

Ecological site R083AY002TX Shallow Ridge

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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.

MLRA notes

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA): 083A–Northern Rio Grande Plain

This area is entirely in Texas and south of San Antonio. It makes up about 11,115 square miles (28,805 square kilometers). The towns of Uvalde, Cotulla, and Hondo are in the western part of the area, and Beeville, Goliad, and Kenedy are in the eastern part. The town of Alice is just outside the southern edge of the area. Interstate Highways 35 and 37 cross this area. This area is comprised of inland, dissected coastal plains.

Classification relationships

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2006. -Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 83A

Ecological site concept

The Shallow Ridge ecological sites are located on uplands. They are shallow to bedrock or a petrocalcic horizon. Petrocalcic horizons are strongly cemented layers of calcium carbonate. Some of the soils have gravels in the soil profile.

Associated sites

R083AY005TX	Shallow
R083AY017TX	Blackland
R083AY019TX	Gray Sandy Loam
R083AY001TX	Igneous Hill
R083AY013TX	Loamy Bottomland
R083AY023TX	Sandy Loam

R083AY024TX	Tight Sandy Loam
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Similar sites

R083BY002TX	Shallow Ridge
R083CY002TX	Shallow Ridge

Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	(1) <i>Acacia berlandieri</i> (2) <i>Acacia rigidula</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i> (2) <i>Digitaria californica</i>

Physiographic features

The Shallow Ridge consists of soils that are very shallow and shallow over bedrock. They are found on nearly level to moderately sloping linear and convex ridges of the Coastal Plains. The soils were formed from loamy residuum, clayey alluvium and calcareous loamy alluvium derived from siltstone or sandstone. Slopes are commonly found from 1 to 8 percent, but can range as high as 25 percent. Elevation is 200 to 1,000 feet. This area is comprised of inland, dissected coastal plains.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Coastal plain > Ridge (2) Coastal plain > Interfluve
Runoff class	Low to very high
Elevation	60 – 240 m
Slope	0 – 10 %
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

MLRA 83A is subtropical, subhumid on the western boundary and subtropical humid on the eastern boundary. Winters are dry and mild and the summers are hot and humid. Tropical maritime air masses predominate throughout spring, summer, and fall. Modified polar air masses exert considerable influence during winter, creating a continental climate characterized by large variations in temperature. Average precipitation for MLRA 83A is 20 inches on the western boundary and 35 inches on the eastern boundary. Peak rainfall,

because of rain showers, occurs late in spring and a secondary peak occurs early in fall. Heavy thunderstorm activities increase in April, May, and June. July is hot and dry with little weather variations. Rainfall increases again in late August and September as tropical disturbances increase and become more frequent. Tropical air masses from the Gulf of Mexico dominate during the spring, summer, and fall. Prevailing winds are southerly to southeasterly throughout the year except in December when winds are predominately northerly.

Table 3 Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (characteristic range)	220-250 days
Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	260-370 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	15,950-20,700 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	210-260 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	250-370 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	15,470-23,720 mm
Frost-free period (average)	230 days
Freeze-free period (average)	310 days
Precipitation total (average)	18,540 mm

- (1) CARRIZO SPRINGS 3W [USC00411486], Carrizo Springs, TX
- (2) DILLEY [USC00412458], Dilley, TX
- (3) FLORESVILLE [USC00413201], Floresville, TX
- (4) KARNES CITY 2N [USC00414696], Karnes City, TX
- (5) LYTLE 3W [USC00415454], Natalia, TX
- (6) MATHIS 4 SSW [USC00415661], Mathis, TX
- (7) PLEASANTON [USC00417111], Pleasanton, TX
- (8) UVALDE 3 SW [USC00419268], Uvalde, TX
- (9) HONDO MUNI AP [USW00012962], Hondo, TX
- (10) CHARLOTTE 5 NNW [USC00411663], Charlotte, TX
- (11) PEARSALL [USC00416879], Pearsall, TX
- (12) CHEAPSIDE [USC00411671], Gonzales, TX
- (13) CROSS [USC00412125], Tilden, TX
- (14) FOWLERTON [USC00413299], Fowlerton, TX
- (15) HONDO [USC00414254], Hondo, TX
- (16) NIXON [USC00416368], Stockdale, TX
- (17) POTEET [USC00417215], Poteet, TX
- (18) BEEVILLE 5 NE [USC00410639], Beeville, TX
- (19) CUERO [USC00412173], Cuero, TX
- (20) GOLIAD [USC00413618], Goliad, TX
- (21) TILDEN 4 SSE [USC00419031], Tilden, TX

Influencing water features

Runoff is negligible on slopes 0 to 1 percent, very low on slopes 1 to 3 percent, low on slopes 3 to 5 percent and medium on slopes greater than 5 percent. Water features do not influence this site.

