

Ecological site R043BY168WY
Steep Loamy
High Mountains

Accessed: 09/30/2026

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

R043BY122WY	Loamy High Mountains Loamy
R043BY130WY	Overflow High Mountains Overflow
R043BY162WY	Shallow Loamy High Mountains Shallow Loamy

Similar sites

R043BY122WY	Loamy High Mountains Loamy (Ly) 20+M has higher production, occurs on lesser sloping topography, and lacks some of the forb diversity.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site occurs on moderate to steep mountain slopes. It is found on all exposures at high elevations, but primarily on north and east slopes at lower elevations.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Alluvial fan (3) Stream terrace
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	1,980 – 3,660 m
Slope	20 – 70 %
Ponding depth	0 cm

Climatic features

Annual precipitation is fairly evenly distributed through the year and averages over 20 inches. Snows are heavy and usually remain in place during the winter. Annual snowfall averages 150 to 200 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.

Prevailing winds are from the southwest, and strong winds are less frequent than over other areas of Wyoming. Occasional storms, however, can bring brief periods of high winds with gusts exceeding 50 mph.

Growth of native cool season plants begins about June 1 at lower elevations, as late as July 15 at higher elevations, and continues until the beginning of September.

The following information is from the "Moran 5 WNW" climate station:

Minimum Maximum 5 yrs. out of 10 between

Frost-free period (days): 31 78 June 30 – August 24

Freeze-free period (days): 65 118 June 5 – September 9

Annual Precipitation (inches): <20.78 >29.35 (2 years in 10)

Mean annual precipitation: 25.23 inches

Mean annual air temperature: 36.5°F (22.1°F Avg. Min. to 50.9°F Avg. Max.)

For detailed information visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service National Water and Climate Center at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/cgibin/state.pl?state=wy> website. Other climate station representative of this precipitation zone include "Alta 1 NW", "Lake Yellowstone", "Moose", "Old Faithful", and "Snake River" in Teton County; "Bedford 3 SE" in Lincoln County; and "Bondurant" in Sublette County.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	80 days
Freeze-free period (average)	120 days

Precipitation total (average)	740 mm
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Influencing water features

Soil features

The soils of this site are moderately deep (greater than 20" to bedrock) to very deep and well-drained with textures ranging from very fine sandy loams through clay loams. Some soils have a lime horizon below 3 feet. The overlying soil is usually noncalcareous. These sites occur on slopes >30% and usually on north and east aspects.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Gravelly loam (2) Clay loam (3) Fine sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Moderately well drained to well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderate
Soil depth	50 – 150 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 – 20 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	6.35 – 15.24 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
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 10 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 10 %

Ecological dynamics

As this site deteriorates because of a combination of frequent and severe grazing, species such as three-tip and mountain big sagebrush, buckwheat, and yarrow will increase. Rhizomatous and/or less palatable grasses such as Letterman needlegrass, rhizomatous wheatgrass, and Sandberg bluegrass increase. Kentucky bluegrass may invade. Cool-season grasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, Columbia needlegrass, and spike fescue will decrease in frequency and production.

Mountain big sagebrush will become dominant with the absence of fire. Wildfires are often actively controlled so chemical control using herbicides has replaced the historic role of fire on this site. Recently, prescribed burning has regained some popularity.

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				616-863	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	616-863	–
2				370-493	
	Idaho fescue	FEID	<i>Festuca idahoensis</i>	370-493	–
3				247-493	
	Columbia needlegrass	ACNE9	<i>Achnatherum nelsonii</i>	247-493	–
4				247-493	
	spike fescue	LEKI2	<i>Leucopoa kingii</i>	247-493	–
5				247-493	
	thickspike wheatgrass	ELLAL	<i>Elymus lanceolatus ssp. lanceolatus</i>	247-493	–
6				247-493	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0-123	–
	Letterman's needlegrass	ACLE9	<i>Achnatherum lettermanii</i>	0-123	–

