

Ecological site R034AY318WY
Impervious Clay
High Plains Southeast (IC)

Accessed: 08/29/2026

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

R034AY304WY	Clayey High Plains Southeast (Cy) CLayey
R034AY344WY	Saline Upland High Plains Southeast (SU) Saline Upland

Similar sites

R034AY310WY	Dense Clay High Plains Southeast (DC) Dense Clay (DC) 10-14" P.Z. High Plains Southeast has higher production and does not have high concentrations of exchangeable sodium throughout the profile.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site will usually occur in a lowland position, on flat to gently sloping land, but can occur in all positions.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Alluvial fan (2) Stream terrace
Elevation	1,680 – 2,290 m

Slope	0 – 40 %
Ponding depth	0 cm
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 June 15. Some green up of cool season plants usually occurs in September.

The following information is from the "Laramie" climate station:

Minimum Maximum 5 yrs. out of 10 between

Frost-free period (days): 57 149 June 1 – September 16

Freeze-free period (days): 94 183 May 15 – September 28

Annual Precipitation (inches): 5.8 17.34

Mean annual precipitation: 11.53 inches

Mean annual air temperature: 42.2 F (30.4 F Avg. Min. to 53.9 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 "Dixon " and "Medicine Bow".

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 are moderately deep (greater than 20" to bedrock) to very deep, well drained soils formed in alluvium. The topsoil, except for thin ineffectual layers, will be heavy clays and/or soils that develop large cracks when dry and are very sticky when wet. These soils are not high in salinity and/or alkalinity but do have high concentrations of exchangeable sodium throughout the profile.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Clay (2) Silty clay
Family particle size	(1) Clayey
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Slow to very slow
Soil depth	40 – 150 cm
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	7.62 – 11.43 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 – 20 %
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)	6.6 – 8.4

Ecological dynamics

As this site deteriorates from improper grazing management, species such as birdfoot sage and unpalatable forbs will increase. Indian ricegrass 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.

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				140-252	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	140-252	–
2				56-112	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	56-112	–
3				56-112	
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	56-112	–
4				0-28	
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	0-28	–
5				0-28	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0-28	–
Forb					
6				28-84	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0-28	–
	textile onion	ALTE	<i>Allium textile</i>	0-28	–
	rosy pussytoes	ANRO2	<i>Antennaria rosea</i>	0-28	–
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	0-28	–
	fleabane	ERIGE2	<i>Erigeron</i>	0-28	–
	desertparsley	LOMAT	<i>Lomatium</i>	0-28	–
	phlox	PHLOX	<i>Phlox</i>	0-28	–
	woodyaster	XYLOR	<i>Xylorhiza</i>	0-28	–
Shrub/Vine					
7				112-224	
	birdfoot sagebrush	ARPE6	<i>Artemisia pedatifida</i>	112-224	–
8				28-56	
	Gardner's saltbush	ATGA	<i>Atriplex gardneri</i>	28-56	–
9				0-28	
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	0-28	–
10				0-28	
	winterfat	KRASC	<i>Krascheninnikovia</i>	0-28	–
11				0-28	
	Shrub (>.5m)	2SHRUB	<i>Shrub (>.5m)</i>	0-28	–

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 Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/ Birdfoot Sage Plant Community (HCPC): Suitable thermal and escape cover for mule deer may be limited due to the low height of woody plants. However, sagebrush provides important winter forage for mule deer and antelope. Year-round habitat is provided for sage grouse and many other sagebrush obligate species such as the sage sparrow, sage thrasher, pygmy rabbit, sagebrush vole, horned lizard, and pronghorn antelope. Open spaces in the sagebrush canopy are potential sage grouse lek locations. Birdfoot Sage/ Rhizomatous Wheatgrass Plant Community: This plant community has a low level of diversity. Due to the dominance of grasses, feed for browsing animals is limited. Areas of bare ground may provide leks for sage grouse.

Heavy Birdfoot Sage 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. If distribution problems occur, stocking rates must be reduced to maintain plant health and vigor.

Plant Community Production Carrying Capacity* (lb./ac) (AUM/ac)

Rhizomatous Wheatgrass/ Birdfoot Sage (HCPC)	350-700	.2
Birdfoot Sage/ Rhizomatous Wheatgrass	200-400	.1
Heavy Birdfoot Sage	100-300	.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 is the principal factor limiting forage production on this site. This site is dominated by soils in hydrologic group D. Infiltration ranges from slow to very slow. Runoff potential for this site varies from high to very high depending on 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. Cryptogammic crusts are present, but only cover 1-2% of the soil surface.

Recreational uses

This site provides limited hunting opportunities.

Wood products

No appreciable wood products are present on the site.

Other products

None noted.

Inventory data references

Inventory Data References (narrative) Information presented here has been derived from NRCS clipping data and other inventory data. Field observations from range trained personnel were also used. 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. Inventory Data References Data Source Number of Records Sample Period State County SCS-RANGE-417 69 1967-1988 WY Carbon & others

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.

Author(s)/participant(s)	
Contact for lead author	

Date	05/01/2005
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. Number and extent of rills: Rills should not be present

2. Presence of water flow patterns: Barely observable

3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes: Not evident

4. Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):
Bare ground is 25-35%, occurring in small openings throughout the site.

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: None

7. Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel): Little to no plant litter movement. Plant litter remains in place and is not moved by erosional forces.

8. Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):
Plant cover and litter is at 60% or greater of soil surface and maintains soil surface integrity. Soil Stability class is anticipated to be 5 or greater.

9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness): Use Soil Series description for depth and color of A-horizon

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Grass canopy and basal cover should reduce raindrop impact and slow overland flow providing increased time for infiltration to occur. Infiltration varies with soil texture from moderately rapid to rapid.

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 or soil surface crusting should be present.

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: Shrubs > Mid stature Grasses > Forbs = short stature grasses

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):**
Some plant mortality and decadence is expected

14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Average litter cover is 20-25% with depths of 0.10 to 0.25 inches

15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):**
500 lbs/ac

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:** Birdfoot sagebrush, Annuals, and Species found on Noxious Weed List

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** May be Limited due to effective moisture and seed to soil contact
