

Ecological site EX043B15Z955

Montane Subirrigated Meadow

Cryic

Northern Rocky Mountain Front

Last updated: 3/11/2025

Accessed: 09/15/2026

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): 043B—Central Rocky Mountains

This ecological site currently resides in the Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 43B Central Rocky Mountains. The area of MLRA 43B is expansive and is further divided into Land Resource Units (LRU). A detailed description of MLRA 43B can be found at: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/ref/?cid=nrcs142p2_053624 This ecological site resides within the eastern portion of Glacier National Park which resides in MLRA 43B and LRU A – Northern Rocky Mountain Front.

LRU notes

This ecological site resides within the eastern portion of Glacier National Park which resides in MLRA 43B and LRU A – Northern Rocky Mountain Front. The landscape is mountains and the landforms include scarp slopes, dip slopes, mountain slopes, drainageways, bog, cirque, U-shaped valley and associated moraine and outwash features. Elevations range 1,000-3,175 meters (3,300-10,500 feet) (mean elevation is 1,900 m. or 6,200 ft.). The climate is cold and wet with mean annual precipitation of 1,050 mm (41 in.) and mean annual air temperature of 3 degrees C. (37 degrees F.) with a soil temperature regime of cryic and soil moisture regime of udic or ustic. The geology of the area is dominated by Appenkunny and Grinnell argillite, Kootenai formation, Tertiary sedimentary rocks, Missoula group quartzite, glacial drift alluvium, Siyeh limestone and undifferentiated rock. The soils are dominantly moderately deep to very deep that formed from a variety of sedimentary rock parent materials on moderately steep to very steep mountain slopes. Soils fall into three soil orders: Inceptisols, Mollisols, and Alfisols. Most soils are loamy-skeletal and many, especially in the eastern part, contain significant amounts of calcium carbonate influencing both physical and chemical soil characteristics (horizons of calcium carbonate accumulation and corresponding alkaline pH values). Rock outcrop, rubble land, and surface rock fragments are common. There are few lakes but has numerous major drainages including Dearborn, Sun, Teton, Birch, Badger, Two Medicine, St. Maries, South and Middle Fork Flathead headwaters, Blackfoot headwaters. This is a snow dominated system. Wind is a major force shaping climatic patterns and vegetation structure. This area includes forested areas dominated by either Douglas fir, subalpine fir or white bark pine, and range areas dominated by rough fescue, Richardson's needlegrass and bluebunch wheatgrass and assorted forbs. This is related to the EPA land classification framework of: Level 3- 41 Canadian Rockies. Specifically, it includes Level 4-41a Northern Front. This area is related predominantly to the USFS Provinces M333Cf Northern Rocky Mountain Front.

Ecological site concept

This ecological site is found in the montane, at elevations ranging 1500-1600m, 4921 - 5249 ft, on toeslope or backslope positions of ground moraines or alluvial fans. The climate has a total precipitation range of 24 to 25 inches and a frost-free period of 44 days. This ecological site is found in the cryic soil temperature regime and the udic soil moisture regime. This site relates to the Cowardin System as Palustrine N/A Emergent. The soils associated with this ecological site are mollisols that can range from very poorly drained to moderately well drained. These are very deep soils, the texture is fine or fine-silty and the parent material is alluvium. There are no redoximorphic features noted probably due to the dark colors of the mollic layer masking them, no ash present, no organic layer, and the argillic layer is 16-90 cm thick, and the mollic layer is 0-10 cm thick. The water table is 20-40 inches from the surface. These soils can be seasonally moist to saturated in the spring, but dry out later in the growing season. This vegetation community is medium statured, generally less than 25 inches tall and includes a diverse assemblage of grass and forb species. The reference community includes: ebony sedge (*Carex ebenea*), fowl mannagrass (*Glyceria striata*), Nebraska sedge (*Carex nebrascensis*), shortawn foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*), mountain rush (*Juncus arcticus* ssp. *Littoralis*), clustered field sedge (*Carex praegracilis*), reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), small camas (*Camassia quamash*) and Lyall's angelica (*Angelica arguta*). Plant species are equally split between those that have a wetland affinity (designated Obligate (always occurs in wetlands) or FACW (usually occur in wetlands)) and those that have an upland affinity (designated FAC (occur in wetlands and non-wetlands) or FACU (usually occur in non-wetlands)). These wet meadows