Wetland description

N/A

Soil features

The soils in this site are very shallow and shallow to a petrocalcic horizon or tuffaceous sandstone interbedded with claystone. They are well drained with moderate to very slow permeability. Surface textures are fine sandy loam, loam, sandy clay loam, or clay with or without gravels. Soils correlated to this site include: Condidio, Olemedo, Olmos, Pavelek, and Picoso.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Alluvium – sandstone and siltstone (2) Residuum – sandstone and siltstone
Surface texture	(1) Very gravelly loam (2) Very cobbly loam (3) Loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy-skeletal
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Slow to moderate
Soil depth	20 – 50 cm
Surface fragment cover <=3"	0 – 50 %
Surface fragment cover >3"	0 – 30 %
Available water capacity (0-51.1cm)	0 – 7.62 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-51.1cm)	0 – 70 %
Electrical conductivity (0-51.1cm)	Not specified

Sodium adsorption ratio (0-51.1cm)	0 – 10
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-51.1cm)	7.4 – 8.4
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 30 %
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0 – 10 %

Ecological dynamics

The plant communities of this site are dynamic varying in relation to grazing and drought. Historically, the reference plant community of this site was influenced by fire and grazing herds of buffalo and wild horses. Herds of buffalo and wild horses would come into an area, graze it down and then leave, not to come back for many months or even years. This long deferment period allowed the grasses and forbs to recover from grazing. Periodic fires set by either Native Americans or lightning occurred but affected this site only when climatic factors were ideal for carrying the fire through the lighter fine fuel load of this site. The fuel for fires was dependent upon the accumulation of litter and prior year's growth of grasses afforded by the long deferment.

The reference plant community is a chaparral grassland consisting of approximately 75 to 85 percent midgrasses, 15 to 25 percent woody plants and 5 percent forbs. Dominant grasses are sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Arizona cottontop (*Digitaria californica*), and bristlegrass (*Setaria* spp.). Guajillo (*Acacia berlandieri*) dominates a wide variety of woody shrubs occurring on this site.

While grazing was a natural component of the ecosystem, overstocking and overgrazing by domestic animals has had an impact on the site. Due to overgrazing, midgrasses such as sideoats grama, little bluestem, and Arizona cottontop decrease. Grasses such as slim tridens (*Tridens muticus*), red grama (*Bouteloua trifida*), and threeawn (*Aristida* spp.) increase. Woody plants increase and will make up as much as 65 percent of the annual production. Cenizo (*Leucophyllum frutescens*) is a major woody increaser on the site and may dominate the site in a deteriorated state.

State and transition model

Figure 7. STM

Additional community tables

Table 5. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	Midgrasses			628-1435	
	sideoats grama	BOCU	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	224-729	–
	little bluestem	SCSCS	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium var. scoparium</i>	56-729	–
	beardgrass	BOTHR	<i>Bothriochloa</i>	112-448	–
	plains bristlegrass	SEVU2	<i>Setaria vulpisetia</i>	112-448	–
	Texas bristlegrass	SETE6	<i>Setaria texana</i>	112-224	–
2	Midgrasses			235-538	
	Arizona cottontop	DICA8	<i>Digitaria californica</i>	112-336	–

