

Ecological site R058AC194MT

Shallow to Gravel (SwGr)

RRU 58A-C 11-14" p.z.

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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

R058AC040MT	Silty (Si) RRU 58A-C 11-14" p.z.
R058AC049MT	Silty-Steep (SiStp) RRU 58A-C 11-14" p.z.

Similar sites

R058AC040MT	Silty (Si) RRU 58A-C 11-14" p.z. The Silty site differs mainly by being over 20 inches deep to any root limiting material, including gravel.
R058AC059MT	Shallow Clay (SwC) RRU 58A-C 11-14" p.z. The Shallow Clay site differs by being clayey texture and underlain by shales.
R058AC055MT	Gravel (Gr) RRU 58A-C 11-14" p.z. The Gravel site sill be very droughty, having a water holding capacity of less than 2 inches. It is very gravelly to within 10 inches of the surface.
R058AC057MT	Shallow (Sw) RRU 58A-C 11-14" p.z. The Shallow site is over hard rock or semi-consolidated beds, not gravel.

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This ecological site most often occurs on level, nearly level, and moderately steep alluvial fans, knolls, stream terraces, and terrace escarpments. Slopes range from 0–15%, but can occasionally occur on slopes greater than 15%. It also occurs on nearly level valley bottoms not subject to a water table or overflow events.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Stream terrace (2) Knoll (3) Outwash plain
Flooding duration	Very brief (4 to 48 hours)
Flooding frequency	Rare
Elevation	690 – 1,370 m
Slope	0 – 50 %
Water table depth	150 cm
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 58AC in Montana is considered to have a continental climate characterized by cold winters, hot summers, low humidity, light rainfall, and much sunshine. Extremes in temperature are typical. The climate is the result of this MLRA's location in the geographic center of North America. There are few natural barriers on the northern Great Plains and the winds move freely across the plains and account for rapid changes in temperature. Seasonal precipitation is often limiting for plant growth. Annual fluctuations in species composition and total production are typical depending on the amount and timing of rainfall.

Temperatures can be very extreme in this part of Montana. Summer daytime temperatures are typically quite warm, generally averaging in the mid to upper 80°s F for July and August. Summertime temperatures will typically reach in the 100°s F at some point during the summer, and can reach 90° F any month between May and September. Conversely, winter temperatures can be cold, averaging in the mid teens to mid 20°s F for December and January. There will typically be several days of below zero temperatures each winter. It is not uncommon for temperatures to reach 30–40° F below zero, or even colder, most any winter.

Spring can be windy throughout this MLRA, with winds averaging over 10 mph about 15 percent of the time. Speeds of 50 mph or stronger can occasionally occur as a weather system crosses this part of Montana.

The majority of the rangeland in MLRA 58AC is within the 11 to 14 inch Mean Annual Precipitation (MAP) range. During an average year, 70 to 75 percent of the annual precipitation falls between April and September, which are the primary growing season months.

Snowfall is not heavy in the area, averaging 28 total inches in the Yellowstone Valley. Heavy snowfall occurs infrequently, usually late in the winter or early spring. Snow cover is typically 1 to 3 inches.

The frost-free (32° F.) season averages about 105 to 145 days each year in the uplands, to nearly 170 days along the Yellowstone River Valley.

For local climate station information, refer to <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/cgibin/state.pl?state=mt>.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	140 days
Freeze-free period (average)	160 days
Precipitation total (average)	360 mm

Influencing water features

Soil features

These soils are moderately deep to very deep. Depth to sand and gravel is typically 10 to 20 inches. Few roots penetrate beyond a depth of 20 inches. The upper 10–20 inches of the soil will typically have at least 20 to 35% less gravel than the lower part of the soil profile. Available Water Holding Capacity to 40 inches is 2 - 4 inches.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Soil depth	50 – 180 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	10 %
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	5.08 – 10.16 cm

Ecological dynamics

The following are descriptions of several plant communities that may occupy this site:

