

Ecological site R027XY046NV COBBLY CLAYPAN 12-14 P.Z.

Last updated: 6/03/2024
Accessed: 05/20/2025

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)	P NOVAK-ECHENIQUE
Contact for lead author	State Rangeland Management Specialist
Date	07/12/2012
Approved by	Kendra Moseley
Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

- 1. Number and extent of rills:** Rills are none. Rock fragments armor the surface.

- 2. Presence of water flow patterns:** Waterflow patterns are none to rare. Rock fragments armor the surface.

- 3. Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Pedestals are none to rare. Occurrence is usually limited to areas of water flow patterns. Frost heaving of shallow rooted plants should not be considered an indicator of soil erosion.

-
4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** Bare Ground \pm 5-20%, depending on amount of surface rock fragments
-
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):** Fine litter (foliage from grasses and annual & perennial forbs) expected to move distance of slope length during intense summer convection storms or rapid snowmelt events. Persistent litter (large woody material) will remain in place except during large rainfall events.
-
8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Soil stability values should be 3 to 6 on most soil textures found on this site. (To be field tested.)
-
9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Surface structure is typically very fine to thick platy or subangular blocky. Soil surface colors are dark gray-browns and soils have a mollic epipedon. Organic matter of the surface 2 to 4 inches is typically less than 1 percent dropping off quickly below. Organic matter content can be more or less depending on micro-topography.
-
10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Perennial herbaceous plants (especially deep-rooted bunchgrasses [i.e., Idaho fescue]) slow runoff and increase infiltration. Shrub canopy and associated litter break raindrop impact. Snow catch and accumulation is limited on windswept slopes.
-

11. **Presence and thickness of compaction layer (usually none; describe soil profile features which may be mistaken for compaction on this site):** Compacted layers are none. Massive sub-surface structure or subsoil argillic horizons are not to be interpreted as compacted.
-
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: Deep-rooted, cool season, perennial bunchgrasses > low shrubs (low sagebrush)
- Sub-dominant: associated shrubs = deep-rooted, cool season perennial forbs > shallow-rooted, cool season, perennial bunchgrasses > fibrous, shallow-rooted, cool season, perennial forbs = annual forbs
- Other: evergreen trees
- Additional: After wildfires, perennial bunchgrasses and forbs dominate. Low sagebrush is removed for several years.
-
13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Dead branches within individual shrubs common and standing dead shrub canopy material may be as much as 25% of total woody canopy; some of the mature bunchgrasses (<10%) have dead centers.
-
14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Under canopy and between plant interspaces ($\pm 25\%$) and litter depth is $< \frac{1}{4}$ inch.
-
15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** For normal or average growing season (through mid-June) ± 400 lbs/ac; Favorable years ± 600 lbs/ac; Unfavorable years ± 250 lbs/ac
-
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 invaders include halogeton, annual mustards, and cheatgrass.

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All functional groups should reproduce in average (or normal) and above average growing season years. Reduced growth and reproduction occur during extreme or extended drought periods.
-