are subirrigated and have a water table between 20-40 inches below the surface. In spring, these areas may be saturated or flooded. Species are adapted to these wet conditions in the early growing season, which dry later in the growing season. The natural disturbances include fire and wildlife grazing. It is tolerant to moderate intensity ground fires and late-season livestock grazing. Intensive grazing can lead to invasion by non-native species including: Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), timothy (*Phleum pratense*), and common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*). This degraded state can lead to noxious species occurring which are highly invasive and pose a real threat to the structure and diversity of this meadow.

Associated sites

EX043B15I954	Montane Very Deep Meadow 20-24" PZ Cryic Northern Rocky Mountain Front These sites are associated in that they both reside on the ground moraines and alluvial fans east of the Continental Divide within Glacier National Park. The 43B MONTANE VERY DEEP MEADOW is in areas with drier, loamy soils and the 43B MONTANE SUBIRRIGATED MEADOW is in lower areas with subirrigated water, seasonally moist to saturated in the spring, but dry out later in the growing season.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Carex ebenea</i> (2) <i>Carex nebrascensis</i>

Legacy ID

R043BX955MT

Physiographic features

This ecological site is found in the montane, at elevations ranging 1500-1600m, 4921 - 5249 ft, on toeslope or backslope positions of ground moraines or alluvial fans.

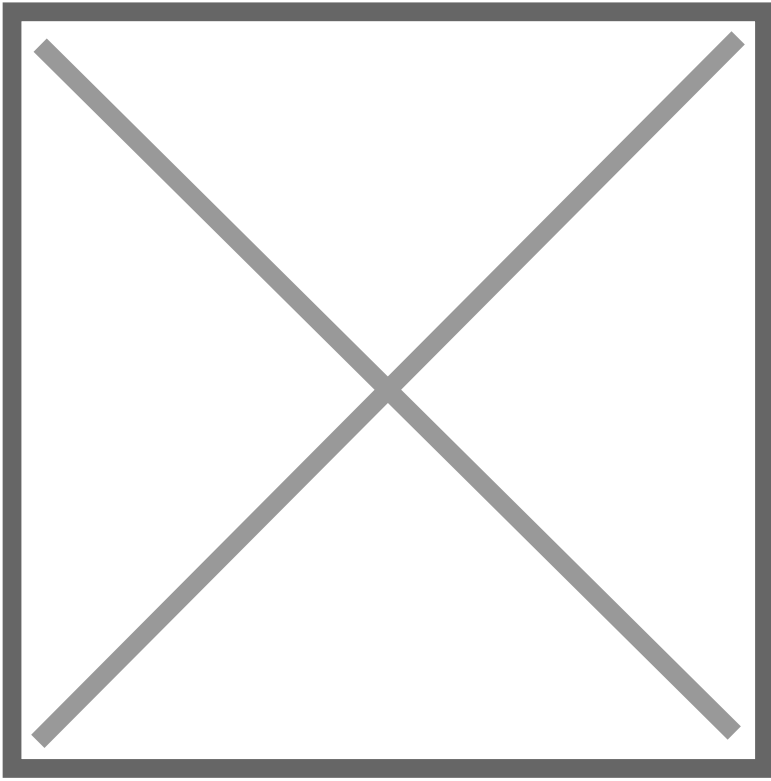


Figure 1.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Valley > Ground moraine (2) Valley > Alluvial fan
Flooding frequency	None to rare
Elevation	1,500 – 1,600 m
Slope	0 – 10 %
Water table depth	50 – 100 cm
Aspect	W, NW, N, NE, E, SE, S, SW

Climatic features

This ecological site is found in the cryic soil temperature regime and the udic soil moisture regime. Cryic soils have average annual temperature less than 8 degrees C, with less than 5 degrees C difference from winter to summer. Udic soil moisture regime denotes that the rooting zone is usually moist throughout the winter and the majority of summer.