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	Native grasses			807-1143	
	bluebunch wheatgrass	PSSP6	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>	404-942	–
	needle and thread	HECOC8	<i>Hesperostipa comata ssp. comata</i>	50-202	–
	plains muhly	MUCU3	<i>Muhlenbergia cuspidata</i>	1-135	–
	western wheatgrass	PASM	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	50-135	–
	threadleaf sedge	CAFI	<i>Carex filifolia</i>	50-135	–
	tufted wheatgrass	ELMA7	<i>Elymus macrourus</i>	50-135	–
2	Native grasses			1-67	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	1-67	–
	blue grama	BOGR2	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	1-67	–

	plains reedgrass	CAMO	<i>Calamagrostis montanensis</i>	1-67	–
	prairie Junegrass	KOMA	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	1-67	–
	Sandberg bluegrass	POSE	<i>Poa secunda</i>	1-67	–
3	Native grasses			0-1	
	Fendler's threeawn	ARPUF	<i>Aristida purpurea</i> var. <i>fendleriana</i>	0-1	–
Forb					
4	Native forbs			101-202	
	Forb, perennial	2FP	<i>Forb, perennial</i>	10-67	–
	common yarrow	ACMI2	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	10-67	–
	pussytoes	ANTEN	<i>Antennaria</i>	10-67	–
	tufted milkvetch	ASSP6	<i>Astragalus spatulatus</i>	10-67	–
	milkvetch	ASTRA	<i>Astragalus</i>	10-67	–
	miner's candle	CRVI4	<i>Cryptantha virgata</i>	10-67	–
	white prairie clover	DACA7	<i>Dalea candida</i>	10-67	–
	purple prairie clover	DAPU5	<i>Dalea purpurea</i>	10-67	–
	buckwheat	ERIOG	<i>Eriogonum</i>	10-67	–
	hairy false goldenaster	HEVI4	<i>Heterotheca villosa</i>	10-67	–
	dotted blazing star	LIPU	<i>Liatris punctata</i>	10-67	–
	desertparsley	LOMAT	<i>Lomatium</i>	10-67	–
	evening primrose	OENOT	<i>Oenothera</i>	10-67	–
	beardtongue	PENST	<i>Penstemon</i>	10-67	–
	spiny phlox	PHHO	<i>Phlox hoodii</i>	10-67	–
	scurfpea	PSORA2	<i>Psoralegium</i>	10-67	–
	upright prairie coneflower	RACO3	<i>Ratibida columnifera</i>	10-67	–
	scarlet globemallow	SPCO	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	10-67	–
	prairie thermopsis	THRH	<i>Thermopsis rhombifolia</i>	10-67	–
	American vetch	VIAM	<i>Vicia americana</i>	10-67	–
5	Native forbs (toxic properties)			0-1	
	twogrooved milkvetch	ASBI2	<i>Astragalus bisulcatus</i>	0-1	–
	larkspur	DELPH	<i>Delphinium</i>	0-1	–
	white locoweed	OXSE	<i>Oxytropis sericea</i>	0-1	–
	deathcamas	ZIGAD	<i>Zigadenus</i>	0-1	–
Shrub/Vine					
6	Native shrubs and half-shrubs			10-67	
	Shrub, broadleaf	2SB	<i>Shrub, broadleaf</i>	10-67	–
	prairie sagewort	ARFR4	<i>Artemisia frigida</i>	10-67	–
	Wyoming big sagebrush	ARTRW8	<i>Artemisia tridentata</i> ssp. <i>wyomingensis</i>	10-67	–
	yellow rabbitbrush	CHVI8	<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>	10-67	–
	rubber rabbitbrush	ERNAN5	<i>Ericameria nauseosa</i> ssp. <i>nauseosa</i> var. <i>nauseosa</i>	10-67	–
	creeping juniper	JUHO2	<i>Juniperus horizontalis</i>	10-67	–
	skunkbush sumac	RHTR	<i>Rhus trilobata</i>	10-67	–
	prairie rose	ROAR3	<i>Rosa arkansana</i>	10-67	–
	soapweed yucca	YUGL	<i>Yucca glauca</i>	10-67	–
7	Native shrubs and half-shrubs			0-1	
	broom snakeweed	GUSA2	<i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i>	0-1	–
	plains pricklypear	OPPO	<i>Opuntia polyacantha</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. Forage production is somewhat limited by steep slopes and shallow, droughty soils, and the potential for runoff, which reduces the effectiveness of the precipitation received for plant growth. The steeper slopes may also limit livestock travel and result in poor grazing distribution, especially in areas away from water. Management objectives should include maintenance or improvement of the plant community. Shorter grazing periods and adequate re-growth after grazing are recommended for plant maintenance and recovery. Heavy stocking and season long use of this site can be detrimental and will alter the plant community composition and production over time. Whenever Plant Community 2 (medium and short grasses) occurs, grazing management strategies need to be implemented to avoid further deterioration. This community is still stable, productive, and healthy provided it receives proper management. This community will respond fairly quickly to improved grazing management, including increased growing season rest of key forage plants. Grazing management alone can usually move this community back towards the potential community. Plant Communities 3 and 4 have substantially reduced forage production, and a high percentage of aggressive, non-palatable species. Once these plant communities become established, it will be much more difficult to restore the site to a community that resembles the potential with grazing management alone. Additional growing season rest is often necessary for re-establishment of the desired species and to restore the stability and health of the site. Plant Community 4 has extremely limited forage production (175 lbs./acre), and a high percentage of non-preferred species for cattle and sheep. Seeding may be necessary to restore desirable native perennial species. See note on seeding under Plant Community 4. Wildlife Interpretations: Because this site often occurs as a minor component in a complex with large expanses of the relatively uniform Silty Ecological Site, it adds wildlife habitat diversity to the landscape. The historical extent of this site on the landscape is probably similar to the present distribution because the soils and topography are not suitable for conversion to cropland. On southern and western exposures, Wyoming big sagebrush, creeping juniper and skunkbush sumac provide winter browse for mule deer and pronghorn. Skunkbush sumac, and other shrubs provide breeding habitat for some passerine birds, such as the spotted towhee and loggerhead shrike. Mountain plovers may nest on the relatively open, pebbly ground surface and rock wrens often inhabit the rocky face of escarpments. When the site is found on terrace escarpments, golden eagles take advantage of a hunting opportunity as they cruise low to the ground along the face of the slope to surprise cottontails and other small mammals. Noxious weeds, such as spotted knapweed, can rapidly colonize this site. Plant Community 1: Tall and Medium Grasses/ Forbs/ Shrubs (HCPC): Pollinator insect diversity may be high, reflecting the abundance and variety of flowering plants. Reptiles are represented by the prairie rattlesnake and bull snake and short-horned lizard. Hummingbirds are attracted to brightly colored flowering plants. Ground-nesting birds that favor light to medium ground cover, such as long-billed curlews, find adequate litter cover and residual plant material in spring to hide the nest site from predators. Sharp-tailed grouse may find lek sites where this community occurs on ridge tops and relatively level ground. A diverse forb and shrub component provides mule deer and pronghorn with nutritious forage throughout the year; shrubs during winter and both shrubs and forbs spring through fall. Small mammal diversity can be relatively high; seed eaters like the deer mouse are more common than herbivorous species such as voles. Plant Community 2: Medium and Short Grasses and Sedges/ Half-shrubs: Insect diversity may decline with a partial loss of forb variety. The reduction of taller grasses and some desirable shrubs degrades habitat value for many birds, small mammals and big game. Potential increases in half-shrubs may maintain big game winter range feeding value, although thermal cover will be reduced if the larger shrubs such as skunkbush sumac decline. Small mammal variety declines with the loss of vegetative diversity and litter cover. Plant Community 3: Short Grasses & Sedges/ Half-shrubs: Pollinating insect diversity further declines as the forb community is simplified and soils become warmer and drier. Ground nesting bird habitat value is very poor and the loss of skunkbush sumac deprives other songbirds, such as the spotted towhee, of nesting habitat. The ubiquitous deer mouse may still thrive in this community but small mammal diversity in general declines significantly. Big game animals lose nutritional value on winter ranges with the loss of browse plants. Plant Community 4: Half-shrubs/ Short Grasses/ Annual grasses and Forbs: Wildlife habitat value is very poor in general. Insects (i.e. grasshoppers) may be very abundant during population highs but species diversity, especially of pollinators, is very low. Amphibian habitat around seeps and springs is severely degraded. Reptiles, such as the short-horned lizard, may still occur but their formerly diverse food supply is reduced. Topographic diversity still provides some thermal cover for big game animals but nutritional value is very limited because the higher value browse plants are gone. Small mammals are represented by very few species. The deer mouse, a seed eater, may be relatively abundant.

