

Ecological site EX043B23B166 Shallow Sandy (SwSy) Absaroka Upper Foothills

Last updated: 4/30/2024
Accessed: 05/22/2025

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.

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Date	05/30/2008
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Approval date	
Composition (Indicators 10 and 12) based on	Annual Production

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Rills should not be present
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2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Barely observable
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3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Essentially non-existent
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4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen,**

moss, plant canopy are not bare ground): Bare ground is 35-55% occurring in small areas throughout site

5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** Active gullies should be restricted to areas of concentrated water flow patterns on steeper slopes

6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** Small scoured sites may be observed

7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Litter movement is little to none based on topography and water flow patterns

8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Plant cover and litter is at 55% or greater of soil surface and maintains soil surface integrity. Soil Stability class is anticipated to be 3 or greater.

9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Use Soil Series description for depth and color of A-horizon

10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Grass canopy and basal cover should reduce raindrop impact and slow overland flow providing increased time for infiltration to occur. Infiltration is rapid to very rapid

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 or soil surface crusting should be 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 stature Cool Season Grasses

Sub-dominant: Forbs Shrubs

Other: Short Grasses/Grasslikes

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** Very Low
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Average litter cover is 20-30% with depths of 0.25 to 0.5 inches
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 850 lbs/acre
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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:** Bare ground greater than 50% is the most common indicator of a threshold being crossed. Big sagebrush and bluegrasses are common increasers. Annual weeds such as cheatgrass and mustards are common invasive species in disturbed sites.
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17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** All species are capable of reproducing, except in extreme drought years.
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