SUMMARY ST. MARY CLIMATE STATION:

Mean Average Precipitation 31-63 inches
Mean Average Annual Temperature 34-43 degrees
Frost free days: 30-70
Relative Effective Annual Precipitation: 30-65 inches

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	40 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	100 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	610-640 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	40 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	100 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	610-640 mm
Frost-free period (average)	40 days
Freeze-free period (average)	100 days
Precipitation total (average)	640 mm

- (1) ST. MARY 1 SSW [USW00004130], Babb, MT
- (2) EAST GLACIER [USC00242629], East Glacier Park, MT

Influencing water features

Water Table at 20 to 40 inches

Wetland description

(Cowardin System) Palustrine N/A Emergent

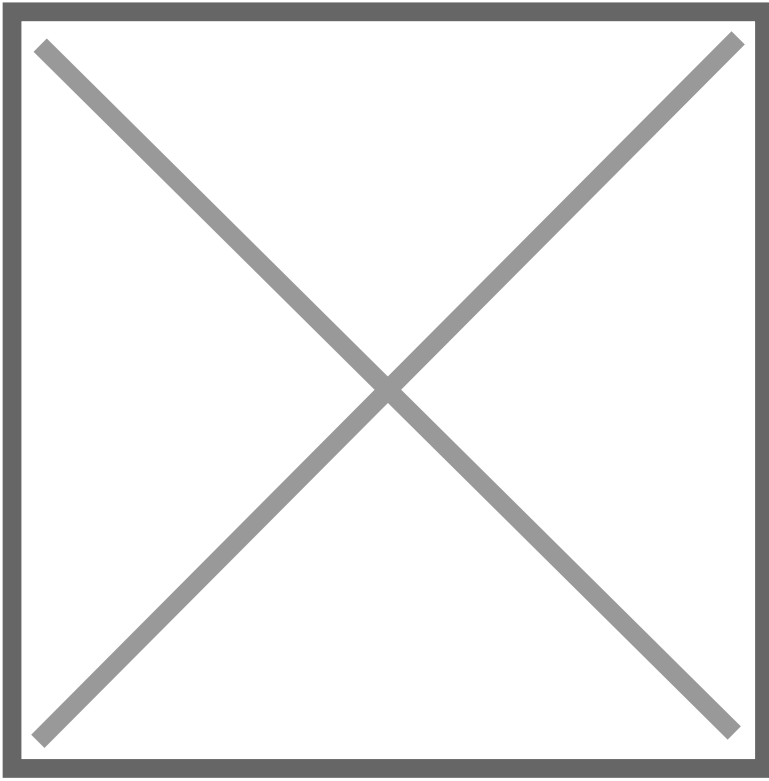


Figure 8.

Soil features

The soils associated with this ecological site are mollisols that can range from very poorly drained to moderately well drained. These are very deep soils, the texture is fine or fine-silty and the parent material is alluvium. There are no redoximorphic features noted probably due to the dark colors of the mollic layer masking them, no ash present, no organic layer, and the argillic layer is 16-90 cm thick, and the mollic layer is 0-10 cm thick. The water table is 20-40 inches from the surface. These soils can be seasonally moist to saturated in the spring, but dry out later in the growing season.

