

Ecological site R044BP812MT

Shallow Shrubland

Last updated: 8/26/2019

Accessed: 08/20/2026

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): 044B—Central Rocky Mountain Valleys

44B Central Rocky Mountain Valleys Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 44B, Central Rocky Mountain Valleys, is nearly 3.7 million acres of Southwest Montana. This MLRA borders 2 MLRAs: 43B Central Rocky Mountains and Foothills, and MLRA 46 Northern and Central Rocky Mountain Foothills. The major watersheds of this MLRA are the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers along with their associated headwaters such as the Beaverhead, Big Hole, Jefferson, Ruby, Madison, Gallatin, and Shields Rivers. Limited portions of the MLRA are west of the Continental Divide along the Clark Fork River. These waters allow for extensive irrigation for crop production in an area that would generally be only compatible with rangeland and grazing. The Missouri River and its headwaters are contained behind several reservoirs used for irrigation water, hydroelectric power, and municipal water. The primary land use of this MLRA is production agriculture (grazing, small grain production, and hay) with limited mining. Urban Development is also high. MRLA 44B consists of 7 Climate based Land Resource Units (LRUs). Annual precipitation ranges from a low of 9" to a high near 24". The driest areas tend to be in the valley bottoms of southwest Montana in the rain shadow of the mountains. The wettest areas tend to be near the edges of the MLRA where it borders with MLRA 43B. Frost Free periods also vary greatly with from less than 30 days in the Big Hole Valley to approximately 110 days in the warm valleys along the Yellowstone River and Missouri River Headwaters. MLRA 44B's plant communities are highly variable however are dominated by a cool season grass and shrub steppe community on the rangeland and a mixed coniferous forest in the mountains. Warm season grasses occupy an extremely limited extent in this MLRA. Most subspecies of Big Sagebrush are present, to some extent, across the MLRA.

Ecological site concept

- Site does not receive any additional water
- Soils are o Not saline or saline-sodic o Not strongly or violently effervescent ($\text{CaCO}_3 > 14\%$) in surface mineral 18cm o Shallow depth (less than 50cm (20 in) to bedrock, lithic, or paralithic root restrictive layer o Less than 5% stone and boulder cover (15% max)
- Soil surface texture ranges from sandy loam to clay loam in surface mineral 4"
- An area of dissected mountain valleys. The valleys are typically bordered by mountains trending north to south.
- Site Landform: hillslopes, buttes, escarpment
- Parent material is typically colluvium and/or residuum
- Moisture Regime: ustic
- Temperature Regime: frigid to cryic
- Dominant Cover: rangeland (grass dominated)
- Elevation Range: 3800-6850 (Representative Range 4500-6000)
- Slope range: 0-60 (often less than 45%)

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Symphoricarpos albus</i> (2) <i>Tetradymia canescens</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i> (2) <i>Festuca campestris</i>

Physiographic features

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Valley > Fan remnant (2) Valley > Escarpment
Elevation	1,160 – 2,090 m
Slope	0 – 50 %

Climatic features

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	20-80 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	60-110 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	280-380 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	10-90 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	30-130 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	280-480 mm
Frost-free period (average)	50 days
Freeze-free period (average)	90 days
Precipitation total (average)	360 mm

- (1) WHITE SULPHUR SPRNGS 2 [USC00248930], White Sulphur Springs, MT
- (2) WISDOM [USC00249067], Wisdom, MT
- (3) HELENA RGNL AP [USW00024144], Helena, MT
- (4) DEER LODGE 3 W [USC00242275], Deer Lodge, MT
- (5) DILLON AP [USW00024138], Dillon, MT
- (6) LIVINGSTON MISSION FLD [USW00024150], Livingston, MT
- (7) BOZEMAN MONTANA ST U [USC00241044], Bozeman, MT
- (8) ENNIS [USC00242793], Ennis, MT
- (9) BOULDER [USC00241008], Boulder, MT
- (10) LAKEVIEW [USC00244820], Lima, MT

Influencing water features

Soil features

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium (2) Colluvium
Depth to restrictive layer	50 cm

Ecological dynamics

1.1 Mid-statured bunchgrasses dominant plant type. Bluebunch tends to be the most common however limited Rough fescue or Spike fescue possible. Minor component of mat forming forbs growing between rocks with shortgrasses being equal to forbs. Non-sagebrush shrubs common; including Grey horsebrush, Skunkbush sumac, Gooseberry, Creeping Juniper, Rocky Mtn Juniper, and/or Common Juniper. Extremely limited tree cover such as Ponderosa pine and/or Douglas fir possible

1.1a Plant community experiences long term drought, wildfire (low intensity), untimely grazing event

1.2 Mid-statured bunchgrasses share dominance with short bunchgrasses. Shrubs increases as well as forbs likely to increase. Limited tree cover may exist.

1.2a Plant community receives timely moisture and has an opportunity to rest from disturbance

2.1 Shortgrasses take over dominance with shrubs and forbs as a subdominant plant groups. Mid-statured bunchgrasses rare. Tree presence likely rare

T1A Catastrophic fire (extremely rare), multiple overgrazing events, long term drought, climate change

R1A Time and timely moisture, proper grazing management, brush management

3.1 Site becomes invaded with invasive forbs and grasses. Tree encroachment also often occurs.

T1B Overgrazing, Catastrophic fire, introduction of invasive species

R3A Removal of invasive species (if possible), proper grazing management, time

T2B Overgrazing, Catastrophic fire, introduction of invasive species

R3B Removal of invasive species (if possible), proper grazing management, time

State and transition model

Additional community tables

Approval

Scott Woodall, 8/26/2019

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	
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:
