

Ecological site R083AY011TX Claypan Prairie

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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 Claypan Prairie is a grassland site that occurs on nearly level, lower lying areas. Drainage in this site varies. The soils are characterized by a thin layer of fine sandy loam topsoil underlain by deep clay and clay loam subsoils.

Associated sites

R083AY022TX	Loamy Sand
R083AY023TX	Sandy Loam
R083AY027TX	Western Clay Loam

Similar sites

R083BY011TX	Claypan Prairie
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	(1) <i>Prosopis glandulosa</i>
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Shrub	(1) <i>Opuntia</i> (2) <i>Ziziphus obtusifolia</i>
Herbaceous	(1) <i>Trichloris pluriflora</i> (2) <i>Setaria macrostachya</i>

Physiographic features

This site occurs in the nearly level to gently sloping floodplains of the Texas Western Rio Grande Plain as stream terraces or steps on drainageways. Drainage in this site varies from well-defined to rather indistinct. Elevation ranges from 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 medium
Flooding duration	Brief (2 to 7 days)
Flooding frequency	None to rare
Ponding frequency	None
Elevation	60 – 310 m
Slope	0 %
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
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Freeze-free period (characteristic range)	260-370 days
Precipitation total (characteristic range)	640-810 mm
Frost-free period (actual range)	210-260 days
Freeze-free period (actual range)	250-370 days
Precipitation total (actual range)	610-940 mm
Frost-free period (average)	240 days
Freeze-free period (average)	310 days
Precipitation total (average)	740 mm

- (1) FLORESVILLE [USC00413201], Floresville, TX
- (2) LYTLE 3W [USC00415454], Natalia, TX
- (3) PLEASANTON [USC00417111], Pleasanton, TX
- (4) HONDO MUNI AP [USW00012962], Hondo, TX
- (5) BEEVILLE 5 NE [USC00410639], Beeville, TX
- (6) CUERO [USC00412173], Cuero, TX
- (7) GOLIAD [USC00413618], Goliad, TX
- (8) NIXON [USC00416368], Stockdale, TX
- (9) CARRIZO SPRINGS 3W [USC00411486], Carrizo Springs, TX
- (10) FOWLERTON [USC00413299], Fowlerton, TX
- (11) HONDO [USC00414254], Hondo, TX
- (12) KARNES CITY 2N [USC00414696], Karnes City, TX
- (13) MATHIS 4 SSW [USC00415661], Mathis, TX
- (14) POTEET [USC00417215], Poteet, TX
- (15) UVALDE 3 SW [USC00419268], Uvalde, TX
- (16) CHARLOTTE 5 NNW [USC00411663], Charlotte, TX
- (17) PEARSALL [USC00416879], Pearsall, TX
- (18) TILDEN 4 SSE [USC00419031], Tilden, TX
- (19) CHEAPSIDE [USC00411671], Gonzales, TX
- (20) CROSS [USC00412125], Tilden, TX
- (21) DILLEY [USC00412458], Dilley, TX
- (22) CALLIHAM [USC00411337], Calliham, TX

Influencing water features

Flooding varies from none to rarely depending on the site.

Wetland description

N/A

Soil features

The soils are very deep, moderately well drained, very slowly permeable soils that formed in saline loamy alluvium. Soil series correlated are Laparita and Orelia.

Table 4. Representative soil features

Parent material	(1) Residuum – claystone
Surface texture	(1) Clay loam (2) Loam (3) Sandy clay loam
Family particle size	(1) Fine
Drainage class	Well drained
Permeability class	Very slow to slow
Soil depth	200 cm
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	Not specified
Surface fragment cover >3"	Not specified
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	10.16 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	0 – 10 %
Electrical conductivity (0-76.2cm)	Not specified
Sodium adsorption ratio (0-76.2cm)	0 – 10
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-76.2cm)	6.1 – 7.8

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

Ecological dynamics

The Northern Rio Grande Plain MLRA was a disturbance-maintained system. Prior to European settlement (pre-1825), fire and grazing were the two primary forms of disturbance. Grazing by large herbivores included antelope, deer, and small herds of bison. The infrequent but intense, short-duration grazing by these species suppressed woody species and invigorated herbaceous species. The herbaceous savannah species adapted to fire and grazing disturbances by maintaining belowground tissues. Wright and Bailey (1982) report that there are no reliable records of fire frequency for the Rio Grande Plains because there are no trees to carry fire scars from which to estimate fire frequency. Because savannah grassland is typically of level or rolling topography, a natural fire frequency of three to seven years seems reasonable for this site.

Precipitation patterns are highly variable. Long-term droughts, occurring three to four times per century, cause shifts in species composition by causing die-off of seedlings, less drought-tolerant species, and some woody species. Droughts also reduce biomass production and create open space, which is colonized by opportunistic species when precipitation increases. Wet periods allow midgrasses to increase in dominance.

Historical accounts prior to 1800 identify grazing by herds of wild horses, followed by heavy grazing by sheep and cattle as settlement progressed. Grazing on early ranches changed natural graze-rest cycles to continuous grazing resulting in stocking rates exceeding the carrying capacity. These shifts in grazing intensity and the removal of rest from the system reduced plant vigor for the most palatable species, which on this site were mid-grasses and palatable forbs. Shortgrasses and less palatable forbs began to dominate the site. This shift resulted in lower fuel loads, which reduced fire frequency and intensity. The reduction in fires resulted in an increase in size and density of woody species.

