

Ecological site R035XB202AZ

Clayey Wash

6-10" p.z.

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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.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 035X–Colorado Plateau

This ecological site occurs in Common Resource Area 35.2 - the Colorado Plateau Shrub – Grasslands Elevations range from 3800-5800 feet and precipitation averages 6 to 10 inches per year. Vegetation includes shadscale, fourwing saltbush, Mormon tea, blackbrush, Indian ricegrass, galleta, blue grama, and black grama. The soil temperature regime is mesic and the soil moisture regime is typic aridic. This unit occurs within the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province and is characterized by a sequence of flat to gently dipping sedimentary rocks eroded into plateaus, valleys and deep canyons. Sedimentary rock classes dominate the plateau with volcanic fields occurring for the most part near its margin.

Ecological site concept

Soils grouped on this site are deep and well drained. The surface horizons have textures ranging from clay loam to vertic clays. This ecological site occurs in a bottom position with gentle slopes ranging from 0 to 5 percent. It benefits significantly from run-in moisture.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Atriplex canescens</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Sporobolus airoides</i> (2) <i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>

Physiographic features

This site occurs in a bottom position with gentle slopes ranging from 0-5%. It benefits significantly from run-in moisture.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Wash (2) Alluvial fan (3) Flood plain
Flooding duration	Brief (2 to 7 days)

Flooding frequency	Occasional
Elevation	1,160 – 1,770 m
Slope	0 – 10 %
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

About 50% of annual precipitation is received as rain from July to September. With the least amount from May and June. Most of the moisture that comes from November to February is in the form of snow. Strong winds are common during the winter and spring.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	180 days
Freeze-free period (average)	210 days
Precipitation total (average)	250 mm

Influencing water features

This ecological site is located in the low areas along the drainages where runoff water flows following rainfall events. The soil moisture on this site is from both rainfall, and run-on moisture from the watershed above it. This additional water makes this site much more productive than the adjacent uplands that only receive moisture from rainfall.

Soil features

Soils in this site are deep and well drained. The surface horizons have textures ranging from clay loam to vertic clays. The subsurface textures are clay, silty clay, clay loam, or silty clay loam and contain very little gravel.

Typical taxonomic units include:

Coconino County Central Part (AZ631) Soil Map Units- 26-Navajo Clay; 51-Tours Silty Clay Loam; 52-Tours.

Navajo County Central Part (AZ633) Soil Map Unit- 67-Tours.

Little Colorado River Area (AZ707) Soil Map Unit- 61-Tours.

Navajo Mountain(AZ711) Soil Map Units- 7-Berryhill family; 47-Sanfeco.

Fort Defiance Area (NM - AZ)(AZ715) Soil Map Units- 133-Wepo, 134-Wepo.

Shiprock Area (NM-AZ) (AZ717)Soil Map Unit- 527-Outpost.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Clay loam (2) Clay
Family particle size	(1) Clayey

Drainage class	Moderately well drained to well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to very slow
Soil depth	100 – 150 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 – 10 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	15.24 – 33.02 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 – 20 %
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	20 – 30 mmhos/cm
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	7.4 – 8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 10 %

Ecological dynamics

An ecological site is not a precise assemblage of species for which the proportions are the same from place to place or from year to year. In all plant communities, variability is apparent in productivity and occurrence of individual species. Spatial boundaries of the communities; however, can be recognized by characteristic patterns of species composition, association, and community structure. The historic climax plant community for this ecological site has been described by sampling relict or relatively undisturbed sites and/or reviewing historic records. The historic climax plant community is the plant community that evolved over time with the soil forming process and long term changes in climatic conditions of the area. It is the plant community that was best adapted to the unique combination of environmental factors associated with the site.

Natural disturbances, such as drought, fire, grazing of native fauna, and insects, are inherent in the development and maintenance of these plant communities. The effects of these disturbances are part of the range of characteristics of the ecological site. Fluctuations in plant community structure and function caused by the effects of natural disturbances help establish the boundaries and characteristics of an ecological site. They are accounted for as part of the range of characteristics of the ecological site. Recognizable plant community phases are identified in the reference state of the ecological site. Some sites may have a small range of variation, while others have a large range. Some plant community phases may exist for long periods of time, while others may only occur for a couple of years after a disturbance.

Deterioration of the plant community, hydrology, or soil site stability on an ecological site can result in crossing a threshold or potentially irreversible boundary to another state, or equilibrium. This can occur as a result of the loss of soil surface through erosion, the loss of the stability of the site due to disturbances that cause active erosion on the site, increases in the amounts and/or patterns or runoff from rainstorms, changes in availability of surface and subsurface water, significant changes in plant structural and functional types, or the introduction of non-native species. When these thresholds are crossed, the potential of the ecological site to return to the historic climax plant community can be lost, or restoration will require significant inputs. There may be multiple states possible for an ecological site, determined by the type and or severity of disturbance.

The known states and transition pathways for this ecological site are described in the state and transition model. Within each state, there may be one or more known plant community phases. These community phases describe the different plant community that can be recognized and mapped across this ecological site. The state and transition model is intended to help land users recognize the current plant community on the ecological site, and the management options for improving the plant community to the desired plant community.

Plant production data provided in this site description is standardized to the air-dry weight of one year's growth. The plant communities described in this site description are based on near normal rainfall years.

State and transition model

Figure 3. 35.2 Clayey Wash S&T

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	Dominant Warm Season Grasses			280-448	
	alkali sacaton	SPAI	<i>Sporobolus airoides</i>	224-336	–
	James' galleta	PLJA	<i>Pleuraphis jamesii</i>	56-168	–
	blue grama	BOGR2	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	112-168	–
	sideoats grama	BOCU	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	28-140	–
	vine mesquite	PAOB	<i>Panicum obtusum</i>	56-112	–
2	Cool Season Grasses			224-280	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	168-280	–
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	28-140	–
	squirreltail	ELELE	<i>Elymus elymoides ssp. elymoides</i>	28-140	–
3	Other Grasses			84-168	
	threeawn	ARIST	<i>Aristida</i>	6-34	–
	mat muhly	MURI	<i>Muhlenbergia richardsonis</i>	6-34	–
	ring muhly	MUTO2	<i>Muhlenbergia torreyi</i>	6-34	–
	burrograss	SCBR2	<i>Scleropogon brevifolius</i>	6-34	–
	tumblegrass	SCPA	<i>Schedonnardus paniculatus</i>	6-34	–
	spike dropseed	SPCO4	<i>Sporobolus contractus</i>	6-34	–
	sand dropseed	SPCR	<i>Sporobolus cryptandrus</i>	6-34	–
	Grass, annual	2GA	<i>Grass, annual</i>	0-22	–
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0-22	–
Forb					
4	Forbs			28-112	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	16-73	–
	Forb, annual	2FA	<i>Forb, annual</i>	12-67	–
	sideoats grama	BOCU	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	28-56	–
	burrograss	SCBR2	<i>Scleropogon brevifolius</i>	11-45	–
	tumblegrass	SCPA	<i>Schedonnardus paniculatus</i>	11-45	–

	threeawn	ARIST	<i>Aristida</i>	6-45	-
	spike dropseed	SPCO4	<i>Sporobolus contractus</i>	6-34	-
	sand dropseed	SPCR	<i>Sporobolus cryptandrus</i>	6-34	-
	mat muhly	MURI	<i>Muhlenbergia richardsonis</i>	6-34	-
	ring muhly	MUTO2	<i>Muhlenbergia torreyi</i>	6-34	-
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0-11	-

Shrub/Vine

5	Shrubs			280-448	
	fourwing saltbush	ATCA2	<i>Atriplex canescens</i>	280-392	-
	shadscale saltbush	ATCO	<i>Atriplex confertifolia</i>	11-45	-
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	11-45	-
	menodora	MENOD	<i>Menodora</i>	11-45	-
	New Mexico groundsel	PANE7	<i>Packera neomexicana</i>	6-22	-
	pricklypear	OPUNT	<i>Opuntia</i>	6-11	-
	rabbitbrush	CHRY9	<i>Chrysothamnus</i>	6-11	-
	broom snakeweed	GUSA2	<i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i>	6-11	-

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

This site is suitable for grazing during any period of the year by cows and calves, stocker cattle, sheep and horses. Prescribed grazing systems can benefit this site by allowing rest periods for the cool season species. This site is dominated by grassland wildlife species. However, the site is transitory to almost all species because of the proximity of water.

Recreational uses

Since this site is located on non-entrenched swales and bottoms it has good aesthetic appeal from being mostly grasslands interspersed with brushy thickets. Winters are cold and springtime is windy, however, mild summers make this site attractive for horseback riding, wildlife observation, and hunting.

Type locality

Location 1: Navajo County, AZ	
General legal description	Typical example of this site is located on the Turquoise ranch, two miles northwest of Winslow, AZ.

Other references

Information and updates collected during 2009-2010 for this ESD was conducted as part of an Interagency Technical Assistance Agreement between the Bureau of Indian Affairs–Navajo Region and the NRCS-Arizona.

Contributors

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Approval

Kendra Moseley, 5/20/2025

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	08/27/2012
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Few. Any rills present will continually form and reshape periodically due to occasional flooding on the site.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Some water flow patterns may be present, but are highly variable due to position on landscape and dependant on run-in moisture from uplands. The high shrink/swell characteristics of the soil and occasional flooding (overland flow) will continually reshape the surface.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Very few expected, some minor pedestals/terraces may occur along water flow patterns.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** This site has moderate to high potential to produce herbaceous cover and low amounts of bare ground. Bare ground ranges from 15-35%.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Uncommon, some gullies may form due to location on floodplains. Any gullies present should be stable with vegetation and no signs of active erosion.

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Some deposition areas (from sediments) may occur due to overland flow and occasional flooding.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Most herbaceous and woody litter will be transported throughout the site during intense overland flow/flood events. Only minor amounts of fine litter will be transported by wind.

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Expected values of 1-3 in interspaces and 4-6 under the plant canopies. This site is fairly resistance to erosion when well vegetated.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Surface textures typically range from clay loam to clay with a thickness of 2-14 inches. Typically soil structure is moderately (thin, fine to medium) platy structure. Surface colors range from light reddish brown to reddish brown.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** This site is characterized as a native grassland with scattered large and half shrubs with few forbs. This site is dominated by a mix of bunch and colonizing grasses providing a diverse root structure and vegetation pattern. Perennial grasses reduce raindrop impact and slow run-in moisture (overland flow) to allow for increased infiltration.

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** None. These soils have a naturally platy structure.

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: Warm season grasses > Cool season grasses >

Sub-dominant: Large shrubs > Half shrubs > Forbs > Cacti

Other:

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** All plants functional groups are adapted to survival in all but the most severe droughts. Severe winter droughts affect shrubs the most. Severe summer droughts affect grasses the most.

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):
Average annual production on this site is expected to be 900 to 1100 lbs/ac. in a year of average annual precipitation.

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: Tamarisk, cheatgrass, foxtail barley, silverleaf nightshade, Russian thistle, and camelthorn.

17. Perennial plant reproductive capability: All plants native to this site are adapted and are capable of producing seeds, stolons and rhizomes in all but the most severe drought.