	tanglehead	HECO10	<i>Heteropogon contortus</i>	112-336	-
	green sprangletop	LEDU	<i>Leptochloa dubia</i>	112-336	-
	false Rhodes grass	TRCR9	<i>Trichloris crinita</i>	112-336	-
3	Shortgrasses			235-538	
	hairy grama	BOHI2	<i>Bouteloua hirsuta</i>	56-168	-
	hooded windmill grass	CHCU2	<i>Chloris cucullata</i>	56-168	-
	fall witchgrass	DICO6	<i>Digitaria cognata</i>	56-168	-
	curly-mesquite	HIBE	<i>Hilaria belangeri</i>	56-168	-
	Reverchon's bristlegrass	SERE3	<i>Setaria reverchonii</i>	56-168	-
4	Shortgrasses			78-179	
	threeawn	ARIST	<i>Aristida</i>	28-112	-
	sand dropseed	SPCR	<i>Sporobolus cryptandrus</i>	28-112	-
	slim tridens	TRMU	<i>Tridens muticus</i>	28-112	-
Forb					
5	Forbs			78-179	
	awnless bushsunflower	SICA7	<i>Simsia calva</i>	56-179	-
6	Forbs			78-179	
	yellow sundrops	CASE12	<i>Calylophus serrulatus</i>	56-140	-
	featherplume	DAFO	<i>Dalea formosa</i>	56-140	-
	Engelmann's daisy	ENPE4	<i>Engelmannia peristenia</i>	56-140	-
	menodora	MENOD	<i>Menodora</i>	56-140	-
	evening primrose	OENOT	<i>Oenothera</i>	56-140	-
	Forb, annual	2FA	<i>Forb, annual</i>	0-56	-
Shrub/Vine					
7	Shrubs			157-359	
	guajillo	ACBE	<i>Acacia berlandieri</i>	157-359	-
8	Shrubs			78-168	
	blackbrush acacia	ACRI	<i>Acacia rigidula</i>	56-280	-
	jointfir	EPHED	<i>Ephedra</i>	56-280	-
	Texas kidneywood	EYTE	<i>Eysenhardtia texana</i>	56-280	-
	stretchberry	FOPU2	<i>Forestiera pubescens</i>	56-280	-
	Texas lignum-vitae	GUAN	<i>Guaiacum angustifolium</i>	56-280	-
	pricklypear	OPUNT	<i>Opuntia</i>	56-280	-
	live oak	QUVI	<i>Quercus virginiana</i>	56-280	-
	shrubby blue sage	SABA5	<i>Salvia ballotiflora</i>	56-280	-

Table 6. Community 1.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 7. Community 2.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 8. Community 3.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 9. Community 3.2 plant community composition

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

As a historic tall/midgrass prairie, this site was occupied by bison, antelope, deer, quail, turkey, and dove. This site was also used by many species of grassland songbirds, migratory waterfowl, and coyotes. This site now provides forage for livestock and is still used by quail, dove, migratory waterfowl, grassland birds, coyotes, and deer. Feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*) can be found on most ecological sites in Texas. Damage caused by feral hogs each year includes, crop damage by rutting up crops, destroyed fences, livestock watering areas, and predation on native wildlife, and ground-nesting birds. Feral hogs have few natural predators, thus allowing their population to grow to high numbers. Wildlife habitat is a complex of many different plant communities and ecological sites across the landscape. Most animals use the landscape differently to find food, shelter, protection, and mates. Working on a conservation plan for the whole property, with a local professional, will help managers make the decisions that allow them to realize their goals for wildlife and livestock. Grassland State (1): This state provides the maximum amount of forage for livestock such as cattle. It is also utilized by deer, quail and other birds as a source of food. When a site is in the reference plant community phase (1.1) it will also be used by some birds for nesting, if other habitat requirements like thermal and escape cover are near. Shrubland State (2): This state can be maintained to meet the habitat requirements of cattle and wildlife. Land managers can find a balance that meets their goals and allows them flexibility to manage for livestock and wildlife. Forbs for deer and birds like quail will be more plentiful in this state. There will also be more trees and shrubs to provide thermal and escape cover for birds as well as cover for deer. Converted Land State (3): The quality of wildlife habitat this site will produce is extremely variable and is influenced greatly by the timing of rain events. This state is often manipulated to meet landowner goals. If livestock production is the main goal, it can be converted to pastureland. It can also be planted to a mix of grasses and forbs that will benefit both livestock and wildlife. A mix of forbs in the pasture could attract pollinators, birds and other types of wildlife. Food plots can also be planted to provide extra nutrition for deer. This rating system provides general guidance as to animal preference for plant species. It also indicates possible competition between kinds of herbivores for various plants. Grazing preference changes from time to time, especially between seasons, and between animal kinds and classes. Grazing preference does not necessarily reflect the ecological status of the plant within the plant community. For wildlife, plant preferences for food and plant suitability for cover are rated. Refer to habitat guides for a more complete description of a species habitat needs.

Hydrological functions

Due to very shallow soils found on this site, limited herbaceous cover, and exposed rock, this site has a limited ability to capture and store water. During high intensity rainfall events, runoff from this site can be high, thus causing some plant pedestalling to naturally occur on the site. During the growing season, light showers are captured in the canopy of the shrubs and evaporate. In higher rainfall event, the shrubs intercept rainfall and channel via the stems and trunks to the ground.

Recreational uses

Hunting and birdwatching are common recreational activities.

Inventory data references

Information presented was derived from the revised Range Site, literature, limited NRCS clipping data (417s), field observations, and personal contacts with range-trained personnel.

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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	04/17/2026

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:**
