

Ecological site R048AY014NM

Mountain Valley

Dry

Last updated: 4/02/2025
Accessed: 09/14/2026

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): 048A–Southern Rocky Mountains

This area is in Colorado (76 percent), New Mexico (11 percent), Utah (8 percent), and Wyoming (5 percent). It makes up about 45,920 square miles (119,000 square kilometers). The towns Jemez Springs, Los Alamos, Red River and Eagle Nest, New Mexico, are in this MLRA. This MLRA has numerous national forests, the Carson National Forest and part of the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico. The Jemez, Picuris, Santa Clara, and Taos Indian Reservations are in this MLRA. Most of this area is in the Southern Rocky Mountains Province of the Rocky Mountain System. Small parts of the southwest corner and some isolated areas farther west are in the Canyon Lands Section of the same province and division. The Southern Rocky Mountains consist primarily of two belts of strongly sloping to precipitous mountain ranges trending north to south. Several basins, or parks, are between the belts. The ranges include the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Jemez Mountains, and Tusas Mountains. Elevation typically ranges from 6,500 to 13,167 feet (1,980 to 1,039 meters) in this area. The Rio Grande is a National Wild and Scenic River in northern New Mexico, which is in the southern part of this MLRA. The mountains in this area were formed mainly by crustal uplifts during the late Cretaceous and early Tertiary periods. The rocks exposed in the mountains are mostly Precambrian igneous and metamorphic rocks, which in many places are flanked by steeply dipping Mesozoic sedimentary rocks. Younger igneous rocks, primarily basalt and andesitic lava flows, tuffs, breccias, and conglomerates, are throughout this area. Representative formations in this area are the Silver Plume and Pikes Peak granites, San Juan Volcanics, and Mancos Shale. Many of the highest mountain ranges were reshaped by glaciation during the Pleistocene. Alluvial fans at the base of the mountains are recharge zones for local basin and valley fill aquifers. They also are important sources of sand and gravel. The dominant soil orders in this MLRA are Mollisols, Alfisols, Inceptisols, and Entisols. The soils in the area dominantly have a frigid or cryic soil temperature regime and an ustic or udic soil moisture regime. Mineralogy is typically mixed, smectitic, or paramicaceous. In areas with granite, gneiss, and schist bedrock, Glossocryalfs (Seitz, Granile, and Leadville series) and Haplocryolls (Rogert series) formed in colluvium on mountain slopes. Dystrocryepts (Leighcan and Mummy series) formed on mountain slopes and summits at the higher elevations. In areas of andesite and rhyolite bedrock, Dystrocryepts (Endlich and Whitecross series) formed in colluvium on mountain slopes. In areas of sedimentary bedrock, Haplustolls (Towave series) formed on mountain slopes at low elevations and with low precipitation. Haplocryolls (Lamphier and Razorba series), Argicryolls (Cochetopa series), and Haplocryalfs (Needleton series) formed in colluvium on mountain slopes at high elevations.

LRU notes

This site is part of the RM-2 sub-resource area. This site is found on the west side of Sangre de Cristo mountains, Tusas Mountains (southern San Juan mountains) and Jemez Mountains.

Classification relationships

This ecological site is correlated to soil components at the Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) level which is further described in USDA AgHandbook 296.

Ecological site concept

This site occurs on broad valleys, overflow areas adjacent to intermittent streams and depressional areas subject to run-in of moisture from adjacent sites. However, this site is often highly dissected, and run-in is non-effective. Slopes range from 1 to 8 percent. Elevation ranges from 7,200 to 8,000 feet above sea level. The soils are deep to very deep and well drained. Surface textures is usually clay loam. Subsoils is usually clay. This ecological site used to have the ID number of R048BY007NM in RM-2 subresource area in 1982.

Associated sites

R048AY015NM	Mountain Shale Dry This site occurs on nearly level to sloping landscapes below steeper slopes of interbedded sandstone and shale. Slopes range from 1 to 35 percent. Elevation ranges from 6,800 to 7,700 feet above sea level. Soil depths range from shallow to moderately deep. Surface textures are generally clay loam and are very thin. Subsoils are generally clays. The amount of surface skeletal fragments varies from no fragments to very channery and erosion pavement forms as the surface is eroded. Permeability is slow to very slow. This ecological site used to have the ID number of R048BY008NM in RM-2 subresource area in 1982.
R048AY016NM	Mountain Meadows This site occurs on basins and valleys and below seeps and springs on mountain side slopes. Drainages associated with the site are not dissected and allow the water to fan out. This results in a high water table and even some surface water in the spring and summer. Slopes are less than 5 percent. Elevation ranges from 7,200 to 9,000 feet above sea level. The soils are deep and somewhat poorly drained with a high water table. Depth of the water table ranges from 0 to 60 inches. The surface soil textures are loam, silt loam, or clay loam. Subsoils range from gravelly loam, gravelly clay, clay loam, silty clay loam, silt loam, to clay. The soil profiles are characterized by high amounts of organic matter and dark colors. Permeability is moderate to slow, runoff is medium, and water-holding capacity is high. This ecological site used to have the ID number of R048BY006NM in RM-2 subresource area in 1982.

Similar sites

R048AY016NM	Mountain Meadows This site occurs on basins and valleys and below seeps and springs on mountain side slopes. Drainages associated with the site are not dissected and allow the water to fan out. This results in a high water table and even some surface water in the spring and summer. Slopes are less than 5 percent. Elevation ranges from 7,200 to 9,000 feet above sea level. The soils are deep and somewhat poorly drained with a high water table. Depth of the water table ranges from 0 to 60 inches. The surface soil textures are loam, silt loam, or clay loam. Subsoils range from gravelly loam, gravelly clay, clay loam, silty clay loam, silt loam, to clay. The soil profiles are characterized by high amounts of organic matter and dark colors. Permeability is moderate to slow, runoff is medium, and water-holding capacity is high. This ecological site used to have the ID number of R048BY006NM in RM-2 subresource area in 1982.
R048AY003NM	Mountain Valley This site is located in mountain valleys in the ponderosa pine zone. It has gentle to moderate slopes and receives occasional light overflow from the main stream course or adjacent side slopes. The alluvial slopes immediately adjacent to the main stream are also included in this site. Slopes are 0-5%. Along valley bottoms where drainage is poor, it may blend with the Mountain Meadow ecological site. This site differs from the Mountain Meadow ecological site in the lack of high water table. Elevation ranges from 7,000 to 9,000 feet above sea level. Soils on this site are well drained and deep to very deep. The surface layer is loam, sandy loam or fine sandy loam with subsoil of loam, clay loam, or sandy clay loam. These soils have moderate to moderately high permeability. Runoff is medium. Available water-holding capacity is high. Effective rooting depth is 20 inches to more than 60 inches. Severe gullyng can carry off most of the water, and a loss of topsoil greatly reduces water intake. Gullies that carry off extra water will drastically alter the moisture-plant relationship in many areas.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified

Herbaceous	(1) <i>Pascopyrum smithii</i> (2) <i>Muhlenbergia wrightii</i>
------------	---

Physiographic features

This site occurs on broad valleys, overflow areas adjacent to intermittent streams and depressional areas subject to run-in of moisture from adjacent sites. However, this site is often highly dissected, and run-in is non-effective. Slopes range from 1 to 8 percent. Elevation ranges from 7,200 to 8,000 feet above sea level.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Valley side
Runoff class	Very high
Flooding frequency	None
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	2,200 – 2,440 m
Slope	0 – 10 %
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The climate is characterized by cold, wet winters in which more than 50 percent of the total annual precipitation is received during the winter. The balance of the precipitation is received in the summer months, some of it in the form of high intensity thunderstorms. Average annual precipitation is about 22 inches but ranges from 16 to 30 inches and yearly fluctuations are common.

The average frost-free period is about 80 days but ranges from 60 days at the highest elevations to 110 days at the lowest elevations; however, the period lengths vary. The average last killing frost in the spring occurs about June 10th. The average first killing frost in the fall occurs about September 20th. Average annual air temperature is 22.6 degrees F in January and 64.5 degrees F in July with extremes ranging from -40 degrees F to 95 degrees F.

Climate data was obtained from <http://www.wrcc.sage.dri.edu/summary/climsmnm.html> web site using 50% probability for freeze-free and frost-free seasons using 28.5 degrees F and 32.5 degrees F respectively.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	50-120 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	90-150 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	410-760 mm

Frost-free period (actual range)	50-130 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	80-160 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	410-760 mm
Frost-free period (average)	90 days
Freeze-free period (average)	120 days
Precipitation total (average)	580 mm

- (1) RED RIVER [USC00297323], Questa, NM
- (2) WOLF CANYON [USC00299820], Jemez Springs, NM
- (3) JEMEZ SPRINGS [USC00294369], Jemez Springs, NM
- (4) LOS ALAMOS 13 W [USW00003062], Jemez Springs, NM
- (5) LOS ALAMOS [USC00295084], Los Alamos, NM

Influencing water features

None.