	mountain brome	BRMA4	<i>Bromus marginatus</i>	0-123	–
	Porter brome	BRPO2	<i>Bromus porteri</i>	0-123	–
	sun sedge	CAINH2	<i>Carex inops ssp. heliophila</i>	0-123	–
	California oatgrass	DACA3	<i>Danthonia californica</i>	0-123	–
	timber oatgrass	DAIN	<i>Danthonia intermedia</i>	0-123	–
	squirreltail	ELELE	<i>Elymus elymoides ssp. elymoides</i>	0-123	–
	blue wildrye	ELGL	<i>Elymus glaucus</i>	0-123	–
	slender wheatgrass	ELTR7	<i>Elymus trachycaulus</i>	0-123	–
	slender wheatgrass	ELTRS	<i>Elymus trachycaulus ssp. subsecundus</i>	0-123	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	0-123	–
	oniongrass	MEBU	<i>Melica bulbosa</i>	0-123	–
	alpine timothy	PHAL2	<i>Phleum alpinum</i>	0-123	–
	Cusick's bluegrass	POCU3	<i>Poa cusickii</i>	0-123	–
	muttongrass	POFE	<i>Poa fendleriana</i>	0-123	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	0-123	–
	spike trisetum	TRSP2	<i>Trisetum spicatum</i>	0-123	–
Forb					
7				123-370	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0-123	–
	common yarrow	ACMI2	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	0-123	–
	giant hyssop	AGAST	<i>Agastache</i>	0-123	–
	agoseris	AGOSE	<i>Agoseris</i>	0-123	–
	pussytoes	ANTEN	<i>Antennaria</i>	0-123	–
	sandwort	ARENA	<i>Arenaria</i>	0-123	–
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	0-123	–
	balsamroot	BALSA	<i>Balsamorhiza</i>	0-123	–
	Indian paintbrush	CASTI2	<i>Castilleja</i>	0-123	–
	hawksbeard	CREPI	<i>Crepis</i>	0-123	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	0-123	–
	elkweed	FRSP	<i>Frasera speciosa</i>	0-123	–
	bedstraw	GALIU	<i>Galium</i>	0-123	–
	geranium	GERAN	<i>Geranium</i>	0-123	–
	little sunflower	HEPU3	<i>Helianthus pumilus</i>	0-123	–
	stoneseed	LITHO3	<i>Lithospermum</i>	0-123	–
	lupine	LUPIN	<i>Lupinus</i>	0-123	–
	creeping barberry	MARE11	<i>Mahonia repens</i>	0-123	–
	bluebells	MERTE	<i>Mertensia</i>	0-123	–
	ragwort	PACKE	<i>Packera</i>	0-123	–
	beardtongue	PENST	<i>Penstemon</i>	0-123	–
	phacelia	PHACE	<i>Phacelia</i>	0-123	–
	phlox	PHLOX	<i>Phlox</i>	0-123	–
	buttercup	RANUN	<i>Ranunculus</i>	0-123	–
	stonecrop	SEDUM	<i>Sedum</i>	0-123	–
	ragwort	SENEC	<i>Senecio</i>	0-123	–
	aster	SYMPH4	<i>Symphotrichum</i>	0-123	–
	meadow-rue	THALI2	<i>Thalictrum</i>	0-123	–

	clover	TRIFO	<i>Trifolium</i>	0-123	–
	American vetch	VIAM	<i>Vicia americana</i>	0-123	–
	violet	VIOLA	<i>Viola</i>	0-123	–
	mule-ears	WYAM	<i>Wyethia amplexicaulis</i>	0-123	–
Shrub/Vine					
8				123-370	
	Shrub, deciduous	2SD	<i>Shrub, deciduous</i>	0-123	–
	Shrub, evergreen	2SE	<i>Shrub, evergreen</i>	0-123	–
	Tree, deciduous	2TD	<i>Tree, deciduous</i>	0-123	–
	Tree, evergreen	2TE	<i>Tree, evergreen</i>	0-123	–
	Saskatoon serviceberry	AMAL2	<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	0-123	–
	silver sagebrush	ARCA13	<i>Artemisia cana</i>	0-123	–
	threetip sagebrush	ARTR4	<i>Artemisia tripartita</i>	0-123	–
	mountain big sagebrush	ARTRV	<i>Artemisia tridentata ssp. vaseyana</i>	0-123	–
	snowbrush ceanothus	CEVE	<i>Ceanothus velutinus</i>	0-123	–
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	0-123	–
	chokecherry	PRVI	<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	0-123	–
	antelope bitterbrush	PUTR2	<i>Purshia tridentata</i>	0-123	–
	Woods' rose	ROWOW	<i>Rosa woodsii var. woodsii</i>	0-123	–
	snowberry	SYMPH	<i>Symphoricarpos</i>	0-123	–

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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Table 8. Community 4.1 plant community composition

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

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations Mixed Grass/Mixed Shrub Plant Community (HCPC): This plant community provides suitable thermal and escape cover for mule deer, elk, and antelope. Sagebrush, which can approach 15% protein and 40-60% digestibility, provides important winter forage for mule deer and elk. Birds that would frequent this plant community include horned larks and golden eagles. Mountain Big Sage/Bunchgrass Plant Community: This plant community may be useful for the same wildlife that would use the Historic Climax Plant Community. Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue 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. Three-tip Sage Plant Community: This plant community provides limited forage for elk and mule deer due to low production and lack of palatable woody species. 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) Mixed Grass/Mixed Shrub (HCPC) 1800-2600 0.6 Mountain Big Sage/Bunchgrass 1600-2400 0.5 Mountain Big Sage/Idaho Fescue 1000-2000 0.3 Three-tip Sage 500-1500 0.15 * - 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 B, with localized areas in hydrologic groups A and C. Infiltration ranges from rapid to moderate. Runoff potential for this site varies from low to moderate depending on soil hydrologic group and ground cover. In many cases, areas with greater than 75% ground cover have the greatest potential for high infiltration and lower runoff. Areas where ground cover is less than 50% have the greatest potential to have reduced infiltration and higher runoff (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 and shrubs. Litter typically falls in place, and signs of movement are not common. Chemical and physical crusts are rare to non-existent. Cryptogamic crusts are present, but only cover 1-2% of the soil surface.

Recreational uses

This site provides hunting opportunities for upland game species. The wide variety of plants which bloom from spring until fall have an esthetic value that appeals to visitors.

Wood products

No appreciable wood products are present on the site.

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. Those involved in developing this site include: Bill Christensen, Range Management Specialist, NRCS; Karen Clause, Range Management Specialist, NRCS; and Everet Bainter, Range Management Specialist, NRCS. 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

Contributors

K. Clause

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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Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. Number and extent of rills: Rare to nonexistent. Where present, short and widely spaced.

2. Presence of water flow patterns: Barely observable.

3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes: Rare to nonexistent.

4. Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground): Bare ground can range from 0-10%.

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: Rare to nonexistent.

7. Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel): Herbaceous litter expected to move in moderate amounts. Large woody debris will show only slight movement down slope.

8. Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values): Soil Stability Index ratings range from 3 (interspaces) to 6 (under plant canopy), but average values should be 4.0 or greater.

9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness): Soil data is limited for this site. Soil OM of 6-16% is expected.

10. Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff: Plant community consists of 75-80% grasses, 15% forbs, and 5-10% shrubs. Evenly distributed plant canopy (60-95%) and litter plus moderate infiltration rates result in minimal runoff. Basal cover is typically greater than 10% for this site and does affect runoff on this site.

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

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: Mid-size, cool season bunchgrasses>> cool season rhizomatous grasses> perennial forbs>perennial shrubs>tall, cool season bunchgrasses=short, cool season bunchgrasses

13. Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):
Minimal decadence, typically associated with shrub component.
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14. Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in): Litter ranges from 5-40% of total canopy measurement with total litter (including beneath the plant canopy) from 50-90% expected. Herbaceous litter depth typically ranges from 5-15mm. Woody litter can be up to a couple inches (4-6 cm).
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15. Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):
English: 1800-2600 lb/ac (2200 lb/ac average); Metric 2016-2912 kg/ha (2464 kg/ha average).
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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: Bare ground greater than 30% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Rabbitbrush, Sandberg bluegrass, buckwheat, phlox, and yarrow are common increasers. Kentucky bluegrass, common dandelion, thistles, and annual weeds are common invasive species in disturbed sites.
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17. Perennial plant reproductive capability: All species are capable of reproducing, except in extreme drought years.
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