

Ecological site R067BY044CO Shale Breaks

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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.

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

Indicators

1. **Number and extent of rills:** Typically none. Rills may occur on steep shale outcrop.
2. **Presence of water flow patterns:** Water flow paths should be broken and irregular in appearance. As slope and shale outcrops increase, flow paths become more apparent and may be connected.
3. **Number and height of erosional pedestals or terracettes:** Expect some evidence of

pedestalled plants on steeper slopes and shale outcrops.

4. **Bare ground from Ecological Site Description or other studies (rock, litter, lichen, moss, plant canopy are not bare ground):** 10 percent or less bare ground, with bare patches generally less than 6 inches. Extended drought may increase bare ground 15 to 20 percent. Exposed shale is inherent to the site and would be considered rock outcrop.
5. **Number of gullies and erosion associated with gullies:** None to some on steep slopes.
6. **Extent of wind scoured, blowouts and/or depositional areas:** None to some on exposed areas.
7. **Amount of litter movement (describe size and distance expected to travel):** Litter movement is associated with water flow patterns and may move as much as 1 to 3 feet down slope during severe precipitation events.
8. **Soil surface (top few mm) resistance to erosion (stability values are averages - most sites will show a range of values):** Stability class rating is anticipated to be 4 to 5 in interspaces at soil surface.
9. **Soil surface structure and SOM content (include type of structure and A-horizon color and thickness):** Average SOM ranges from 0.5 to 2 percent. Soils are shallow and well drained. Surface texture is clay to clay loam. A-horizon ranges from 0 to 4 inches in depth with a light brownish gray color. Structure is very fine granular, soft, friable, calcareous, and moderately alkaline. Gypsum crystals can be found on the surface.
10. **Effect of community phase composition (relative proportion of different functional groups) and spatial distribution on infiltration and runoff:** Raindrop impact is reduced by the diverse grass, forb, shrub functional/structural groups and root structure. This slows overland flow and provides increased time for infiltration to occur. Extended drought, wildfire or both may reduce basal density, canopy cover, and litter amounts (primarily from tall, warm-

season bunch and rhizomatous grasses), resulting in decreased infiltration and increased runoff on steep slopes following intense 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
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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: Cool-season mid rhizomatous = warm-season mid bunchgrass >

Sub-dominant: Cool-season bunchgrass/grasslikes > shrubs/half-shrubs = leguminous forbs
> warm-season short bunchgrass >

Other: Other forbs > warm-season tall bunchgrass = warm-season sod-forming grass

Additional:

13. **Amount of plant mortality and decadence (include which functional groups are expected to show mortality or decadence):** None to slight. Expect slight mortality and decadence during and following extended drought.
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14. **Average percent litter cover (%) and depth (in):** Litter cover during and following extended drought can range from 10 to 20 percent.
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15. **Expected annual annual-production (this is TOTAL above-ground annual-production, not just forage annual-production):** 350 lbs./ac. low precip years; 650 lbs./ac. average precip years; 1000 lbs./ac. high precip years. After extended drought or the first growing season following wildfire, production may be significantly reduced by 150-350 lbs./ac.
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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: Invasive plants should not occur in the reference plant community. Cheatgrass, Russian thistle, burningbush, and other non-native annuals may invade following extended drought or fire assuming a seed source is available.

17. **Perennial plant reproductive capability:** The only limitations are weather-related, wildfire, natural disease, and insects that may temporarily reduce reproductive capability.
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