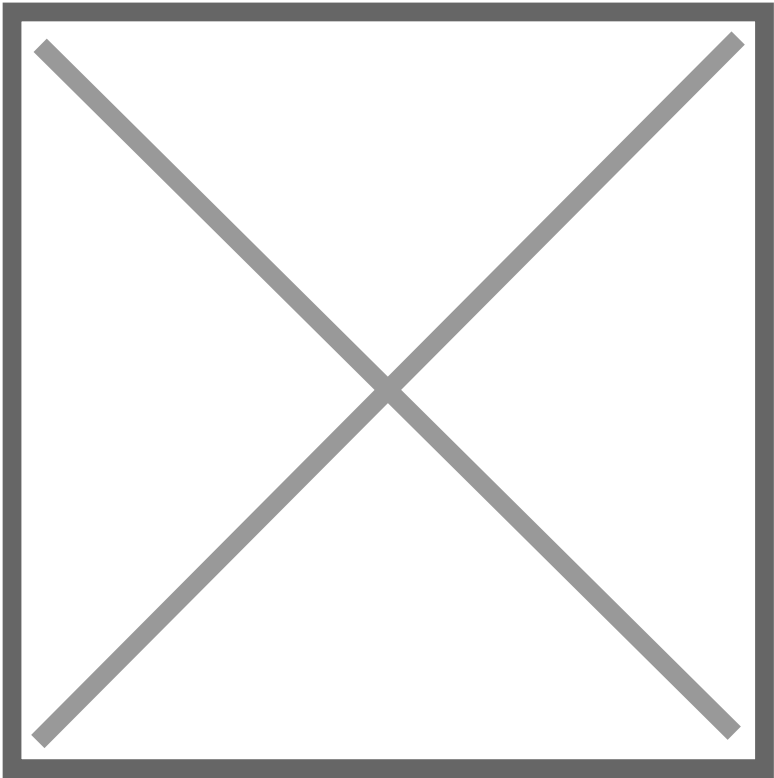


Figure 7.

Soil features

The soils are deep to very deep and well drained. Surface textures is usually clay loam. Subsoils is usually clay.

Characteristic Soils Are:
Roques

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium – shale
Surface texture	(1) Clay loam
Family particle size	(1) Fine
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Very slow
Soil depth	150 – 250 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	Not specified
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (Depth not specified)	13.97 – 16.51 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (Depth not specified)	0 – 10 %
Electrical conductivity (Depth not specified)	Not specified
Sodium adsorption ratio (Depth not specified)	Not specified
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (Depth not specified)	6.6 – 7.3

Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	Not specified

Ecological dynamics

Deterioration of the potential plant community is indicated by a decrease in western wheatgrass, spike muhly, muttongrass, prairie junegrass and Arizona fescue. Species that increase include blue grama, galleta, mat muhly, bottlebrush squirreltail and woody species.

Below is a State and Transition Model diagram to illustrate the “phases” (common plant communities), and “states” (aggregations of those plant communities) that can occur on the site. Differences between phases and states depend primarily upon observations of a range of disturbance histories in areas where this ESD is represented. These situations include grazing gradients to water sources, fence-line contrasts, patches with differing dates and intensities of fire, herbicide treatment, etc. Reference State 1 illustrates the common plant communities that probably existed just prior to European settlement.

The major successional pathways within states, (“community pathways”) are indicated by arrows between phases. “Transitions” are indicated by arrows between states. The drivers of these changes are indicated in codes decipherable by referring to the legend at the bottom of the page and by reading the detailed narratives that follow the diagram.

The plant communities shown in this State and Transition Model may not represent every possibility but are probably the most prevalent and recurring plant communities. As more monitoring data are collected, some phases or states may be revised, removed, and/or new ones may be added.

The state and transition model was added to comply with the provisional ecological site instruction. It is a very general model.

