

Ecological site R046XC519MT

Limy Droughty (LyDr)

RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ

Last updated: 7/19/2023
Accessed: 09/25/2026

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

R046XC505MT	Sandy (Sy) RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ
R046XC506MT	Shallow (Sw) RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ
R046XC508MT	Silty (Si) RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ
R046XC510MT	Limy (Ly) RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ

Similar sites

R046XC508MT	Silty (Si) RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ The Silty site differs mainly by also having few rocks, plus significantly less lime, particularly at the surface.
R046XC510MT	Limy (Ly) RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ The Silty-Limy site differs mainly by having few rocks, giving it a better soil water relationship and better plant cover.
R046XC506MT	Shallow (Sw) RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ The Shallow site differs by having bedrock within 20 inches of the surface.
R046XC507MT	Shallow to Gravel (SwGr) RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ The Shallow to Gravel site differs by having gravels within 20 inches of the surface, and being less limy at the surface.

R046XC505MT	Sandy (Sy) RRU 46-C 13-19 PZ The Sandy site differs mainly by also having few rocks, plus significantly less lime, particularly at the surface.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i> (2) <i>Hesperostipa comata</i>

Physiographic features

This ecological site occurs on nearly level to strongly sloping valleys, terraces, and fans. The slopes range from 0 – 15%, but are mainly less than 8%. Occasionally, this site will occur on slopes steeper than 15%. This site occurs on all exposures. Aspect is not significant.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Valley (2) Fan (3) Terrace
Flooding frequency	None to rare
Ponding frequency	None
Slope	0 – 20 %
Water table depth	100 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

See Climatic Data Sheet for more details (Section II of the Field Office Technical Guide) or reference the following climatic web site: <http://www.wrcc.sage.dri.edu/> .

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	70-90 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	110-120 days

Precipitation total (characteristic range)	380-430 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	50-90 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	100-130 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	360-480 mm
Frost-free period (average)	80 days
Freeze-free period (average)	120 days
Precipitation total (average)	430 mm

- (1) RAYNESFORD 2 NNW [USC00246902], Raynesford, MT
- (2) STANFORD [USC00247864], Stanford, MT
- (3) LEWISTOWN MUNI AP [USW00024036], Lewistown, MT
- (4) ZORTMAN [USC00249900], Zortman, MT
- (5) DENTON [USC00242347], Denton, MT
- (6) HOBSON [USC00244193], Hobson, MT

Influencing water features

No influencing water features.

Soil features

These soils are very gravelly and very cobbly loams more than 20 inches deep that have loamy surfaces and are strongly to violently effervescent within 4 inches of the surface. They typically have a calcic horizon within 12 inches of the surface. The soils are formed in alluvium, colluvium, or residuum. Texture will vary between loam, silt loam, sandy loams, sandy clay loams, and clay loam. The amount of rock present reduces the available water holding capacity to less than 5 inches.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Loam (2) Sandy loam (3) Sandy loam
Drainage class	Moderately well drained to well drained
Permeability class	Moderate
Soil depth	50 cm

Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	0 – 12.7 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	20 %
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	Not specified
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	7.4 – 8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	10 – 20 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	10 – 50 %

Ecological dynamics

This site developed under Northern Rocky Mountain foothills climatic conditions, which included the natural influence of large herbivores and occasional fire. The plant community upon which interpretations are primarily based is the Historic Climax Plant Community (HCPC). This community is described as a reference to understand the original potential of this site, and is not always considered to be the management goal for every acre of rangeland. The following descriptions should enable the landowner or manager to better understand which plant communities occupy their land, and assist with setting goals for vegetation management. It can also be useful to understand the environmental and economic values of each plant community.

This site is considered only slightly resilient to disturbance as it has significant soil limitations (amount of lime and rock content) for plant growth. Changes may occur to the Historic Climax Plant Community due to management actions and/or climatic conditions. Under continued adverse impacts, a moderate to extreme decline in vegetative vigor and composition will occur. Under favorable vegetative management treatments this site can more readily return to the Historic Climax Plant Community (HCPC).

Continual adverse impacts to the site over a period of years results in a departure from the HCPC, with a decrease of the taller, more palatable species such as bluebunch wheatgrass and green needlegrass. These plants will typically be replaced by a mixture of medium and short grasses and sedges, including Idaho fescue (mainly 15 inches MAP or more), thickspike wheatgrass, needleandthread (mainly less than 15 inches MAP), Sandberg bluegrass, prairie junegrass, spike oatgrass, and plains reedgrass. Several species of less desirable and non-palatable forbs such as hairy goldenaster, pussytoes, and asters and daisys will be common. Fringed sagewort also becomes abundant.

Continued deterioration to the community results in short grasses (Sandberg bluegrass, prairie junegrass, spike oatgrass, plains reedgrass) becoming dominant. Undesirable species such as red threeawn, broom snakeweed, and plains pricklypear cactus will become abundant.

Plants that are not a part of the Historic Climax Plant Community that are most likely to invade are annual grasses (cheatgrass, Japanese brome), and annual and biennial forbs. Leafy spurge, knapweeds, dalmation toadflax, and sulphur cinquefoil are potential noxious weed invaders on this site.

Long-term non-use (e.g., >3 years) combined with the absence of fire will result in excessive litter and decadent plants in the bunchgrass communities at higher precipitation zones.

State and transition model

Figure 7. 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 (%)
Shrub/Vine					
0	Shrubs and Half-shrubs			0-69	
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	0-41	–
	Shrub, broadleaf	2SB	<i>Shrub, broadleaf</i>	0-24	–
	prairie sagewort	ARFR4	<i>Artemisia frigida</i>	0-24	–
	black sagebrush	ARNO4	<i>Artemisia nova</i>	0-24	–
	broom snakeweed	GUSA2	<i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i>	0-1	–
	plains pricklypear	OPPO	<i>Opuntia polyacantha</i>	0-1	–
Grass/Grasslike					
0	Grasses and Sedges			734-1110	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	415-902	–
	needle and thread	HECOC8	<i>Hesperostipa comata ssp. comata</i>	90-207	–
	thickspike wheatgrass	ELLAL	<i>Elymus lanceolatus ssp. lanceolatus</i>	0-140	–
	Idaho fescue	FEID	<i>Festuca idahoensis</i>	0-140	–
	sand dropseed	SPCR	<i>Sporobolus cryptandrus</i>	0-69	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	0-69	–
	plains muhly	MUCU3	<i>Muhlenbergia cuspidata</i>	0-69	–
	green needlegrass	NAVI4	<i>Nassella viridula</i>	0-69	–
	Cusick’s bluegrass	POCU3	<i>Poa cusickii</i>	0-69	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	0-69	–
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	0-69	–
	blue grama	BOGR2	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	0-69	–
	threadleaf sedge	CAFI	<i>Carex filifolia</i>	8-69	–
	plains reedgrass	CAMO	<i>Calamagrostis montanensis</i>	0-69	–
	poverty oatgrass	DASP2	<i>Danthonia spicata</i>	0-69	–
	purple threeawn	ARPU9	<i>Aristida purpurea</i>	0-1	–
Forb					
0	Forbs			45-207	
	woolly groundsel	PACA15	<i>Packera cana</i>	0-69	–
	spiny phlox	PHHO	<i>Phlox hoodii</i>	0-69	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	0-69	–
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	0-69	–
	pussytoes	ANTEN	<i>Antennaria</i>	0-69	–
	fleabane	ERIGE2	<i>Erigeron</i>	0-69	–
	hairy false goldenaster	HEVI4	<i>Heterotheca villosa</i>	0-69	–
	rubberweed	HYMEN7	<i>Hymenoxys</i>	0-69	–
	dotted blazing star	LIPU	<i>Liatris punctata</i>	1-69	–
	desertparsley	LOMAT	<i>Lomatium</i>	0-69	–
	locoweed	OXYTR	<i>Oxytropis</i>	0-1	–