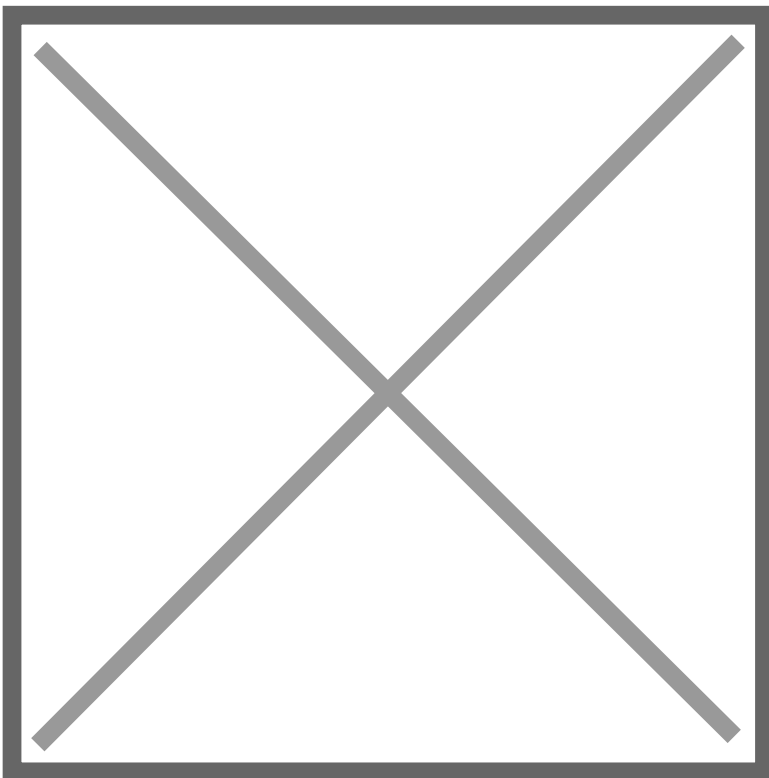


Figure 9.

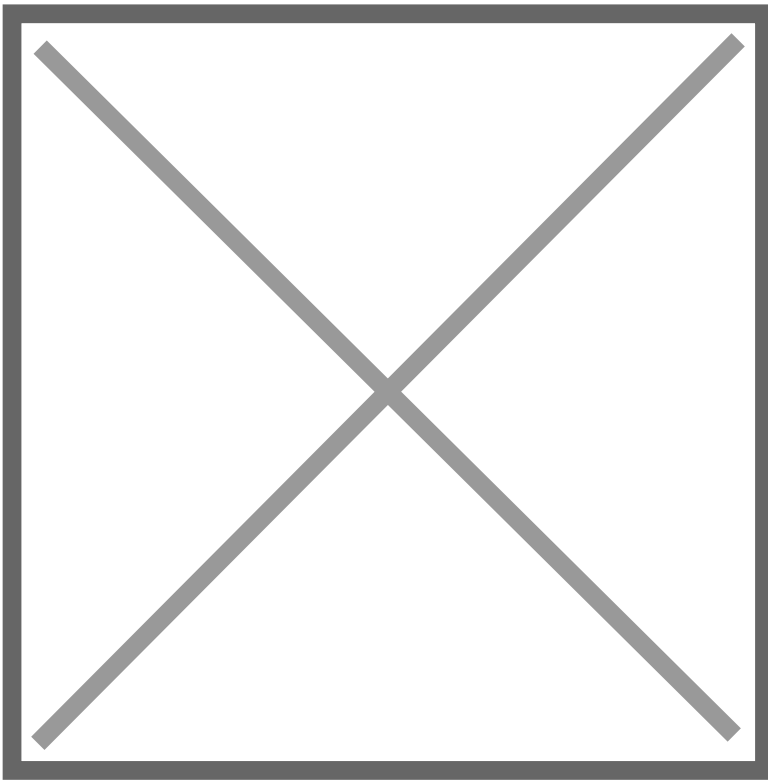


Figure 10.

