

USDA icon Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Ecological site R030XA014CA

Clay Plain

Last updated: 10/21/2024

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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.

Classification relationships

NDDB/Holland, R.F. 1986. Preliminary descriptions of the terrestrial natural communities of California - Desert Saltbush Scrub. ; J.O. Sawyer and T. Keeler-Wolf. 1995. Manual of California Vegetation - Spinescale Series.

Ecological site concept

This site occurs on nearly level areas of alluvial plains. Elevations are 2270 to 2375 feet. Slopes range from 0 to 2 percent. The soils that characterize this site are very deep and moderately drained to well drained. They are formed in lacustrine sediments.

Associated sites

R030XA013CA	Clay Flat Clay Flat
R030XA025CA	Saline Bottom Saline Bottom
R030XA031CA	Sodic Dunes 5-7" P.Z. Sodic Dunes

Similar sites

R030XA024CA	Outwash Plain Outwash Plain - Allscale Saltbush dominant species.
R030XA013CA	Clay Flat Clay Flat - Less productive site; occurs on eroded areas.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
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Shrub	(1) <i>Atriplex spinifera</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Distichlis spicata</i>

Physiographic features

This site occurs on nearly level areas of alluvial plains. Elevations are 2270 to 2375 feet. Slopes range from 0 to 2 percent.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Alluvial flat
Flooding duration	Very brief (4 to 48 hours)
Flooding frequency	Occasional
Ponding duration	Very brief (4 to 48 hours)
Ponding frequency	Occasional
Elevation	690 – 720 m
Slope	0 %
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The climate on this site is characterized by cool, relatively dry winters (30 to 60 degrees F) and hot, dry summers (70 to 100 degrees F). The average annual precipitation ranges from 3 to 7 inches with most falling as rain from November to March. Mean annual air temperature is 60 to 64 degrees F.

The average frost free period is 200 to 250 days.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	250 days
Freeze-free period (average)	220 days
Precipitation total (average)	150 mm

Influencing water features

This site is subject to occasional flooding and ponding during very brief periods after snow/rain showers from December through March and summer convection storms from July through September.

Soil features

The soils that characterize this site are very deep and moderately drained to well drained. They are formed in lacustrine sediments. Surface textures are clay loams and fine sandy loams. Subsoils are clay loams, sandy clay loams and silty clay loams. These soils are saline and sodic. Available water capacity is moderate and the hazard of water erosion is slight. Wind erosion hazard is moderate. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more, but root growth may be impeded where a dense natric horizon exists. Water tables are greater than 60 inches. Up to 6 inches of ponding may occur for several days after heavy winter rains.

Soil Map Units

126 Leuhman complex, 0-2% slopes

127 Inclusion, Leuhman-Cajon-Leuhman, eroded, complex, 0-9% slopes

144 Voyager-Leuhman complex, 0-2% slopes

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Loamy sand (2) Fine sandy loam (3) Sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Moderately well drained
Permeability class	Very slow
Soil depth	150 – 310 cm
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	12.7 – 17.78 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10 %
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0 – 30 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	10 – 50

Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	8.2 – 9.3
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Ecological dynamics

Please refer to R030XA009CA Alkali Flat 5-7" P.Z. to view group concept STM.

This site is a very stable plant community so long as the site is undisturbed. Destructive impacts such as land clearing may reduce the cover of the chenopods, perennial grasses and the cryptogamic crust. With a loss of perennial cover and disturbance of the crust, non-native annual forbs and grasses such as red-stem filaree, red brome, cheatgrass and Schismus will invade this site. Wind erosion will most likely increase. Fire Effects - The foliage of the saltbushes appears to have fire-retarding qualities associated with the salt content of the leaves, although a severe fire can kill top growth. Most fires consume the aboveground foliage of saltgrass. Saltgrass survives fires by sending up top growth from rhizomes.

State and transition model

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

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

Wildlife Interpretations: This site provides habitat for small mammals such as kangaroo rats and ground squirrels. Fur and game mammals include black-tailed jack rabbits, desert cottontails and coyotes. Ravens, raptors and various songbirds are common. Limitations for burrowing reptiles such as the desert tortoise include occasional ponding and flooding and a dense natric horizon of the soil. Grazing Interpretations: This site has limited value for livestock grazing due to low production, lack of stock water and the hazard of wind erosion if the crust is disturbed. In favorable years, abundant annual forbs and grasses may provide limited spring grazing for sheep. Wildlife Habitat - Management for this site is to protect the cryptogamic crust and vegetation from excessive disturbance. Water developments would enhance the species diversity of the site. LIVESTOCK GRAZING: Season of Use- Other Mgt. Considerations - This site is poorly suited for livestock grazing. It is limited by low production, lack of stock water and the hazard of wind erosion. In favorable years, abundant annual forbs and grasses may provide limited spring grazing. General guide to initial stocking rate. Before making specific recommendations, an on-site evaluation must be made. Pounds/acre air-dry Normal Years 450

Hydrological functions

Runoff is negligible or low. Permeability is very slow to slow. Hydrologic soil group B - soils having moderate infiltration rates when thoroughly wetted and consisting chiefly of moderately deep to deep, moderately well drained to well-drained soils with moderately fine to moderately coarse textures. Hydrologic soil group D - soils having very slow infiltration rates when thoroughly wetted and consisting chiefly of clay soils with a high swelling potential, soils with a permanent high watertable, soils with a claypan or clay layer at or near the surface, and shallow soils over nearly impervious material. Hydrologic conditions: good - >70% ground cover (includes litter, grass and brush overstory); fair - 30 to 70% ground cover; poor - 30% ground cover. Soil Series: Leuhman Hydrologic Group: D Hydrologic Conditions and Runoff Curves: Good 84; Fair 86; Poor 88 Soil Series: Voyager Hydrologic Group: B Hydrologic Conditions and Runoff Curves: Good 86; Fair 72; Poor 77

Recreational uses

This site is valued for open space and is used by joggers, mountain bikers and other off-road enthusiasts. Off-road vehicles can easily damage the cryptogamic crust and vegetative cover, and should be restricted to existing roads and trails.

Other information

Military Operations - Vehicles should be limited to existing roads and trails. Park vehicles on roadways only and avoid areas that have ponded water. To reduce wind erosion, limit disturbance to the cryptogamic crust and clearing of vegetation. Native species indigenous to this site are recommended for any revegetation efforts. Revegetation/Restoration: The saltbush species are suitable for revegetation. Transplants are more effective than direct seeding. Supplemental irrigation is recommended during the first growing season. Protection from rodents and removal of annual grasses and forbs is also recommended. Saltgrass is an excellent plant for wind or water erosion control. Rhizomes collected in the field and planted onto disturbed areas will resprout and spread.

Inventory data references

Sampling technique _12 NV-ECS-1 _2_ SCS-Range 417 ____ Other

Type locality

Location 1: Kern County, CA	
Township/Range/Section	T9N R10W S12
General legal description	SW 1/4 Section 12, R10W, T9N North of Hospital Road, near South Base Kern Co., CA

Other references

Hickman, J.C. (ed) 1995. The Jepson Manual - Higher Plants of California.

Contributors

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Approval

Kendra Moseley, 10/21/2024

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	08/30/2026
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:
