

Ecological site R028AY140UT Desert Silt Flat (Winterfat)

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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.

Associated sites

R028AY119UT	Desert Flat (Shadscale)
R028AY124UT	Desert Loam (Shadscale)

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site occurs on lake terraces, flood plains, and alluvial fans.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Lake terrace (2) Flood plain (3) Alluvial fan
Elevation	1,280 – 1,520 m
Slope	0 %

Climatic features

The climate is cold and snowy in the winter and warm and dry in the summer. The average annual precipitation is 5 to 8 inches. Approximately 70 percent comes as rain from March through October. On the average, June through September are the driest months

and March through may are the wettest months.

Mean Annual Air Temperature: 45-50

Mean Annual Soil Temperature: 52-56

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	0 days
Freeze-free period (average)	160 days
Precipitation total (average)	200 mm

Influencing water features

Soil features

Characteristic soils in this site are more than 60 inches deep and well drained.

They formed in silty lacustrine deposits and alluvium derived mainly from limestone and volcanic parent materials. The surface horizon is silt loam textures and 2 inches thick. Rock fragments are not found in or on this soil. These soils are moderately alkaline to strongly alkaline, and slightly saline to strongly saline below the surface layer. They are calcareous throughout the profile. The calcium carbonate equivalent ranges up to 40 percent. Available water capacity is 3 to 9 inches. Permeability is moderate to moderately slow. Runoff is slow to very slow.

The water supplying capacity is 2 to 5 inches. Natural geologic erosion in potential is approximately 0.1 tons/acre/year.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Silt loam
Permeability class	Moderate to moderately slow
Soil depth	150 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	Not specified
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	7.62 – 22.86 cm
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified

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

As ecological condition deteriorates due to overgrazing, Indian ricegrass, winterfat, and squirreltail decrease while rabbitbrush, snakeweed, and annuals increase.

When the potential natural plant community is burned, winterfat and Indian ricegrass, decrease while rabbitbrush and annuals increase.

Annual forbs and annual grasses are most likely to invade this site.

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 (%)
Shrub/Vine					
0	Primary Shrubs			381-476	
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	336-392	–
	shadscale saltbush	ATCO	<i>Atriplex confertifolia</i>	28-56	–
	bud sagebrush	PIDE4	<i>Picrothamnus desertorum</i>	17-28	–
3	Secondary Shrubs			17-28	
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	6-17	–
	broom snakeweed	GUSA2	<i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i>	6-17	–
	shortspine horsebrush	TESP2	<i>Tetradymia spinosa</i>	6-17	–
Grass/Grasslike					
0	Primary Grasses			28-56	
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	28-56	–
1	Secondary Grasses			17-28	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	6-17	–
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	6-17	–
	James' galleta	PLJA	<i>Pleuraphis jamesii</i>	6-17	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	6-17	–
Forb					
2	Forbs			17-28	
	Utah milkvetch	ASUT	<i>Astragalus utahensis</i>	6-17	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	6-17	–
	showy Townsend daisy	TOFL5	<i>Townsendia florifer</i>	6-17	–

Animal community

This site is suited for sheep and cattle grazing during winter and spring. Wildlife using this site include rabbit, coyote, fox, and pronghorn antelope. This is a short list of the more common species found. Many other species are present as well and migratory birds are present at times.

Hydrological functions

The soils are in hydrologic group B with runoff curves ranging from 61 to 79 depending on hydrologic condition.

Recreational uses

Resources that have special aesthetic and landscape value are wildflowers. Some recreational uses of this site are hiking and hunting.

Wood products

None

Other information

Threatened and endangered species include plants and animals.

Other references

400 ft S & 2000 ft W of NE Corner of Section 23, Township 10N, Range 12W

Contributors

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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.