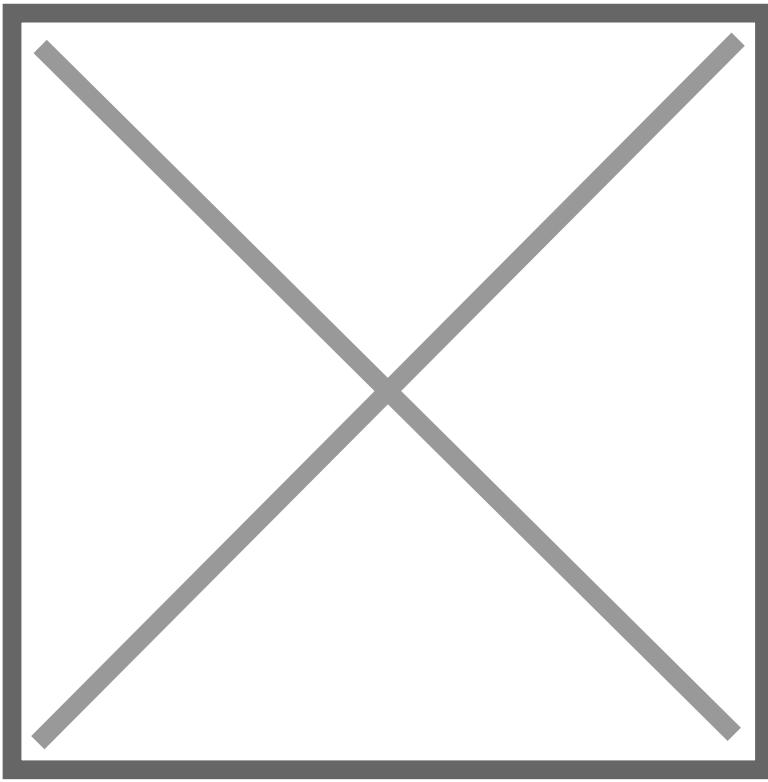


Figure 11.

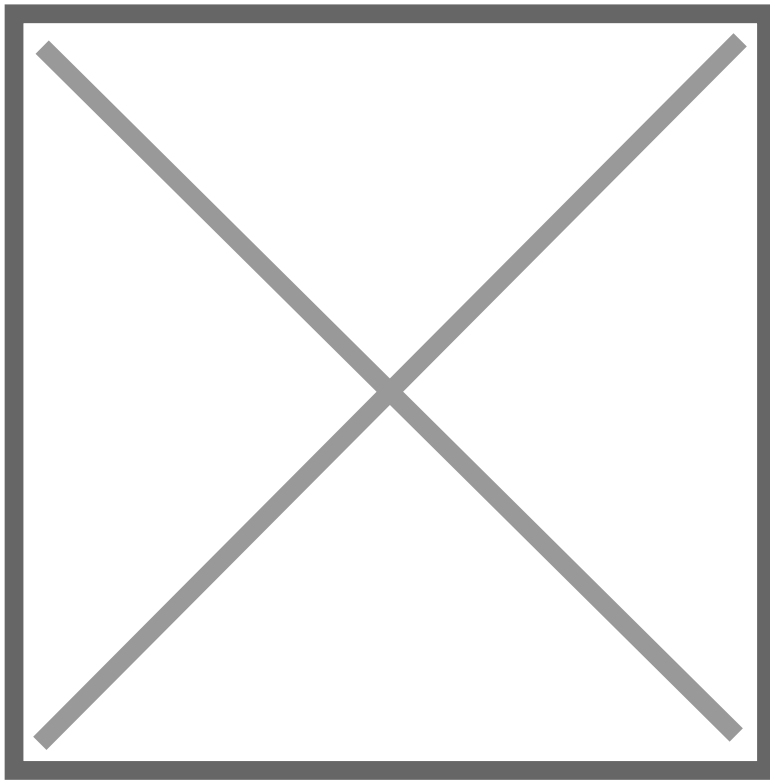


Figure 12.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium – metasedimentary rock
Surface texture	(1) Silty clay loam (2) Clay loam
Drainage class	Very poorly drained to moderately well drained
Permeability class	Moderate
Soil depth	150 – 250 cm
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (15.7-18.3cm)	Not specified

Ecological dynamics

This vegetation community is medium statured, generally less than 25 inches tall and includes a diverse assemblage of grass and forb species. Plant species are equally split between those that have a wetland affinity (designated Obligate (always occurs in wetlands) or FACW (usually occur in wetlands)) and those that have an upland affinity (designated FAC (occur in wetlands and non-wetlands) or FACU (usually occur in non-wetlands)). These wet meadows are subirrigated and have a water table between 20-40 inches below the surface. In spring, these areas may be saturated or flooded. Species are adapted to these wet conditions in the early growing season, which dry later in the growing season. The natural disturbances include fire and wildlife grazing. It is tolerant to moderate intensity ground fires and late-season livestock grazing. Intensive grazing can lead to invasion by non-native species including: Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), timothy (*Phleum pratense*), and common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*). This degraded state can lead to noxious species occurring which are highly invasive and pose a real threat to the structure and diversity of this meadow.

