

Ecological site R032XY344WY

Saline Upland (SU)

10-14" East Precipitation Zone

Last updated: 5/01/2024
Accessed: 08/19/2026

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

R032XY340WY	Saline Lowland Drained (SLDr) 10-14" East Precipitation Zone
R032XY322WY	Loamy (Ly) 10-14" East Precipitation Zone

Similar sites

R032XY144WY	Saline Upland (SU) 5-9" Big Horn Basin Precipitation Zone
R032XY244WY	Saline Upland (SU) 5-9" Wind River Basin Precipitation Zone

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site occurs on nearly level to moderately sloping land.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Alluvial fan (3) Stream terrace
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Flooding frequency	None
Elevation	1,650 – 2,290 m
Slope	0 – 20 %
Ponding depth	0 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

Annual precipitation ranges from 10-14 inches per year. The normal precipitation pattern shows the least amount of precipitation in December, January, and February, increasing to a peak during the latter part of May. Amounts decrease through June, July, and August and then increase some in September. Much of the moisture that falls in the latter part of the summer is lost by evaporation and much of the moisture that falls during the winter is lost by sublimation. Average snowfall exceeds 20 inches annually. Wide fluctuations may occur in yearly precipitation and result in more dry years than those with more than normal precipitation.

Temperatures show a wide range between summer and winter and between daily maximums and minimums, due to the high elevation and dry air, which permits rapid incoming and outgoing radiation. Cold air outbreaks from Canada in winter move rapidly from northwest to southeast and account for extreme minimum temperatures. Chinook winds may occur in winter and bring rapid rises in temperature. Extreme storms may occur during the winter, but most severely affect ranch operations during late winter and spring.

Winds are generally not strong as compared to the rest of the state. Daytime winds are generally stronger than nighttime and occasional strong storms may bring brief periods of high winds with gusts to more than 75 mph.

Growth of native cool-season plants begins about April 15 and continues to about July 15. Cool weather and moisture in September may produce some green up of cool season plants that will continue to late October.

The following information is from the "Thermopolis 2" climate station:

Minimum Maximum 5 yrs. out of 10 between

Frost-free period (days): 74 149 May 23 – September 16

Freeze-free period (days): 112 180 May 8 – October 1

Annual Precipitation (inches): 7.6 21.9

Mean annual precipitation: 12.35 inches

Mean annual air temperature: 46.2 F (30.1 F Avg. Min. to 62.3 F Avg. Max.)

For detailed information visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service National Water and Climate Center at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/> website. Other climate station(s) representative of this precipitation zone include" Grass Creek 1E", "Thermopolis", Thermopolis 25NW", "Buffalo Bill Dam" and "Black Mountain".

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	150 days
Freeze-free period (average)	180 days
Precipitation total (average)	360 mm

Influencing water features

Stream Type: None

Soil features

The soils of this site may be 10-20 inches deep but are usually moderately deep (greater than 20"to bedrock) to very deep well-drained soils formed in alluvium from sodic or alkaline materials. These soils have moderate to slow permeability and are moderately to strongly saline and/or alkaline. The surface soil will vary from 2 to 6 inches in thickness. Some soils may contain more soluble salts in the subsoils than in the surface soils. The soil characteristic having the most influence on the plant community is the high quantity of soluble salts.

Major Soil Series correlated to this site include:

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Loam (2) Very fine sandy loam (3) Fine sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Clayey
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Slow to moderate
Soil depth	50 – 150 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	Not specified
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	3.56 – 20 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 – 20 %
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0 – 20 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	10 – 20

Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	7.4 – 10
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified

Ecological dynamics

Potential vegetation on this site is dominated by salt tolerant plants and drought resistant mid cool-season perennial grasses. The expected potential composition for this site is about 50% grasses, 10% forbs and 40% woody plants. The composition and production will vary naturally due to historical use, fluctuating precipitation and fire frequency.

As this site deteriorates, species such as birdfoot sagebrush and greasewood will increase. Weedy annuals will invade. Cool season grasses such as Indian ricegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, and rhizomatous wheatgrasses will decrease in frequency and production.

The Historic Climax Plant Community (description follows the plant community diagram) has been determined by study of rangeland relic areas, or areas protected from excessive disturbance. Trends in plant communities going from heavily grazed areas to lightly grazed areas, seasonal use pastures, and historical accounts have also been used.

The following is a State and Transition Model Diagram that illustrates the common plant communities (states) that can occur on the site and the transitions between these communities. The ecological processes will be discussed in more detail in the plant community narratives following the diagram.

Following are the narratives for each of the described plant communities. These plant communities may not represent every possibility, but they probably are the most prevalent and repeatable plant communities. The plant composition tables shown above have been developed from the best available knowledge at the time of this revision. As more data is collected, some of these plant communities may be revised or removed, and new ones may be added. None of these plant communities should necessarily be thought of as "Desired Plant Communities". According to the USDA NRCS National Range and Pasture Handbook, Desired Plant Communities (DPC's) will be determined by the decision-makers and will meet minimum quality criteria established by the NRCS. The main purpose for including any description of a plant community here is to capture the current knowledge and experience at the time of this revision.

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				50-101	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	50-101	–
2				50-101	
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	50-101	–
3				26-76	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	26-76	–
4				0-50	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0-26	–
	blue grama	BOGR2	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	0-26	–

	Montana wheatgrass	ELAL7	<i>Elymus albicans</i>	0-26	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	0-26	–
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	0-26	–
Forb					
5				0-50	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0-26	–
	textile onion	ALTE	<i>Allium textile</i>	0-26	–
	sulphur-flower buckwheat	ERUM	<i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i>	0-26	–
	cous biscuitroot	LOCO4	<i>Lomatium cous</i>	0-26	–
	leafy wildparsley	MUDI	<i>Musineon divaricatum</i>	0-26	–
	salsify	TRPO	<i>Tragopogon porrifolius</i>	0-26	–
	woodyaster	XYLOR	<i>Xylorhiza</i>	0-26	–
Shrub/Vine					
6				0-26	
	birdfoot sagebrush	ARPE6	<i>Artemisia pedatifida</i>	0-26	–
7				0-26	
	bud sagebrush	PIDE4	<i>Picrothamnus desertorum</i>	0-26	–
8				101-202	
	Gardner's saltbush	ATGA	<i>Atriplex gardneri</i>	101-202	–
9				0-26	
	winterfat	KRASC	<i>Krascheninnikovia</i>	0-26	–
10				0-26	
	Shrub (>.5m)	2SHRUB	<i>Shrub (>.5m)</i>	0-26	–

Table 6. Community 2.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 7. Community 3.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 8. Community 4.1 plant community composition

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

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations Historic Climax Plant Community: The predominance of woody plants in this plant community provides winter grazing for mixed-feeders, such elk, and antelope. Suitable thermal and escape cover for these animals are limited due to the short stature of the woody plants. When found adjacent to sagebrush-dominated states, this plant community may provide lek sites for sage grouse. Other birds that would frequent this plant community include western meadowlarks, horned larks, and golden eagles. Some grassland obligate small mammals would occur here. Gardner's Saltbush/Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses Plant Community: The combination of shrubs, grasses, and forbs can provide a forage source for large animals. Suitable thermal and escape cover for these animals are limited due to the short stature of the woody plants. When found adjacent to sagebrush-dominated states, this plant community may provide lek sites for sage grouse. Other birds that would frequent this plant community include western meadowlarks, horned larks, and golden eagles. Some grassland obligate small mammals would occur here. Mixed Shrub/Blue Grama Sod Plant Community: These communities provide limited foraging for antelope and other grazers. This community may be used as a foraging site by sage grouse if proximal to woody cover. Generally, these are not target plant communities for wildlife habitat management. Gardner's Saltbush/Bare Ground Plant Community: This plant community exhibits a low level of plant species diversity. It may provide some forage value for antelope, but in most cases it is not a desirable plant community to select as a wildlife habitat management objective. Animal Community – Grazing Interpretations The following table lists suggested stocking rates for cattle under continuous season-long grazing under normal growing conditions. These are conservative estimates that should be used only as guidelines in the initial stages of the conservation planning process. Often, the current plant composition does not entirely match any particular plant community (as described in this ecological site description). Because of this, a field visit is recommended, in all cases, to document plant composition and production. More precise carrying capacity estimates should eventually be calculated using this information along with animal preference