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Date	01/24/2009
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

- 1. Number and extent of rills:** Very minor rill development may be apparent in reference communities. Development will be more pronounced following significant storm or snow melt events. Rills should be somewhat short (< 4') and fairly widely spaced (6' – 8'). Rills

will run from higher to lower micro-elevational areas within the site and will travel in random directions. Rills development may also be more pronounced on the edges of this site where run-on from adjacent upland sites or exposed bedrock concentrate flows.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Evidence of stable overland water flow is apparent in the reference community. Flow patterns follow site micro-contours, are sinuous and may contain standing water after storm events. Flow patterns are normally <20 feet long, flow around shrub mounds, and are typically spaced 10 to 12 feet apart.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Very slight evidence of pedestals or terracettes caused by accelerated water erosion may be evident in the reference community. 1 – 2 inches of elevational mounding under Winterfat canopies and within biological soil crusts is normal and may not be water erosion caused. There are no exposed roots around perennial grass bunches and biological soil crusts, where present, show little sign of disturbance.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare ground ranges from 50% - 60% in the reference community. Ground cover (the inverse of bare ground) typically includes: coarse fragments – < 1%; plant canopy – 20% to 30%; litter – 15% to 20%, and cryptogamic crusts – 2% to 5%.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Developed gully channels are a normal component of desert environments. Gullies associated with reference areas will typically have stable, partially vegetated sides and bottoms with no evidence of head-cutting. Some evidence of disturbance may be apparent following significant weather events or when gullies convey runoff from higher elevation rocky or naturally eroding areas.

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Very minor evidence of wind generated soil movement is present in reference communities. Wind caused blowouts are not present. Slight depositional mounding in perennial grass bunches, under Winterfat canopies and within biological soil crusts is a normal characteristic of this site.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Most litter resides in place within or under plant canopies. Some movement of the finest material (< 1/8" or less) may move (1' – 2') in the direction of prevailing winds or down slope if being transported by water. Little accumulation is observed behind obstructions.

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** This site should have a soil stability rating of 4 under plant canopies and 3 in interspaces. Surface textures are typically silt loams or fine loams containing very few coarse fragments.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Soil surface is 4 inches deep and structure varies from weak thin to moderate thick platy. The A-horizon color varies from 10YR 8/2 to 10YR 6/3. Soils have an Ochric epipedon that extends 4 inches into the soil profile. The A horizon is normally deeper and better developed under plant canopies.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** The presence of healthy perennial bunchgrasses and Winterfat in the reference community provides for the best infiltration and least runoff from storm events and snow melt. As perennial vegetation decreases and bare ground increases, runoff increases and soil loss is accelerated.
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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. Soils are deep to very deep. Increases in clay or silt content in subsoil layers could be mistaken for compaction.
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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:** Dominant: Mixed shrubs (e.g. Winterfat and Shadscale) 60 – 80%, > > cool season grasses (e.g. Indian ricegrass and Bottlebrush squirreltail) 10 – 15%.
- Sub-dominant:** Sub-dominant: Mixed shrubs (e.g. Bud sage and Low rabbitbrush) 3 - 5% > Cool season grasses (e.g. Sandberg bluegrass and Western wheatgrass) 1 - 3%.
- Other:** Others: Shrubs (e.g. Shortspine horsebrush) 1-3%, perennial forbs (e.g. Scarlet globemallow and Utah milkvetch) 1-3%, biological crusts (e.g. lichens, mosses, cyanobacteria) 1-3%.
- Additional:** Moss and lichen communities will normally be found under plant canopies while the cyanobacteria will be found throughout the site. Functional/structural groups may appropriately contain non-native species if their ecological function is the same as the native species in the reference state. Perennial and annual forbs can be expected to vary widely in their expression in the plant community based upon departures from average growing conditions.
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13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** During years with average to above-average precipitation, there should be very little recent mortality or decadence apparent in either the shrubs or grasses. During severe (multi-year) drought or insect infestations up to 80% of the shadscale may die. There may be partial mortality of individual bunchgrasses and other shrubs during severe drought.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter cover ranges from 10 to 20% with a small spike when Bud Sage drops its leaves. Depth varies from ½ - 1/4 inch with depth increasing near plant canopies.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 450 – 500 pounds on an average year.
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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:** Russian thistle, annual bromes and Halogeton are likely to invade this site.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All perennial plant species have the ability to reproduce in most years except drought years.