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

Livestock Grazing Interpretations: Managed livestock grazing is suitable on this site as it has the potential to produce a moderate amount of high quality forage. Grazing must be managed carefully on this site to be sure livestock drift onto the better, more productive sites is not excessive. Management objectives should include maintenance or improvement of the native plant community. Using shorter grazing periods and providing for adequate re-growth after grazing are recommended for plant maintenance, health, and recovery. Continual non prescribed grazing of this site can be detrimental and will alter the plant composition and production over time. The result will be plant communities that resemble numbers 3 and 4, depending on how long this grazing management is used as well as other circumstances such as weather conditions and fire frequency. Whenever Plant Community 2 (medium and short grasses) occurs, grazing management strategies that will prevent further degradation need to be implemented. This community is still stable, productive, and healthy provided it receives proper management. It will respond fairly quickly to improved grazing management, including increased growing season rest of key forage plants. Grazing management alone can usually move this back towards the potential / historic climax community. However, the probability for success is significantly reduced because of the limy, very rocky soils. Plant community 3 is the result of long-term, heavy, continuous grazing and/or annual, early spring seasonal grazing. Repeated heavy early spring grazing, especially during stem elongation (generally mid May through mid June), can also have detrimental affects on the taller, key forage species. Repeated spring grazing depletes stored carbohydrates, resulting in weakening and eventual death of the cool season tall and medium grasses. This plant community can occur throughout the pasture, on spot grazed areas, and around water sources where season-long grazing patterns occur. The management objective at this point needs to be to implement a grazing strategy that will restore the stability and health of the site and prevent further degradation to Plant Community 4. Rest, usually for a number of years, can sometimes help with re-establishment of the desired species, depending on the amount of desirable species remaining. Plant Community 4 has a high percentage of aggressive, less-desirable species. It has lost most of the attributes of a healthy rangeland. Grazing management alone is seldom able to restore the site to one that resembles the HCPC once this plant community has become established. There are major limitations to using seeding and/or mechanical treatment on this site due to the limy (calcareous), very rocky soils. Calculating Safe Stocking Rates: Proper stocking rates should be incorporated into a grazing management strategy that protects the resource, maintains or improves rangeland health, and is consistent with management objectives. Safe stocking rates will be based on useable forage production, and should consider ecological condition and trend of the site, and past grazing use history. Calculations used to determine a safe stocking rate are based on the amount of useable forage available, taking into account the harvest efficiency of the animal and the grazing strategy to be implemented. Average annual production must be measured or estimated to properly assess useable forage production and stocking rates. The following is an example of how to calculate the recommended stocking rate. This example does not use production estimates from this specific ecological site. You will need to adjust the annual production values and run the calculations using total annual production values from the ecological sites encountered on each individual ranch/pasture. Before making specific recommendations, an on-site evaluation must be made. Example of total annual production amounts by type of year: Favorable years = 2200 lbs/acre Normal years = 1480 lbs/acre Unfavorable years = 1200 lbs/acre It is recommended that on slopes of 30% or less, stocking rate should be derived from the total annual production pounds minus 500 pounds for residual dry matter and 25% harvest efficiency. On slopes over 30%, stocking rate is derived from total annual production pounds minus 800 pounds for residual dry matter and 25% harvest efficiency. Refer to the NRCS National Range and Pasture Handbook for a list of Animal Unit Equivalents. Sample Calculations using Favorable Year production amounts: 30% slopes: $AUM/AC = [(2200-500)(0.25)]/915 \text{ lbs/month for one AU} = 0.46$ AUM/AC $AC/AUM = (1.0 \text{ AU})/(0.46 AUM/AC) = 2.2$ $AC/AUM > 30\% \text{ slopes: } AUM/AC = [(2200-800)(0.25)]/915 \text{ lbs/month for one AU} = 0.38$ AUM/AC $AC/AUM = (1.0 \text{ AU})/(0.38 \text{ AU! M/AC}) = 2.6$ AC/AUM NOTE: 915 lbs/month for one Animal Unit is used as the baseline for maintenance requirements. This equates to 30 lbs/day of air-dry forage (1200 lb cow at 2.5% of body weight).

Hydrological functions

The runoff potential for this site is moderate, depending on slope and ground cover/health. Runoff curve numbers generally range from 66 to 84. The soils associated with this ecological site are generally in Hydrologic Soil Group B. Soils have a moderate infiltration rate when thoroughly wetted and consist chiefly of soils with moderately fine to moderately coarse textures. Good hydrologic conditions exist on rangelands if plant cover (grass, litter, and brush canopy) is greater than 70%. Fair conditions exist when cover is between 30 and 70%, and poor conditions exist when cover is less than 30%. Sites in high similarity to HCPC (Plant Communities 1 and 2) generally have enough plant cover and litter to optimize infiltration, minimize runoff and erosion, and have a good hydrologic condition. The deep root systems of the potential vegetation help maintain or increase infiltration rates and reduce runoff. Sites in low similarity (Plant Communities 3 and 4) are generally considered to be in poor hydrologic condition as the majority of plant cover is from shallow-rooted species such as blue grama and annual grasses. Erosion is minor for sites in high similarity. Rills and gullies should not be present. Water flow patterns, if present, will be barely observable. Plant pedestals are essentially non-existent. Plant litter remains in place and is not moved by erosion.

Soil surfaces should not be compacted or crusted. Plant cover and litter helps retain soil moisture for use by the plants. Maintaining a healthy stand of perennial vegetation will optimize the amount of precipitation that is received. (Reference: Engineering Field Manual, Chapter 2 and Montana Supplement 4).

Recreational uses

Recreation and Natural Beauty: This site provides some limited recreational opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, big game and upland bird hunting. The droghy soils and rock content diminish the quality of the experience. The forbs have flowers that appeal to photographers. This site provides valuable open space. Caution should be used during wet weather periods.

Wood products

None

Contributors

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Approval

Kirt Walstad, 7/19/2023

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)	G. Petersen K. Walstad
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Date	03/01/2020
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Rills are not present in the reference condition.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Water flow patterns are not present in the reference condition.

3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes: Pedestals are not evident in the reference condition.

4. Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground): Bare ground is 10-15%. It consists of small, randomly scattered patches.

5. Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies: Gullies are not present in the reference condition.

6. Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas: Wind scoured, or depositional areas are not evident in the reference condition.

7. Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel): Litter movement is not evident in the reference condition.

8. Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values): The average soil stability rating is 4-6 under plant canopies and plant interspaces. The A horizon is 3-6 inches thick.

9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness): Soil Structure at the surface is weak coarse to fine granular. A Horizon should be 4-6 inches thick with color, when wet, typically ranging in Value of 4 or less and Chroma of 3 or less. Local geology may affect color, it is important to reference the Official Series Description (OSD) for characteristic range. <https://soilseries.sc.egov.usda.gov/osdname.aspx>

10. Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff: Infiltration of the Limy Droughty ecological site is high and is well drained. An even distribution of mid stature grasses (75-80%), cool season bunchgrasses (10-15%) along with rhizomatous grass (5%), forbs (5-15%), and shrubs (0-3%)

11. Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site): A compaction layer is not present in the reference condition. Soil profile may contain an abrupt transition to an Argillic horizon which can be misinterpreted as compaction, however, the soil structure will be fine to medium subangular blocky, where a compaction layer will be platy or structureless (massive).

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: Mid-statured, cool season, perennial bunchgrasses (Primarily bluebunch wheatgrass)

Sub-dominant: shortgrass grasses/grasslikes (needle and thread, prairie Junegrass) ? forbs > rhizomatous grasses >> Shrubs

Other:

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):**
Mortality in herbaceous species is not evident. Species with bunch growth forms may have some natural mortality in centers is 3% or less.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Total litter cover ranges from 50-60%. Most litter is irregularly distributed on the soil surface and is not at a measurable depth.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):**
Average annual production is 955. Low: 695 High 1237. Production varies based on effective precipitation and natural variability of soil properties for this ecological site.
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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:** Potential invasive (including noxious) species (native and non-native). Invasive species on this ecological site include (but not limited to) sulphur cinquefoil, yellow salsify, annual brome spp., spotted knapweed, yellow toadflax, leafy spurge, crested wheatgrass Native species such as Rocky Mountain juniper, ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, broom snakeweed, Sandberg's bluegrass, etc. when their populations are significant enough to affect ecological function, indicate site condition departure.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** In the reference condition, all plants are vigorous enough for reproduction either by seed or rhizomes in order to balance natural mortality with species recruitment.
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