data, particularly when grazers other than cattle are involved. Under more intensive grazing management, improved harvest efficiencies can result in an increased carrying capacity. If distribution problems occur, stocking rates must be reduced to maintain plant health and vigor. Plant Community Production Carrying Capacity* (lb./ac) (AUM/ac) Historic Climax Plant Community 275-650 .25 Gardner's Saltbush/Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses 225-575 .20 Mixed Shrub/Blue Grama Sod 125-450 .12 Gardner's Saltbush/Bare Ground 50-225 .05 * - Continuous, season-long grazing by cattle under average growing conditions. Grazing by domestic livestock is one of the major income-producing industries in the area. Rangeland in this area may provide yearlong forage for cattle, sheep, or horses. During the dormant period, the forage for livestock use needs to be supplemented with protein because the quality does not meet minimum livestock requirements.

Hydrological functions

Water and salinity are the principal factors limiting forage production on this site. This site is dominated by soils in hydrologic group B and C, with localized areas in hydrologic group D. Infiltration ranges from slow to moderate. Runoff potential for this site varies from moderate to high depending on soil hydrologic group and ground cover. In many cases, areas with greater than 75% ground cover have the greatest potential for high infiltration and lower runoff. An example of an exception would be where short-grasses form a strong sod and dominate the site. Areas where ground cover is less than 50% have the greatest potential to have reduced infiltration and higher runoff (refer to Part 630, NRCS National Engineering Handbook for detailed hydrology information). Rills and gullies should not typically be present. Water flow patterns should be barely distinguishable if at all present. Pedestals are only slightly present in association with bunchgrasses. Litter typically falls in place, and signs of movement are not common. Chemical and physical crusts may be present. Cryptogamic crusts are present, but only cover 1-2% of the soil surface.

Recreational uses

This site provides some hunting opportunities for upland game species.

Wood products

No appreciable wood products are present on the site.

Other products

none noted

Inventory data references

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS inventory data. Field observations from range trained personnel were also used. Those involved in developing this site include: Chris Krassin, Range Management Specialist, NRCS and Everet Bainter, Range Management Specialist. Other sources used as references include USDA NRCS Water and Climate Center, USDA NRCS National Range and Pasture Handbook, USDI and USDA Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health Version 3, and USDA NRCS Soil Surveys from various counties.

Contributors

Ray Gullion

Approval

Kirt Walstad, 5/01/2024

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.

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Contact for lead author	ray.gullion@wy.usda.gov or 307-347-2456
Date	05/01/2008
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. Number and extent of rills: Rare to nonexistent. Where present, short and widely spaced.

2. Presence of water flow patterns: Barely observable.

3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes: Rare to nonexistent.

4. Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground): Bare ground can range from 20-45%.

5. Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies: Active gullies should not be present.

6. Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas: Minimal to nonexistent.

7. Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel): Herbaceous litter expected to move only in small amounts (to leeward side of shrubs) due to wind.

8. Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values): Soil Stability Index ratings range from 3 (interspaces) to 5 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 4.0 or greater.

9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness): Typically an A-horizon of greater than 3 inches (7 cm) with medium platy structure and color hues of 10YR or 5Y, values of 5-7, and chromas of 2-4. Sometimes a shallow E-horizon of 1 inch (3 cm) with weak platy structure that is grayish brown (i.e. 2.5Y 5/2) will replace the A-horizon. Organic

matter typically ranges from 1 to 2%.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Plant community consists of 30-65% grasses, 5% forbs, and 30-65% shrubs. Evenly distributed plant canopy (35-70%) and litter, but slow infiltration rates result in slight to moderate runoff. Basal cover is typically less than 5% for this site and does very little to effect runoff on this site.
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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):** No compaction layer exists, but some soil crusting in dry conditions is typical.
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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: perennial shrubs=mid-size, cool season bunchgrasses>cool season rhizomatous grasses>>short, cool season bunchgrasses=perennial forbs

Sub-dominant:

Other:

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Minimal decadence.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter ranges from 10-30% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 25-50% expected. Herbaceous litter depth is typically shallow, ranging from 2-7 mm. Woody litter can be up to an inch (3 cm).
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** English: 275-650 lb/ac (460 lb/ac average); Metric: 308-728 kg/ha (518 kg/ha average).
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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:** Bare ground greater than 60% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Birdfoot sagebrush, greasewood, Sandberg bluegrass, and phlox are common increasers. Halogeton, kochia, and Russian thistle are common invasive species in disturbed sites.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing, except in drought years.
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