NATIVE SPECIES PRESENT: ebony sedge (Carex ebenea)-fowl mannagrass (Glyceria striata)-Nebraska sedge (Carex nebrascensis)-shortawn foxtail (Alopecurus aequalis)-mountain rush (Juncus arcticus ssp. littoralis) - clustered field sedge (Carex praegracilis) - reed canarygrass (Phalaris arundinacea)/ small camas (Camassia quamash) - Lyall's angelica (Angelica arguta).

WEEDY SPECIES PRESENT: Timothy (Phleum pratense)-(Kentucky bluegrass (Poa pratensis)/common dandelion (Taraxacum officinale)-Clover (Trifolium species)-common tansy (Tanacetum vulgare)-Queen Anne's lace (Daucus carota)-smooth brome (Bromus inermis)-intermediate wheatgrass (Thinopyrum intermedium)).

STATE 1: Historic reference state which is defined by the species with wetland affinity, to some degree, that have been found at current times.

STATE 2: Current reference state with very low cover of weedy species present. This state is defined by the native species with some wetland affinity (designated Obligate, FACW, and FAC) that occur at sites in State 3.

STATE 3: Current state in which defining species are present, but the high cover of weedy species precludes adding this community to STATE 2.

COMMUNITY PHASE 1.1:

DOMINATED BY: Timothy (Phleum pratense)-(Kentucky bluegrass (Poa pratensis)/common dandelion (Taraxacum officinale)-Clover (Trifolium species)-common tansy (Tanacetum vulgare)-Queen Anne's lace (Daucus carota)-smooth brome (Bromus inermis)-intermediate wheatgrass (Thinopyrum intermedium)).

NATIVE SPECIES: ebony sedge (Carex ebenea)-fowl mannagrass(Glyceria striata)-Nebraska sedge (Carex nebrascensis)-shortawn foxtail (Alopecurus aequalis)-mountain rush (Juncus arcticus ssp. littoralis)- clustered field sedge (Carex praegracilis)- reed canarygrass (Phalaris arundinacea)/ small camas (Camassia quamash)- --Lyall's angelica (Angelica arguta)-SOLIDAGO-twin arnica (Arnica sororia)-slender cinquefoil (Potentilla gracilis)-common yarrow (Achillea millefolia)-northern bedstraw (Galium boreale)-vicia –Virginia strawberry (Fragaria virginiana)- SENECIO.

This vegetation community has a variety of grass and forb species with wetland affinities with designations of Obligate or FACW. These are indicative of the moist nature of these meadows. These are subirrigated ecological sites with water table ranging 20-40 inches from the surface. Species designated as OBLIGATE to wetlands include: fowl mannagrass, Nebraska sedge, and shortawn foxtail. Species designated as having a wetland affinity but can survive outside of wetlands are FACW and include: small camas, Lyall's angelica, mountain rush and clustered field sedge. Other species that are typical of montane meadows and are more upland species (designated FAC, FACU) include: twin arnica, slender cinquefoil, common yarrow, northern bedstraw, Virginia strawberry and solidago, senecio and vicia species.

This vegetation community is generally medium statured with all plants under 25 inches in height. There are two layers of grass and forbs species. The taller layer ranges 10-25 inches tall and can include: shortawn foxtail, ebony sedge, mountain rush, Lyall's angelica, fowl mannagrass, Nebraska sedge, clustered field sedge, reed canarygrass, common yarrow, small camas, solidago species and slender cinquefoil. The shorter layer is 10 inches and lower and can include: Lyall's penstemon (Penstemon lyallii), Starry false lily of the valley (Maianthemum stellatum), northern bedstraw, twin arnica, senecio species and vicia species.

Community Phase Pathway 1.1.A
Community Phase Pathway 1.1B

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 (%)
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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 1.3 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 8. Community 2.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 9. Community 2.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 10. Community 2.3 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 11. Community 2.4 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 12. Community 3.1 plant community composition

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

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Montana Native Heritage Program Web Page. Rocky Mountain Foothill, valley grassland.

Contributors

Approval

Kirt Walstad, 3/11/2025

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	04/30/2024
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:
