

Ecological site F043AY539ID

Ashy Canyons and Plateaus

23-25" PZ Mesic

Eastern Columbia Plateau Embayments

Last updated: 4/11/2025

Accessed: 04/21/2026

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.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 043A–Northern Rocky Mountains

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 043A–Northern Rocky Mountains Description of MLRAs can be found in: United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2006. Land Resource Regions and Major Land Resource Areas of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin. U.S. Department of Agriculture Handbook 296. Available electronically at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/ref/?cid=nrcs142p2_053624#handbook

LRU notes

Most commonly found in LRU 43A07 (Eastern Columbia Plateau Embayments) and 43A09 (Western Bitterroot Foothills). Climate parameters were obtained from PRISM and other models for the area. Landscape descriptors are derived from USGS DEM products and their derivatives.

Classification relationships

Relationship to Other Established Classifications: United States National Vegetation Classification (2008) – A3446 Ponderosa Pine / Shrub Understory Central Rocky Mt. Forest & Woodland Alliance Washington Natural Heritage Program. Ecosystems of Washington State, A Guide to Identification, Rocchio and Crawford, 2015 – Northern Rocky Mountain Ponderosa Pine Woodland and Savanna Description of Ecoregions of the United States, USFS PN # 1391, 1995 - M333 Northern Rocky Mt. Forest-Steppe-Coniferous Forest-Alpine Meadow Province Level III and IV Ecoregions of WA, US EPA, June 2010 - 15r Okanogan – Colville Xeric Valleys & Foothills and 15s Spokane Valley Outwash Plains This ecological site includes the following USDA Forest Service Plant Associations: PIPO/SYAL, PIPO/PHMA, and PIPO/SYOR. (Williams et. al. 1995)

Ecological site concept

This ESD is distinguished by an overstory of ponderosa pine understory shrub component of ninebark, oceanspray, and snowberry. It occurs on canyon sides and structural benches. The soils have developed in mixed Mazama tephra deposits over over loess or alluvium, or colluvium from granite. The soils are very deep and about half have a perched water table within 30 inches of the surface during some part of the year. The soils are well drained or moderately well drained and have >3 inches of available water capacity in the top 40 inches. This ESD fits into the National Vegetation Standard's Central Rocky Mt. *Pinus ponderosa* / Shrub Understory alliance.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) <i>Pinus ponderosa</i>
Shrub	(1) <i>Symphoricarpos albus</i> (2) <i>Physocarpus malvaceus</i>

Herbaceous	(1) <i>Calamagrostis rubescens</i> (2) <i>Achillea millefolium</i>
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Physiographic features

Physiographic Features

Landscapes: Hills, Plateaus, Canyonlands

Landform: loess hills, hillslopes, stream terraces, earthflows

Elevation (m): Total range = 585 to 1035 m

(1,920 to 3,395 feet)

Central tendency = 755 to 865 m

(2,475 to 2,835 feet)

Slope (percent): Total range = 0 to 40 percent

Central tendency = 7 to 20 percent

Aspect: 70-225-20

Central tendency: 150-225-300

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hills > Hillslope (2) Plateau > Loess hill (3) Canyonlands > Stream terrace
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	750 – 860 m
Slope	10 – 20 %
Water table depth	200 cm
Aspect	W, NW, S, SW

Table 3. Representative physiographic features (actual ranges)

Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	590 – 1,040 m

Slope	0 – 40 %
Water table depth	40 – 200 cm

Climatic features

Climatic Features

Frost-free period (days): Total range = 105 to 130 days

Central tendency = 110 to 120 days

Mean annual precipitation (cm): Total range = 420 to 925 mm

(17 to 36 inches)

Central tendency = 585 to 725 mm

(23 to 28 inches)

MAAT (C): Total range = 6.9 to 9.9

(44 to 50 F)

Central tendency = 8.0 to 8.7

(46 to 48 F)

Climate Stations: none

Influencing water features

Water Table Depth (cm):

94 – >200 cm (median = >200 cm)

(37 – 80 inches; median = >80 inches)

Flooding:

Frequency: None

Duration: None

Ponding:

Frequency: None

Duration: None

Soil features

Representative Soil Features

This ecological subsite is associated with several soil series (e.g Dearyton, Driscoll, Freeman, Glenrose, Johnson, Kramerhill, Larkin, Lauby, Newlig, and Southwick,). The soils are Oxyaquic Argixerolls, Ultic Argixerolls, Vitrandic Haploxeralfs, Vitrandic Argixerolls, Ultic Palexerolls, Vitrandic Palexeralfs, Aquic Palexerolls, Pachic Ultic Argixerolls, and Aquandic Palexeralfs. These soils have developed in highly mixed Mazama tephra deposits over loess or alluvium, or colluvium from granite. The soils are very deep and about half have a perched water table within 30 inches of the surface during some part of the year. The soils are well drained or moderately well drained and have >3 inches of available water capacity in the upper 40 inches.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Volcanic ash (2) Loess (3) Alluvium (4) Residuum – granite (5) Colluvium – granite
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Surface texture	(1) Silt loam (2) Ashy silt loam
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow
Depth to restrictive layer	200 cm
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	Not specified
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	18.29 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-152.4cm)	6.5
Subsurface fragment volume ≤3" (25.4-152.4cm)	Not specified
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (25.4-152.4cm)	Not specified

Table 5. Representative soil features (actual values)

Drainage class	Moderately well drained to well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to very slow

Depth to restrictive layer	100 – 200 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	0 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	14.22 – 20.83 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 %
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0 mmhos/cm
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-152.4cm)	5.1 – 7.3
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (25.4-152.4cm)	0 – 10 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (25.4-152.4cm)	0 %

Ecological dynamics

Ecological Dynamics of the Site

This site is located on foot slopes and side slopes of hills, canyons and low mountains. It is on sites with more moisture than the pine/dry grass sites. Most of this site occurs under 2800' of elevation. Reference state is characteristic of mature pine stands over snowberry, serviceberry, spirea, chokecherry, woods rose, nutka rose, and ninebark. Redstem ceanothus may be present as evidence of past fires. Fire disturbance is sporadic and currently in the mixed severity or stand replacing regimes. It would not be considered in the pine/savanna category due to lack of frequent ground fires. Overstory canopy cover of these mature pine stands will range from 40 – 60%. These mature pine stands will be subject to bark beetle kill, windfall, and fire. The understory shrubs will resprout quickly and pine regeneration will be dependent on pine seed placement and shrub competition.

The pine/snowberry plant association will be located on the drier topographic locations and the pine/ninebark plant association will be located on northern aspects. These sites have been subject to overgrazing, introduced grass seeding and land conversion. Kentucky bluegrass and Canada bluegrass have invaded many of these sites dominating the understory. Sites on less sloping terrain may have been converted to crops, pasture, or urban land.

State and transition model

Additional community tables

Table 6. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 7. Community 1.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 8. Community 1.3 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 9. Community 1.4 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 10. Community 2.1 plant community composition

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

Kirt Walstad, 4/11/2025

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)	
Contact for lead author	
Date	12/18/2020
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:
