

# Ecological site R034AY263WY Shallow Loamy Calcareous Foothills and Basins West (SwLyCa)

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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

|             |                                                                            |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| R034AY204WY | <b>Clayey Foothills and Basins West (Cy)</b><br><br>Clayey                 |
| R034AY212WY | <b>Gravelly Foothills and Basins West (Gr)</b><br><br>Gravelly             |
| R034AY222WY | <b>Loamy Foothills and Basins West (Ly)</b><br><br>Loamy                   |
| R034AY250WY | <b>Sandy Foothills and Basins West (Sy)</b><br><br>Sandy                   |
| R034AY262WY | <b>Shallow Loamy Foothills and Basins West (SwLy)</b><br><br>Shallow Loamy |

## Similar sites

|             |                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| R034AY262WY | <b>Shallow Loamy Foothills and Basins West (SwLy)</b><br><br>Shallow Loamy (SwLy) 10-14 West has higher production, and has no or incidental amounts of Black Sage. |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Table 1. Dominant plant species

|            |               |
|------------|---------------|
| Tree       | Not specified |
| Shrub      | Not specified |
| Herbaceous | Not specified |

## Physiographic features

This site will usually occur in an upland position on rolling to steep slopes (averaging 2 to 15%) on all exposures. Elevations are mostly above 7000 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

|                    |                                                     |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Landforms          | (1) Alluvial fan<br>(2) Stream terrace<br>(3) Ridge |
| Flooding frequency | None                                                |
| Ponding frequency  | None                                                |
| Elevation          | 1,980 – 2,290 m                                     |
| Slope              | 0 – 30 %                                            |
| Aspect             | Aspect is not a significant factor                  |

## Climatic features

Annual precipitation ranges from 10-14 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 August 15. Some green up of cool season plants usually occurs in September depending upon fall moisture occurrences.

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 "Border 3 N " and Kemmerer Wtr Trtmt" in Lincoln County; "Evanston 1 E" in Uinta County; and "Merna" in Sublette County.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

|                               |          |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Frost-free period (average)   | 70 days  |
| Freeze-free period (average)  | 100 days |
| Precipitation total (average) | 360 mm   |

## Influencing water features

No water features are associated with this site.

### Soil features

The soils of this site are moderately deep to deep with root growth restricted by high amounts of lime or coarse fragments at 10 to 20 inches depth. Parent material is residuum, colluvium and alluvium from sedimentary rock.

Table 4. Representative soil features

|                                             |                                              |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Surface texture                             | (1) Loam<br>(2) Clay loam<br>(3) Sandy loam  |
| Family particle size                        | (1) Loamy                                    |
| Drainage class                              | Well drained to somewhat excessively drained |
| Permeability class                          | Moderately slow to moderately rapid          |
| Soil depth                                  | 30 – 50 cm                                   |
| Surface fragment cover <=3"                 | 0 – 20 %                                     |
| Surface fragment cover >3"                  | 0 – 20 %                                     |
| Available water capacity<br>(0-101.6cm)     | 2.54 – 6.35 cm                               |
| Calcium carbonate equivalent<br>(0-101.6cm) | 20 – 30 %                                    |
| Electrical conductivity<br>(0-101.6cm)      | 0 – 10 mmhos/cm                              |
| Sodium adsorption ratio<br>(0-101.6cm)      | 0 – 10                                       |
| Soil reaction (1:1 water)<br>(0-101.6cm)    | 6.6 – 8.4                                    |

|                                                          |          |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Subsurface fragment volume <=3"<br>(Depth not specified) | 0 – 30 % |
| Subsurface fragment volume >3"<br>(Depth not specified)  | 0 – 20 % |

## Ecological dynamics

As this site deteriorates because of a combination of frequent and severe grazing, species such as unpalatable forbs and green rabbitbrush will increase. Cool-season grasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass and Indian ricegrass will decrease in frequency and production.

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.

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.

