

Ecological site R035XC327AZ

Clayey Upland

10-14" p.z.

Sodic

Last updated: 5/19/2025

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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.

MLRA notes

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

AZ CRA 35.3 – Colorado Plateau Sagebrush – Grasslands Elevations range from 4500 to 6000 feet and precipitation averages 10 to 14 inches. Vegetation includes Wyoming big sagebrush, Utah juniper, Colorado pinyon - cliffrose, Mormon tea, fourwing saltbush, blackbrush Indian ricegrass, needle and thread, western wheatgrass Galleta, black grama, blue grama, and sand dropseed. The soil temperature regime is mesic and the soil moisture regime is ustic 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

This site is located on small concave depressed areas of cuestas. Soils are deep and moderately well-drained to well-drained. Clay contents are generally high throughout the profile.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Atriplex confertifolia</i> (2) <i>Atriplex obovata</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Pleuraphis jamesii</i> (2) <i>Sporobolus airoides</i>

Physiographic features

Site is located on small concave depressed areas of cuestas.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Cuesta (2) Dip slope
Flooding duration	Extremely brief (0.1 to 4 hours)

Flooding frequency	Very rare to rare
Ponding frequency	None to rare
Elevation	1,620 – 1,920 m
Slope	10 – 20 %
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

Winter summer moisture ratios range from 70:30 to 60:40. Late spring is usually the driest period, and early fall moisture can be sporadic. Summer rains fall from June through September; moisture originates in the Gulf of Mexico and creates convective, usually brief, intense thunderstorms. Cool season moisture from October through May tends to be frontal; it originates in the Pacific and the Gulf of California and falls in widespread storms with longer duration and lower intensity. Precipitation generally comes as snow from December through February. Accumulations above 12 inches are not common but can occur. Snow usually lasts for 3-4 days, but can persist much longer. Summer daytime temperatures are commonly 95 - 100 F and on occasion exceed 105 F. Winter air temperatures can regularly go below 10 F and have been recorded below - 20 F.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	170 days
Freeze-free period (average)	190 days
Precipitation total (average)	360 mm

Influencing water features

Soil features

Soils are deep and moderately well-drained to well-drained. Clay contents are generally high throughout the profile. Geologic formation is Morrison. Available water capacity is moderate. Wind/water erosion potential is moderate. Soils are moderately saline/sodic. pH is 7.8-9.0. Soil moisture regime is ustic aridic. Soil temperature regime is mesic.

Typical taxonomic units on this site include:

SSA 717 Shiprock Area AZ/NM MU's 308 McElmo and 318 Camino.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium – clayey shale (2) Residuum – sandstone
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Surface texture	(1) Very gravelly sandy clay loam (2) Gravelly clay (3) Gravelly clay loam
Family particle size	(1) Clayey
Drainage class	Moderately well drained to well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to slow
Soil depth	100 – 150 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	40 – 50 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	0 – 10 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	12.7 – 17.78 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	10 – 20 %
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	7.8 – 10
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 10 %

Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 20 %
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Ecological dynamics

The plant communities found on an ecological site are naturally variable. Composition and production will vary with yearly conditions, location, aspect, and the natural variability of the soils. The Historical Climax Plant Community represents the natural potential plant communities found on relict or relatively undisturbed sites. Other plant communities described here represent plant communities that are known to occur when the site is disturbed by factors such as fire, grazing, or drought.

Production data provided in this site description is standardized to air dry weight at the end of the summer growing season. The plant communities described in this site description are based on near normal rainfall years.

NRCS uses a Similarity Index to compare existing plant communities to the plant communities described here. Similarity index is determined by comparing the production and composition of a plant community to the production and composition of a plant community described in this site description. To determine Similarity index, compare the production (air dry weight) of each species to that shown in the plant community description. For each species, count no more than the maximum amount shown for the species, and for each group, count no more than the maximum amount shown for each group. Divide the resulting total by the total normal year production shown in the plant community description. If the rainfall has been significantly above or below normal, use the total production shown for above or below normal years. If field data is not collected at the end of the summer growing season, then the field data must be corrected to the end of the year production before comparing it to the site description. The growth curve can be used as a guide for estimating production at the end of the summer growing season.

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 (%)
Shrub/Vine					
0				45-67	
	James' galleta	PLJA	<i>Pleuraphis jamesii</i>	40-54	–
	shadscale saltbush	ATCO	<i>Atriplex confertifolia</i>	11-22	–
	mound saltbush	ATOB	<i>Atriplex obovata</i>	11-22	–
	desert seepweed	SUSU	<i>Suaeda suffrutescens</i>	2-11	–
	broom snakeweed	GUSA2	<i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i>	0-7	–
	Shrub (>.5m)	2SHRUB	<i>Shrub (>.5m)</i>	0-7	–
	plains pricklypear	OPPO	<i>Opuntia polyacantha</i>	0-2	–
Grass/Grasslike					
0				123-146	
	James' galleta	PLJA	<i>Pleuraphis jamesii</i>	67-90	–
	alkali sacaton	SPAI	<i>Sporobolus airoides</i>	22-34	–
	sand dropseed	SPCR	<i>Sporobolus cryptandrus</i>	2-11	–
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0-11	–
	Indian ricegrass	ACHY	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	0-7	–
	squirreltail	ELELE	<i>Elymus elymoides ssp. elymoides</i>	0-7	–
	sand dropseed	SPCR	<i>Sporobolus cryptandrus</i>	1-7	–
Forb					
0				0-11	
	alkali sacaton	SPAI	<i>Sporobolus airoides</i>	13-20	–
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	2-7	–
	widewing springparsley	CYPU	<i>Cymopterus purpurascens</i>	0-2	–

Forb, annual	2FA	<i>Forb, annual</i>	0-2	-
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Table 6. Community 1.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 7. Community 2.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 8. Community 2.2 plant community composition

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

Site is favorable for grazing throughout most of the year except when snow cover restricts availability of forage. With continuous grazing use during winter and spring, the relatively scarce cool season mid grasses are replaced by desert seepweed, snakeweed and lower value forbs and grasses. Planned grazing systems adapt well to use on this site. The potential plant community produced by this site provides food for those species of wildlife that utilize grass as a major portion of their diet. When vegetative retrogression occurs, unpalatable shrubby species increase and some wildlife species may be benefit. Animals include mule deer, cottontail rabbit, lizards, coyote, pronghorn antelope, blacktail jackrabbit and snakes.

Recreational uses

This site is found in grassy swales, characterized by open grasslands interspersed with a few flowering forbs and shrubs. Activities include hunting, camping, hiking, and horseback riding.

Type locality

Location 1: Apache County, AZ	
Township/Range/Section	T41N R30E S36
General legal description	Teec Nos Pos quad; NW portion of section 36, T41N, R30E; one half mile SE of Teec Nos Pos, Navajo Indian Reservation, Arizona

Contributors

HSH
 Larry D. Ellicott
 Steve Barker

Approval

Kendra Moseley, 5/19/2025

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.

Author(s)/participant(s)	
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Contact for lead author	
Date	06/10/2026
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. Number and extent of rills:

2. Presence of water flow patterns:

3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:

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

5. Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:

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

7. Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):

8. Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):

9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):

10. Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:

11. Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):

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:

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

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):

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:

17. Perennial plant reproductive capability:
