range, Lincoln County, NV.

Other references

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Contributors

CMJ/PB/JWM

T. Stringham/P.Novak-Echenique

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)	P.NOVAK-ECHENIQUE
Contact for lead author	STATE RANGELAND MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST
Date	03/13/2015
Approved by	

Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Rills are none. Rock fragments armor the surface.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Water flow patterns are none to rare (short <1 m and stable). A few may occur after summer convection storms or rapid snowmelt. They are meandering and interrupted by plants and rock fragments.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Pedestals are none to rare. Occurrence is usually limited to areas of water flow patterns. Frost heaving of shallow rooted plants should not be considered an indicator of soil erosion.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare Ground $\pm$ 5-20% depending on amount of surface rock fragments.

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

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None- rock fragments protect the surface.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Fine litter (foliage from grasses and annual & perennial forbs) expected to move distance of slope length during intense summer convection storms or rapid snowmelt events. Persistent litter (large woody material) will remain in place except during large rainfall 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 6 on most soil textures found on this site.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Surface structure is typically medium granular. Soil surface colors are browns and soils have a mollic epipedon. Surface textures are sandy loams. Organic matter of the surface 2 to 4 inches is typically 1 to 3 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., bluebunch wheatgrass and Thurbers

needlegrass)) slow runoff and increase infiltration. Shrub canopy and associated litter break raindrop impact and provide opportunity for snow catch and accumulation on site.

11. Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site): Compacted layers are none. Subsoil argillic or massive horizons are not to be interpreted as compacted.
-

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: Deep-rooted, cool season, perennial bunchgrasses > low shrubs (low sagebrush) >>

Sub-dominant: associated shrubs > shallow-rooted, cool season, perennial bunchgrasses > deep-rooted, cool season, perennial forbs > fibrous, shallow-rooted, cool season, perennial forbs = annual forbs.

Other: Others: cool season rhizomatous grasses, evergreen trees

Additional: With an extended fire return interval, the shrub and tree component will increase at the expense of the herbaceous component. With lack of disturbance, singleleaf pinyon and Utah juniper will eventually dominate the site and the understory will be greatly reduced.

13. Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence): Dead branches within individual shrubs common and standing dead shrub canopy material may be as much as 20% of total woody canopy; some of the mature bunchgrasses (<10%) have dead centers.
-

14. Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in): Between plant interspaces ($\pm 25\%$) and litter depth is $\pm \frac{1}{4}$ inch.
-

15. Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production): For normal or average growing season (thru June) ± 350 lbs/ac; Favorable years ± 500 lbs/ac and unfavorable years ± 200 lbs/ac.
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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: Potential invaders include cheatgrass and annual mustards. Singleleaf pinyon and Utah juniper may increase and eventually dominate 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. Little growth and reproduction occur during extreme or extended drought periods.
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