Today, primarily beef cattle graze rangeland and pastureland. However, horse numbers are increasing rapidly on small acreage properties in the region. There are some areas where dairy cattle, poultry, goats, and sheep are locally important. Whitetail deer, wild turkey, bobwhite quail, and dove are the major wildlife species, and hunting leases are a major source of income for many landowners in this area. Introduced pasture has been established on many acres of old cropland and in areas with deeper soils. Buffelgrass is the most common introduced plant on the site, along with Bermudagrass, guineagrass (*Urochloa maxima*), and kleingrass, which are more commonly used for hay. Cropland is found in the valleys, bottomlands, and deeper upland soils. Wheat (*Triticum* spp.), oats *Avena* spp.), forage and grain sorghum (*Sorghum* spp.), cotton (*Gossypium* spp.), and corn (*Zea mays*) are major crops in the region.

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	Warm-season midgrasses			1345-2690	
	multiflower false Rhodes grass	TRPL3	<i>Trichloris pluriflora</i>	448-2690	–
	large-spike bristlegrass	SEMA5	<i>Setaria macrostachya</i>	448-1681	–
	pink pappusgrass	PABI2	<i>Pappophorum bicolor</i>	112-785	–
	hooded windmill grass	CHCU2	<i>Chloris cucullata</i>	112-560	–
	Arizona cottontop	DICA8	<i>Digitaria californica</i>	0-560	–
	cane bluestem	BOBA3	<i>Bothriochloa barbinodis</i>	0-560	–
	longspike beardgrass	BOLO	<i>Bothriochloa longipaniculata</i>	0-560	–
	plains bristlegrass	SEVU2	<i>Setaria vulpiseta</i>	56-504	–

	curly-mesquite	HIBE	<i>Hilaria belangeri</i>	0-448	-
	Texas bristlegrass	SETE6	<i>Setaria texana</i>	56-336	-
	whiplash pappusgrass	PAVA2	<i>Pappophorum vaginatum</i>	0-280	-
	buffalograss	BODA2	<i>Bouteloua dactyloides</i>	0-280	-
	white tridens	TRAL2	<i>Tridens albescens</i>	0-280	-
2	Warm season shortgrasses			336-673	
	red grama	BOTR2	<i>Bouteloua trifida</i>	0-224	-
	lovegrass tridens	TRER	<i>Tridens eragrostoides</i>	0-224	-
	slim tridens	TRMU	<i>Tridens muticus</i>	0-224	-
Forb					
3	Forbs			56-168	
	Cuman ragweed	AMPS	<i>Ambrosia psilostachya</i>	0-56	-
	bundleflower	DESMA	<i>Desmanthus</i>	0-45	-
	dogfennel	DYSOD	<i>Dysodiopsis</i>	0-34	-
	Lindheimer's bladderpod	LELI2	<i>Lesquerella lindheimeri</i>	0-34	-
	plains dozedaisy	APRA	<i>Aphanostephus ramosissimus</i>	0-34	-
	vervain	VERBE	<i>Verbena</i>	0-34	-
	pepperweed	LEPID	<i>Lepidium</i>	0-34	-
	wild petunia	RUELL	<i>Ruellia</i>	0-34	-
	awnless bushsunflower	SICA7	<i>Simsia calva</i>	0-22	-
	globemallow	SPHAE	<i>Sphaeralcea</i>	0-22	-
	fogfruit	PHYLA	<i>Phyla</i>	0-22	-
Shrub/Vine					
4	Shrubs/Vines			84-196	
	pricklypear	OPUNT	<i>Opuntia</i>	11-56	-
	lotebush	ZIOB	<i>Ziziphus obtusifolia</i>	28-56	-
	desert yaupon	SCCU4	<i>Schaefferia cuneifolia</i>	0-34	-
	Texas lignum-vitae	GUAN	<i>Guaicum angustifolium</i>	0-34	-
	leatherstem	JADID	<i>Jatropha dioica var. dioica</i>	0-34	-
	Texas persimmon	DITE3	<i>Diospyros texana</i>	11-34	-
	blackbrush acacia	ACRI	<i>Acacia rigidula</i>	0-34	-
	Schaffner's wattle	ACSC2	<i>Acacia schaffneri</i>	11-34	-
	whitebrush	ALGR2	<i>Aloysia gratissima</i>	0-34	-
	Texan goatbush	CAERT	<i>Castela erecta ssp. texana</i>	0-34	-
	spiny hackberry	CEEH	<i>Celtis ehrenbergiana</i>	11-34	-
	Christmas cactus	CYLE8	<i>Cylindropuntia leptocaulis</i>	11-22	-
	pitaya	ECEN2	<i>Echinocereus enneacanthus</i>	0-22	-
	stretchberry	FOPU2	<i>Forestiera pubescens</i>	0-22	-
Tree					
5	Trees			11-45	
	honey mesquite	PRGL2	<i>Prosopis glandulosa</i>	11-45	-

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 2.2 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 9. Community 3.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production ()	Foliar Cover (%)
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Table 10. 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. Tree/Shrubland Complex (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.

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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Approval

Bryan Christensen, 9/19/2023

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.

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Approved by	
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** None.

2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** None.

3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** None.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** None.

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** None.

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None.

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Short, less than one foot except during overflow events.

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Soil Stability Rating 5 to 6.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Subangular blocky, A-horizon 1 to 12 inches and 1 to 1.5 percent SOM.

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Tall and midgrasses reduce runoff to minimal amounts except in exceptional rainfall events.

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** None.

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: Warm-Season Grasses

Sub-dominant: Forbs

Other: Shrubs

Additional:

13. Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):
None

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):
1,600 to 3,400 air-dry pounds per 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: Hooded windmill, threeawn, King Ranch bluestem, lovegrass tridens, fall witchgrass, annual forbs, twisted acacia, mesquite, brasil, granjeno, and pear.

17. Perennial plant reproductive capability: All plants should reproduce each year.
