

Ecological site R034AY156WY

Shallow Breaks

Green River and Great Divide Basins (SwBr)

Last updated: 2/26/2025

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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

R034AY158WY	Shallow Clayey Green River and Great Divide Basins (SwCy) Shallow Clayey
R034AY162WY	Shallow Loamy Green River and Great Divide Basins (SwLy) Shallow Loamy
R034AY176WY	Very Shallow Green River and Great Divide Basins (VS) Very Shallow

Similar sites

R034AY176WY	Very Shallow Green River and Great Divide Basins (VS) Very Shallow (VS) 7-9GR has lower production, and junipers are limited to higher elevations.
R034AY256WY	Shallow Breaks Foothills and Basins West (SwBr) Shallow Breaks (SwB) 10-14W has higher production.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site is usually found in an upland position on gently sloping to very steep topography. It may be found on all exposures, but is primarily on south and west facing slopes.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Ridge (3) Escarpment
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	1,830 – 2,200 m
Slope	0 – 70 %
Ponding depth	0 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

Annual precipitation ranges from 7-9 inches per year. 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. This is predominantly due to the high elevation and dry air, which permits rapid incoming and outgoing radiation. Cold air outbreaks in winter move rapidly from northwest to southeast and account for extreme minimum temperatures. Extreme storms may occur during the winter, but most severely affect ranch operations during late winter and spring.

Daytime winds are generally stronger than nighttime and occasional strong storms may bring brief periods of high winds with gusts to more than 50 mph.

Growth of native cool season plants begins about April 15 and continues to about July 15. Some green up of cool season plants may occur in late September if moisture is available.

For detailed information visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service National Water and Climate Center at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/cgibin/state.pl?state=wy> website. Other climate stations representative of this precipitation zone include “Bitter Creek”, “Farson”, “Rock Springs FAA AP”, and “Wamsutter” in Sweetwater County; “Church Buttes Gas PLT”, and Mountain View” in Uinta County; “Fontenelle”, “La Barge”, and “Sage 4 NNW” in Lincoln County; and “Big Piney” in Sublette County.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	120 days
Freeze-free period (average)	130 days
Precipitation total (average)	230 mm

Influencing water features

There are no water features associated with this site.

Soil features

The soils of this site are generally less than 15 inches deep over sedimentary bedrock. This bedrock usually develops large cracks and crevices where junipers can utilize moisture. Included in this site are small areas of exposed bedrock and very shallow to deep pockets of soil. This site usually occurs on steep slopes, but may be on any slope.

Major Soil Series correlated to this site include: Huguston and Spool.

Other Soil Series in MLRA 34 correlated to this site include: Rentsac and Blackhall.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Fine sandy loam (2) Loamy fine sand
Family particle size	(1) Sandy
Drainage class	Well drained to somewhat excessively drained
Permeability class	Moderate to moderately rapid
Soil depth	20 – 40 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 – 10 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	1.78 – 5.59 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10 %
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10

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

Ecological dynamics

As this site deteriorates, species such as juniper and big sagebrush increase. Cheatgrass and annual forbs often invade. Cool season bunchgrasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, and needleandthread will decrease in frequency and production.

These plant communities narratives 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.

The Reference 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.

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				135-314	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	135-314	–
2				90-179	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	90-179	–
3				45-135	
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	45-135	–
4				45-135	
	needle and thread	HECO26	<i>Hesperostipa comata</i>	45-135	–
5				45-135	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0-45	–
	Letterman’s needlegrass	ACLE9	<i>Achnatherum lettermanii</i>	0-45	–
	needleleaf sedge	CADU6	<i>Carex duriuscula</i>	0-45	–
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	0-45	–

	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	0-45	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	0-45	–
Forb					
6				45-90	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0-45	–
	common yarrow	ACMI2	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	0-45	–
	textile onion	ALTE	<i>Allium textile</i>	0-45	–
	rosy pussytoes	ANRO2	<i>Antennaria rosea</i>	0-45	–
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	0-45	–
	Indian paintbrush	CASTI2	<i>Castilleja</i>	0-45	–
	fleabane	ERIGE2	<i>Erigeron</i>	0-45	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	0-45	–
	aster	EUCEP2	<i>Eucephalus</i>	0-45	–
	beardtongue	PENST	<i>Penstemon</i>	0-45	–
	phacelia	PHACE	<i>Phacelia</i>	0-45	–
	spiny phlox	PHHO	<i>Phlox hoodii</i>	0-45	–
	stonecrop	SEDUM	<i>Sedum</i>	0-45	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	0-45	–
	stemless mock goldenweed	STAC	<i>Stenotus acaulis</i>	0-45	–
	clover	TRIFO	<i>Trifolium</i>	0-45	–
Tree					
7				224-404	
	Rocky Mountain juniper	JUSC2	<i>Juniperus scopulorum</i>	224-404	–
Shrub/Vine					
8				45-90	
	little sagebrush	ARAR8	<i>Artemisia arbuscula</i>	0-45	–
	big sagebrush	ARTR2	<i>Artemisia tridentata</i>	0-45	–
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	0-45	–
	limber pine	PIFL2	<i>Pinus flexilis</i>	0-45	–

