

Ecological site R043BY458WY

Shallow Clayey (SwCy)

15-19" Northern Plains Precipitation Zone

Last updated: 4/29/2024
Accessed: 09/21/2026

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.

Associated sites

R043BY408WY	Coarse Upland (CU) 15-19" Northern Plains Precipitation Zone
R043BY462WY	Shallow Loamy (SwLy) 15-19" Northern Plains Precipitation Zone
R043BY476WY	Very Shallow (VS) 15-19" Northern Plains Precipitation Zone

Similar sites

R058BY158WY	Shallow Clayey (SwCy) 10-14" PZ Shallow Clayey 10-14" Northern Plains P.Z. has lower production.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site occurs on slopes and ridge tops, but may occur on all slopes

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Hill (2) Alluvial fan (3) Ridge
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	1,130 – 2,290 m
Slope	20 – 50 %
Ponding depth	0 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

Annual precipitation ranges from 15" to 19" per year. May is generally the wettest month. July, August and September are somewhat drier with daily amounts rarely exceeding one inch. Snowfall is quite heavy in the mountainous area. Annual snowfall averages close to 70 inches.

Sunshine is abundant in the latter part of the summer, the greatest amount being in July and August. Sunshine possibility during these two months averages 70 to 75% possibility with only a 65% possibility for June and September. Winter averages about 40% sunshine.

Because of the varied topography, the wind will vary considerably for different parts of the area. The wind is usually much lighter at the lower elevations and in the valleys as compared with the higher terrain. The average winter wind velocity is 8.5 mph, while the summer wind velocity averages 7.5 mph. Winds during storms and on ridges may exceed 45 mph.

Temperatures show a wide range between summer and winter, and between daily maximums and minimums. Summer nights are cool and temperatures drop into the forties at most places before sunrise. Summer daytime temperatures are usually in the seventies and occasionally reach eighty, but rarely reach the mid nineties. Winters are cold with daily lows below freezing most of the time. January has the coldest temperatures with a range of near 10 deg. F at night to the mid thirties in the afternoon. Temperatures of well below zero to –30 deg. F are not uncommon in the winter months.

The growing season for the cool season plants will generally start about April 15 to May 1 and continue to about October 10.

The following information is from the "Sheridan Airport" climate station:

Frost-free period (32 °F): 95-156 days; (5 yrs. out of 10, these days will occur between May 21 – September 19)

Freeze-free period 28 °F): 116-187 days; (5 yrs. out of 10, these days will occur between May 4 – September 29)

Mean annual precipitation: 14.7 inches

Mean annual air temperature: 45.0 °F (31.2 °F Avg. Min. – 58.8 °F Avg. Max.)

For detailed information visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service National Water and Climate Center at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/> website. Other climate station(s) representative of this precipitation zone include: "Parkman 5 WNW"

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	160 days
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Freeze-free period (average)	190 days
Precipitation total (average)	480 mm

Influencing water features

Stream type: None

Soil features

The soils of this site are shallow (less than 20"to bedrock) well drained, moderately to slowly permeable and may occur on all slopes. The bedrock is clay shale which is virtually impermeable to plant roots. The following soil textures are included in this site: silty clay, the finer portions of sandy clay loam, clay loam or silty clay loams and all clays. Thin ineffectual layers of other soil textures are disregarded.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Clay loam (2) Silty clay loam (3) Clay
Family particle size	(1) Clayey
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Very slow to moderately slow
Soil depth	30 – 50 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 – 30 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	3.56 – 10.67 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10 %
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	Not specified

Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	6.1 – 8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	10 – 20 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified

Ecological dynamics

As this site deteriorates from improper grazing management, species such as blue grama, plains pricklypear, and big sagebrush will increase. Species such as cheatgrass will invade. Cool season grasses such as green needlegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, and rhizomatous wheatgrasses will decrease in frequency and production.

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				157-392	
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	157-392	–
2				78-157	
	little bluestem	SCSC	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	78-157	–
3				78-157	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	78-157	–
4				78-157	
	green needlegrass	NAVI4	<i>Nassella viridula</i>	78-157	–
5				78-157	
	spike fescue	LEKI2	<i>Leucopoa kingii</i>	78-157	–
6				78-157	
	Idaho fescue	FEID	<i>Festuca idahoensis</i>	78-157	–
7				78-235	

	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0-78	–
	Columbia needlegrass	ACNE9	<i>Achnatherum nelsonii</i>	0-78	–
	sideoats grama	BOCU	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	0-78	–
	blue grama	BOGR2	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	0-78	–
	Pumpelly's brome	BRINP5	<i>Bromus inermis ssp. pumpellianus var. pumpellianus</i>	0-78	–
	needleleaf sedge	CADU6	<i>Carex duriuscula</i>	0-78	–
	plains reedgrass	CAMO	<i>Calamagrostis montanensis</i>	0-78	–
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	0-78	–
	needle and thread	HECO26	<i>Hesperostipa comata</i>	0-78	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	0-78	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	0-78	–
Forb					
8				78-157	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0-78	–
	yarrow	ACHIL	<i>Achillea</i>	0-78	–
	rosy pussytoes	ANRO2	<i>Antennaria rosea</i>	0-78	–
	field chickweed	CEAR4	<i>Cerastium arvense</i>	0-78	–
	bastard toadflax	COMAN	<i>Comandra</i>	0-78	–
	tapertip hawksbeard	CRAC2	<i>Crepis acuminata</i>	0-78	–
	prairie clover	DALEA	<i>Dalea</i>	0-78	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	0-78	–
	aster	EUCEP2	<i>Eucephalus</i>	0-78	–
	hairy false goldenaster	HEVI4	<i>Heterotheca villosa</i>	0-78	–
	desertparsley	LOMAT	<i>Lomatium</i>	0-78	–
	lupine	LUPIN	<i>Lupinus</i>	0-78	–
	bluebells	MERTE	<i>Mertensia</i>	0-78	–
	beardtongue	PENST	<i>Penstemon</i>	0-78	–
	phlox	PHLOX	<i>Phlox</i>	0-78	–
	mountain goldenbanner	THMOM3	<i>Thermopsis montana var. montana</i>	0-78	–
	American vetch	VIAM	<i>Vicia americana</i>	0-78	–
Shrub/Vine					
9				0-78	
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	0-78	–
10				0-78	
	big sagebrush	ARTR2	<i>Artemisia tridentata</i>	0-78	–
11				0-78	
	silver sagebrush	ARCA13	<i>Artemisia cana</i>	0-78	–
12				0-78	
	Shrub (>.5m)	2SHRUB	<i>Shrub (>.5m)</i>	0-78	–

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 Rhizomatous Wheatgrasses, Idaho Fescue, Green Needlegrass Plant Community (HCPC): The predominance of grasses in this plant community favors grazers and mixed-feeders, such as bison, elk, and antelope. Suitable thermal and escape cover for deer may be limited due to the low quantities of woody plants. However, topographical variations could provide some escape cover. When found adjacent to sagebrush dominated states, this plant community may provide brood rearing/foraging areas for sage grouse, as well as lek sites. Other birds that would frequent this plant community include western meadowlarks, horned larks, and golden eagles. Many grassland obligate small mammals would occur here. Mixed Sagebrush/Grass Plant Community: The combination of an overstory of sagebrush and an understory of grasses and forbs provide a very diverse plant community for wildlife. The crowns of sagebrush tend to break up hard crusted snow on winter ranges, so mule deer and antelope may use this state for foraging and cover year-round, as would cottontail and jack rabbits. It provides important winter, nesting, brood-rearing, and foraging habitat for sage grouse. Brewer's sparrows' nest in big sagebrush plants, and hosts of other nesting birds utilize stands in the 20-30% cover range. Heavy Sagebrush Plant Community: This plant community can provide important winter foraging for elk, mule deer and antelope, as sagebrush can approach 15% protein and 40-60% digestibility during that time. This community provides excellent escape and thermal cover for large ungulates, as well as nesting and brood rearing habitat for sage grouse. Big Sagebrush/Cheatgrass Plant Community: This plant community may be useful for the same large grazers 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. It may provide some foraging opportunities for sage grouse when it occurs proximal to woody cover. Good grasshopper habitat equals good foraging for birds. 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) Rhiz. WG, Idaho Fescue, Green needlegrass 900-1800 .4 Heavy Sagebrush 800-1200 .3 Mixed Sagebrush/Grass 800-1200 .35 Big Sagebrush, Cheatgrass 500-900 .20 * - 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 C and D. Infiltration ranges from very slow to moderately slow. Runoff potential for this site varies from moderate to high 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. An example of an exception would be where short-grasses form a strong sod and dominate the site. 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 such as bluebunch wheatgrass. 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.

Other products

None noted.

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 was also used. Other sources used as references include USDA NRCS Water and

Contributors

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Approval

Kirt Walstad, 4/29/2024

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	04/01/2005
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Due to the wide slope range associated with this site, the number and extent of rills will vary from none on sites with slopes of < 9% to common on slopes > 25%.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Due to the wide slope range associated with this site, water flow patterns will vary from barely observable on sites with slopes of < 9% from broken and irregular in appearance to continuous on slopes > 25%..

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Not evident on slopes < 9%. Erosional pedestals will be present with terracettes present at debris dams on slopes >9%.

4. Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground): Bare ground is 20 to 35%.

5. Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies: Active gullies restricted to concentrated water flow patterns.

6. Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas: None.

7. Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel): Little to no plant litter movement occurs on slopes < 9%. Litter movement does occur on slopes > 25%.

8. Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values): Plant cover and litter is at 65% or greater of soil surface and maintains soil surface integrity. Stability class anticipated to be 5 or greater.

9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness): Use soil series description for depth and color of A-horizon.

10. Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff: Plant canopy, very slow to slow infiltration rates, the amount of bare ground, and steepness of slopes results in a naturally high runoff rate on slopes > 25%, even in HCPC.

11. Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site): No compaction layer would be expected except for the naturally occurring rooting restriction (bedrock or decomposing shale) at 10 to 20 inches.

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-stature bunch grasses > mid-stature rhizomatous grasses > short stature grasses/grasslikes > shrubs > forbs

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

14. Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in): Litter cover is in contact with soil surface.

15. Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):
1400 lbs/acre

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: Blue grama, plains pricklypear, Cheatgrass, big sagebrush and Species found on Noxious Weed List.

17. Perennial plant reproductive capability: No limitations.