Hydrological functions

The soils associated with this ecological site are generally in Hydrologic Soil Group B. The infiltration rates for these soils will normally be moderate. The runoff potential for this site is moderate, depending on slope and ground cover/health. Runoff curve numbers generally range from 76 to 94.

Other information

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: $AUM/AC = [(2200-500)(0.25)]/915 \text{ lbs/month for one AU} = 0.46$ $AUM/AC \text{ AC/AUM} = (1.0 \text{ AU})/(0.46 AUM/AC) = 2.2$ $AC/AUM > 30\% \text{ slopes: } AUM/AC = [(2200-800)(0.25)]/915 \text{ lbs/month for one AU} = 0.38$ $AUM/AC \text{ AC/AUM} = (1.0 \text{ AU})/(0.38 AUM/AC) = 2.6$ 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).

Inventory data references

NRCS-Production & Composition Record for Native Grazing Lands (Range-417): 4 BLM-Soil & Vegetation Inventory Method (SVIM) Data: 2 NRCS-Range Condition Record (ECS-2): 10 NRCS-Range/Soil Correlation Observations & Soil 232 notes: 15 Ecological Site Reference: NRCS 417 No.: Sweetgrass County 518

Other references

Field Offices where this site occurs within the state:

Big Sandy
Big Timber
Billings
Chinook
Columbus
Crow Agency
Fort Belknap
Hardin
Harlowton
Joliet
Lewistown
Malta
Roundup
Stanford
White Sulphur Springs
Winnett

Contributors

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Approval

Kirt Walstad, 6/14/2023

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)	Loretta Metz
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Contact for lead author	
Date	04/23/2005
Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. Number and extent of rills: Rills should not be evident on slopes <10%. Slopes between 10-35% may have rills present, but they will be < 5.0 feet long. Slopes above 35% will have occasional rills < 8.0 feet long.

2. Presence of water flow patterns: Water flow patterns are generally not evident on slopes <10%, but can be apparent on steeper slopes in the reference state. When they are present, they are short (< 2 feet long) and discontinuous.

3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes: Both may be evident in the reference state, especially on steeper slopes (>35%). If present, they do not exceed 1.5 inches in height.

4. Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground): Bare ground is less than 30% in the reference state. In HCPC, bare ground should not exceed 18%.

5. Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies: Gully erosion is not evident in the reference state.

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

7. Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel): Litter movement varies by size and depth of litter. In the reference state, litter should be coarse perennial grass leaves, anywhere from 1.5 inches up to 3 inches in length, plus small shrub leaves. Litter will not move more than a couple of inches from where it originated.

8. Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values): Stability values of 4-5 in plant interspaces. Stability values of 5-6 under plant canopies and at plant bases.

9. Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness): Moderate or strong granular surface structure. A-Horizon is 1 to 8 inches thick. Organic matter approximately 2-3%.

10. Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff: Deep-rooted native perennial bunchgrasses optimize infiltration and runoff. They should be spaced approximately 1.5 to 2.5 feet apart.

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 present.

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-height, native perennial bunchgrasses and grasslikes >> native perennial and annual forbs > shrubs.

Sub-dominant:

Other:

Additional:

13. Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence): Plant mortality of deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses is very low; mortality of shrubs is very low. Decadence during periods of prolonged drought will be evident on all plant species.

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): 900 – 1200 #/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: plains pricklypear, broom snakeweed, cheatgrass, Japanese brome, curlycup gumweed, Wyoming big sagebrush, fringed sagewort, blue grama.

17. Perennial plant reproductive capability: All plants are capable of reproducing sexually and/or vegetatively.