## 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 (%) |
|------------------------|-------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| <b>Grass/Grasslike</b> |                         |        |                                |                      |                  |
| 1                      |                         |        |                                | 78-196               |                  |
|                        | bluebunch wheatgrass    | PSSP6  | <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i> | 78-196               | –                |
| 2                      |                         |        |                                | 78-196               |                  |
|                        | western wheatgrass      | PASM   | <i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>      | 78-196               | –                |
| 3                      |                         |        |                                | 39-118               |                  |
|                        | needle and thread       | HECO26 | <i>Hesperostipa comata</i>     | 39-118               | –                |
| 4                      |                         |        |                                | 39-118               |                  |
|                        | Indian ricegrass        | ACHY   | <i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>  | 39-118               | –                |
| 5                      |                         |        |                                | 39-78                |                  |
|                        | squirreltail            | ELEL5  | <i>Elymus elymoides</i>        | 39-78                | –                |
| 6                      |                         |        |                                | 78-157               |                  |
|                        | Grass, perennial        | 2GP    | <i>Grass, perennial</i>        | 0-39                 | –                |
|                        | Letterman's needlegrass | ACLE9  | <i>Achnatherum lettermanii</i> | 0-39                 | –                |
|                        | needleleaf sedge        | CADU6  | <i>Carex duriuscula</i>        | 0-39                 | –                |

|                   |                          |        |                                           |        |   |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------|--------|---|
|                   | plains reedgrass         | CAMO   | <i>Calamagrostis montanensis</i>          | 0-39   | – |
|                   | prairie Junegrass        | KOMA   | <i>Koeleria macrantha</i>                 | 0-39   | – |
|                   | muttongrass              | POFE   | <i>Poa fendleriana</i>                    | 0-39   | – |
|                   | Sandberg bluegrass       | POSE   | <i>Poa secunda</i>                        | 0-39   | – |
| <b>Forb</b>       |                          |        |                                           |        |   |
| 7                 |                          |        |                                           | 39-78  |   |
|                   | Forb, perennial          | 2FP    | <i>Forb, perennial</i>                    | 0-39   | – |
|                   | yarrow                   | ACHIL  | <i>Achillea</i>                           | 0-39   | – |
|                   | rosy pussytoes           | ANRO2  | <i>Antennaria rosea</i>                   | 0-39   | – |
|                   | milkvetch                | ASTRA  | <i>Astragalus</i>                         | 0-39   | – |
|                   | Indian paintbrush        | CAST12 | <i>Castilleja</i>                         | 0-39   | – |
|                   | mouse-ear chickweed      | CERAS  | <i>Cerastium</i>                          | 0-39   | – |
|                   | tapertip hawksbeard      | CRAC2  | <i>Crepis acuminata</i>                   | 0-39   | – |
|                   | fleabane                 | ERIGE2 | <i>Erigeron</i>                           | 0-39   | – |
|                   | buckwheat                | ERIOG  | <i>Eriogonum</i>                          | 0-39   | – |
|                   | aster                    | EUCEP2 | <i>Eucephalus</i>                         | 0-39   | – |
|                   | flax                     | LINUM  | <i>Linum</i>                              | 0-39   | – |
|                   | granite prickly phlox    | LIPU11 | <i>Linanthus pungens</i>                  | 0-39   | – |
|                   | stoneseed                | LITHO3 | <i>Lithospermum</i>                       | 0-39   | – |
|                   | bluebells                | MERTE  | <i>Mertensia</i>                          | 0-39   | – |
|                   | nailwort                 | PARON  | <i>Paronychia</i>                         | 0-39   | – |
|                   | beardtongue              | PENST  | <i>Penstemon</i>                          | 0-39   | – |
|                   | phacelia                 | PHACE  | <i>Phacelia</i>                           | 0-39   | – |
|                   | spiny phlox              | PHHO   | <i>Phlox hoodii</i>                       | 0-39   | – |
|                   | stonecrop                | SEDUM  | <i>Sedum</i>                              | 0-39   | – |
|                   | stemless mock goldenweed | STAC   | <i>Stenotus acaulis</i>                   | 0-39   | – |
|                   | princesplume             | STANL  | <i>Stanleya</i>                           | 0-39   | – |
|                   | clover                   | TRIFO  | <i>Trifolium</i>                          | 0-39   | – |
| <b>Shrub/Vine</b> |                          |        |                                           |        |   |
| 8                 |                          |        |                                           | 39-78  |   |
|                   | black sagebrush          | ARNO4  | <i>Artemisia nova</i>                     | 39-78  | – |
| 9                 |                          |        |                                           | 39-118 |   |
|                   | little sagebrush         | ARAR8  | <i>Artemisia arbuscula</i>                | 0-39   | – |
|                   | little sagebrush         | ARARL  | <i>Artemisia arbuscula ssp. longiloba</i> | 0-39   | – |
|                   | big sagebrush            | ARTR2  | <i>Artemisia tridentata</i>               | 0-39   | – |
|                   | yellow rabbitbrush       | CHVI8  | <i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>        | 0-39   | – |
|                   | winterfat                | KRLA2  | <i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>           | 0-39   | – |

Table 6. Community 2.1 plant community composition

| Group | Common Name | Symbol | Scientific Name | Annual Production () | Foliar Cover (%) |
|-------|-------------|--------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|
|-------|-------------|--------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|

Table 7. Community 3.1 plant community composition

| Group | Common Name | Symbol | Scientific Name | Annual Production () | Foliar Cover (%) |
|-------|-------------|--------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|
|-------|-------------|--------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|

## Animal community

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations Bluebunch Wheatgrass/Black Sage Plant Community (HCPC): Suitable thermal and escape cover for most wildlife is limited due to the low height and density of woody plants. However, black sagebrush provides important winter

forage for mule deer and antelope. Open and bare ridges are suitable locations for sage grouse leks. Year-round habitat is provided for sage grouse and many other sagebrush obligate species such as the sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, sage thrasher, pygmy rabbit, sagebrush vole, horned lizard, and pronghorn antelope. Black Sage/Forb Plant Community: This plant community may be beneficial 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. Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Forb Plant Community: This plant community may be beneficial 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. 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/Black Sage (HCPC) 500-900 lb./ac and 0.17 AUM/ac Black Sage/Forb 100-500 lb./ac and 0.09 AUM/ac Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/Forb 50-300 lb./ac and 0.04 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 dominated by soils in hydrologic group D. Infiltration is low when soils are wet due to shallow depth to bedrock and/or impervious subsurface layer. Runoff potential for this site varies from high to moderate depending on soil depth, bedrock type (impervious vs. permeable) and ground cover (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 are rare to non-existent. Cryptogamic crusts are present, but only cover 1-2% of the soil surface.

## Recreational uses

This site provides 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 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 Everett 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

## 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)                    | K. Clause, E. Bainter                    |
| Contact for lead author                     | karen.clause@wy.usda.gov or 307-367-2257 |
| Date                                        | 03/16/2007                               |
| 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.

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2. Presence of water flow patterns: Barely observable.

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

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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 20-50%.

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

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

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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. Large woody debris from sagebrush will show no movement.

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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 1 (interspaces) to 5 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 3.0 or greater.

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9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness): Soil data is limited for this site. Soil OM usually varies from .5 to 1.5%.

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10. Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff: Plant community consists of 65-80% grasses, 10% forbs, and 10-25% shrubs. Evenly distributed plant canopy (30-60%) and litter plus slow to moderate infiltration rates result in minimal runoff. Basal cover is typically less than 5% for this site and does very little to effect runoff on this site. Surface rock fragments of 10-20% provide stability to the site, but reduce infiltration.

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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.

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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: Mid-size, cool season bunchgrasses>> cool season rhizomatous grasses=perennial shrubs>>perennial forbs>short, cool season bunchgrasses

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13. Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence): Minimal decadence, typically associated with shrub component.

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14. Average percent litter cover (%) and depth ( in): Litter ranges from 10-25% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 20-50% expected. Herbaceous litter depth typically ranges from 3-10mm. Woody litter can be up to a couple inches (4-6 cm).

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15. Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production): English: 500-900 lb/ac (700 lb/ac average); Metric 560-1008 kg/ha (784 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% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Rabbitbrush, Sandberg bluegrass, buckwheat, and phlox are common increasers. Annual weeds such as kochia, mustard, lambsquarter, 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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