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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Animal community

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Juniper Plant Community (HCPC): This plant community provides excellent thermal and escape cover for wintering mule deer and elk. Year-round habitat is provided for mule deer, bobcat, cottontail rabbits, jackrabbits, sage grouse and many other birds such as the black-throated sparrow, lark sparrow, green-tailed towhee, and neotropical migrants. Juniper provides good thermal cover and nesting habitat for many bird species. Juniper/Big Sagebrush Plant Community: This plant community may be useful for the same wildlife that would use the Historic Climax Plant Community. However, the plant community composition is less diverse, and thus, less apt to meet the seasonal needs of these animals. Cheatgrass Plant Community: This plant community exhibits a low level of plant species diversity. 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. Plant Community Production (lb./ac) and Carrying Capacity* (AUM/ac) Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Juniper (HCPC) 600-1100 lb./ac and .1 AUM/ac Juniper/Big Sagebrush 300-700 lb./ac and .08 AUM/ac Cheatgrass 50-350 lb./ac and .02 AUM/ac * - 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 is the principal factor limiting forage production on this site. This site is highly variable and is dominated by soils in hydrologic group B and C, with localized areas in hydrologic group D. Infiltration ranges from slow to very rapid. Runoff potential for this site varies from moderate to high depending on soil hydrologic group, depth to and permeability of bedrock, slope, and ground cover (refer to Part 630, NRCS National Engineering Handbook for detailed hydrology information.) Rills and gullies may be present, but should be small. Water flow patterns should be barely distinguishable. Pedestals are only slightly present in association with bunchgrasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass. Litter typically falls in place, and signs of movement are not common. Chemical and physical crusts are rare to non-existent. Cryptogammic crusts are present, but only cover 1-2% of the soil surface.

Recreational uses

This site provides hunting opportunities for upland game species. Variable topography, rock outcrop, and juniper trees appeal to hikers.

Wood products

Limber pine and juniper may be used for firewood and very limited use for fence posts.

Other products

None noted.

Inventory data references

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS clipping data and other inventory data. Field observations from range trained personnel were also used. Those involved in developing this site include: Bill Christensen, Range Management Specialist, NRCS; Karen Clause, Range Management Specialist, NRCS; and Everet Bainter, Range Management Specialist, NRCS. Other sources used as references include: USDA NRCS Water and Climate Center, USDA NRCS National Range and Pasture Handbook, and USDA NRCS Soil Surveys from various counties.

Contributors

Karen Clause

Approval

Kirt Walstad, 2/26/2025

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	03/16/2007

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

Indicators

- 1. Number and extent of rills:** Some rills to be expected on this site. Depending on slope, rills range from .5-2 inches (1-5 cm) wide and are found every 3-6 feet (1-2 m).

- 2. Presence of water flow patterns:** Some observable.

- 3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Slight pedestalling evident.

- 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 30-60%.

- 5. Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Active gullies, where present, should be rare.

- 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 in slight to moderate amounts. Large woody debris will show only slight movement down slope.

- 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 2 (interspaces) to 6 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 3.0 or greater.

- 9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Currently no soil series are correlated to this ecological site. Soil Organic Matter of less than 1% is expected.

- 10. Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Plant community consists of 35-80% grasses, 10% forbs, and 10-55% shrubs/trees. Moderate plant canopy (40-60%) and litter, steep slopes, plus moderate infiltration rates result in slight to moderate runoff. Basal cover is typically less than 5% and

does very little to effect runoff on this site.

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.
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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:

Sub-dominant:

Other:

Additional: trees>mid-size, cool season bunchgrasses>>cool season rhizomatous grasses>perennial shrubs>short, cool season bunchgrasses=perennial forbs

13. Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence): Minimal decadence, typically associated with shrub/tree component.
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14. Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in): Litter ranges from 5-30% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 15-45% expected. Herbaceous litter depth is typically very shallow, ranging from 1-5mm. Woody litter can be up to several inches (>8 cm).
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15. Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production): English: 600-1100 lb/ac (800 lb/ac average); Metric: 672-1232 kg/ha (896 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 75% and the presence of cheatgrass are the most common indicators of a threshold being crossed. Junipers, big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, Sandberg bluegrass, and phlox are common increasers. Annual weeds such as cheatgrass, 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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