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				392-549	
	spike muhly	MUWR	<i>Muhlenbergia wrightii</i>	392-549	–
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	392-549	–
2				47-157	
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	47-157	–
	muttongrass	POFE	<i>Poa fendleriana</i>	47-157	–
3				47-110	
	sedge	CAREX	<i>Carex</i>	47-110	–
4				47-110	
	blue grama	BOGR2	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	47-110	–
	James' galleta	PLJA	<i>Pleuraphis jamesii</i>	47-110	–
5				47-110	
	Arizona fescue	FEAR2	<i>Festuca arizonica</i>	47-110	–
	Thurber's fescue	FETH	<i>Festuca thurberi</i>	47-110	–
6				47-78	
	squirreltail	ELEL5	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	47-78	–
7				0-110	

	alkali sacaton	SPAI	<i>Sporobolus airoides</i>	0-110	–
8				47-157	
	Grass, native	2GN	<i>Grass, native</i>	47-157	–
Forb					
19				47-110	
	white sagebrush	ARLU	<i>Artemisia ludoviciana</i>	47-110	–
	Forb, native	2FN	<i>Forb, native</i>	47-110	–
	common yarrow	ACMI2	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	47-110	–
	larkspur	DELPH	<i>Delphinium</i>	47-110	–
	Rocky Mountain iris	IRMI	<i>Iris missouriensis</i>	47-110	–
	coneflower	RUDBE	<i>Rudbeckia</i>	47-110	–
	vetch	VICIA	<i>Vicia</i>	47-110	–
Shrub/Vine					
10				47-78	
	shrubby cinquefoil	DAFR6	<i>Dasiphora fruticosa</i>	50-84	–
11				16-78	
	mountain big sagebrush	ARTRV	<i>Artemisia tridentata ssp. vaseyana</i>	16-78	–
	winterfat	KRLA2	<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i>	16-78	–
	skunkbush sumac	RHTR	<i>Rhus trilobata</i>	16-78	–
	currant	RIBES	<i>Ribes</i>	16-78	–
	Shrub (>.5m)	2SHRUB	<i>Shrub (>.5m)</i>	16-78	–

Table 6. Community 1.2 plant community composition

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

Animal community

Grazing: Approximately 95 percent of the vegetation produced on this site are suitable for grazing or browsing by domestic livestock and wildlife. Grazing pressure on this site may be a problem due to the lush vegetation on this site compared with adjacent sites. Water and salt should be distributed away from this site to prevent its constant overuse. A planned grazing system with periodic grazing and rest is best to maintain the natural balance between plant species and to maintain high productivity. Habitat for Wildlife: This site provides habitats which support a resident animal community that is characterized by black-tailed jackrabbit, long-tailed vole, golden-mantled ground squirrel, Gunnison's prairie dog, western bluebird, horned lark, leopard frog, smooth green snake. Breeding violet-green swallows and turkey uses these sites. Mule deer and elk use these sites seasonally.

Hydrological functions

The runoff curve numbers are determined by field investigations using hydrologic cover conditions and hydrologic soil groups. Hydrologic Interpretations Soil Series-----Hydrologic Group Roques-----D

Recreational uses

This site in itself is not noted for its beauty, but it is enhanced by the close proximity to a mountain setting. The site is suited to horseback riding and camping.

Wood products

Although a few scattered trees may occur on this site, their numbers are few and not capable of a sustained yield of wood products.

Other information

Guide to Suggested Initial Stocking Rate Acres per Animal Unit Month Similarity Index-----Ac/AUM 100 - 76-----1.3 – 1.7 75 – 51-----1.6 – 2.6 50 – 26-----2.5 – 5.2 25 – 0-----5.2+

Inventory data references

Data collection for this site was done in conjunction with the progressive soil surveys within the State of New Mexico. This site is found in the following soil survey areas: Taos, Sante Fe, Sandoval, Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe National Forest (Coyote, Cuba, Jemez Springs, and Espanola Ranger Districts) and Carson National Forest . These site descriptions were developed as part of a Provisional ESD project using historic soil survey manuscripts, available range site descriptions.

Other references

United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2006. Land Resource Regions and Major Land Resource Areas of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin. U.S. Department of Agriculture Handbook 296.

Contributors

Don Sylvester
Elizabeth Wright
John Tunberg

Approval

Kirt Walstad, 4/02/2025

Acknowledgments

Site Development and Testing Plan: Future work, as described in a Project Plan, to validate the information in this Provisional Ecological Site Description is needed. This will include field activities to collect low, medium and high intensity sampling, soil correlations, and analysis of that data. Annual field reviews should be done by soil scientists and vegetation specialists. A final field review, peer review, quality control, and quality assurance reviews of the ESD will be needed to produce the final document. Annual reviews of the Project Plan are to be conducted by the Ecological Site Technical Team.

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	04/02/2025
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:
