

Ecological site R070BD002NM **Shallow Sandy**

Accessed: 05/21/2025

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.

Figure 1. Mapped extent

Areas shown in blue indicate the maximum mapped extent of this ecological site. Other ecological sites likely occur within the highlighted areas. It is also possible for this ecological site to occur outside of highlighted areas if detailed soil survey has not been completed or recently updated.

Associated sites

R070BD004NM	Sandy Sandy sites often occur in association or in a complex with Shallow Sandy Sites.
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Similar sites

R070BD004NM	Sandy Sandy ecological sites are similar to Shallow Sandy sites in species composition and Transition pathways.
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Table 1. Dominant plant species

Tree	Not specified
Shrub	Not specified
Herbaceous	Not specified

Physiographic features

This site occurs on plains, alluvial fans, uplands, or fan piedmonts. The parent material consists of mixed loamy alluvium or eolian material derived from igneous and sedimentary bedrock. The petrocalcic layer is at a depth of 10 to 25 inches and undulating.

Slopes are nearly level to undulating, usually less than 9 percent. Elevations range from 2,842 to 4,500 feet.

Table 2. Representative physiographic features

Landforms	(1) Plain (2) Fan piedmont (3) Alluvial fan
Elevation	866–1,372 m
Slope	1–9%
Aspect	Aspect is not a significant factor

Climatic features

The average annual precipitation ranges from 8 to 13 inches. Variations of 5 inches, more or less, are common. Over 80 percent of the precipitation falls from April through October. Most of the summer precipitation comes in the form of high intensity – short duration thunderstorms.

Temperatures are characterized by distinct seasonal changes and large annual and diurnal temperature changes. The average annual temperature is 61 degrees with extremes of 25 degrees below zero in the winter to 112 degrees in the summer.

The average frost-free season is from 207 to 220 days. The last killing frost is in late March or early April, and the first killing frost is in late October or early November.

Temperature and rainfall both favor warm season perennial plant growth. In years of abundant spring moisture, annual forbs and cool season grasses can make up an important component of the site. The vegetation of this site can take advantage of the moisture and the time it falls. Because of the soil profile, little moisture can be stored in the soil for any length of time. Moisture is readily available to the plants from the time it falls. Strong winds from the southwest blow from January through June which rapidly dries out the soil profile during a critical period for plant growth.

Climate data was obtained from <http://www.wrcc.sage.dri.edu/summary/climsmnm.html> web site using 50% probability for freeze-free and frost-free seasons using 28.5 degrees F and 32.5 degrees F respectively.

Table 3. Representative climatic features

Frost-free period (average)	221 days
Freeze-free period (average)	240 days
Precipitation total (average)	330 mm

Influencing water features

This site is not influenced from water from wetlands or streams.

Soil features

Soils are very shallow to shallow, less than 20 inches in depth. Surface and subsurface textures are gravelly loamy sand, gravelly fine sandy loam or fine sandy loam.

An indurated calache layer occurs at depths of 6 to 25 inches and is at an average of 15 inches from the surface. Underlying material textures are very gravelly fine sandy loam, very gravelly sandy loam, gravelly fine sandy loam. Gravels are calcium carbonate concretions, calcium carbonate content ranges from 30 to 65 percent.

The indurated caliche layer typically holds water up in the profile for short periods within the root zone of plants. These soils will blow if left unprotected by vegetation.

Minimum and maximum values listed below represent the characteristic soils for this site.

Characteristic soils are:

Simona

Jerag

Table 4. Representative soil features

Surface texture	(1) Fine sandy loam (2) Loamy fine sand (3) Gravelly fine sandy loam
Family particle size	(1) Loamy
Drainage class	Well drained to moderately well drained
Permeability class	Moderately slow to moderate
Soil depth	18–61 cm
Surface fragment cover ≤3"	5–25%
Surface fragment cover >3"	0%
Available water capacity (0-101.6cm)	2.54–5.08 cm
Calcium carbonate equivalent (0-101.6cm)	5–15%
Electrical conductivity (0-101.6cm)	0–4 mmhos/cm

Sodium adsorption ratio (0-101.6cm)	0
Soil reaction (1:1 water) (0-101.6cm)	7.4–8
Subsurface fragment volume <=3" (Depth not specified)	5–25%
Subsurface fragment volume >3" (Depth not specified)	0%

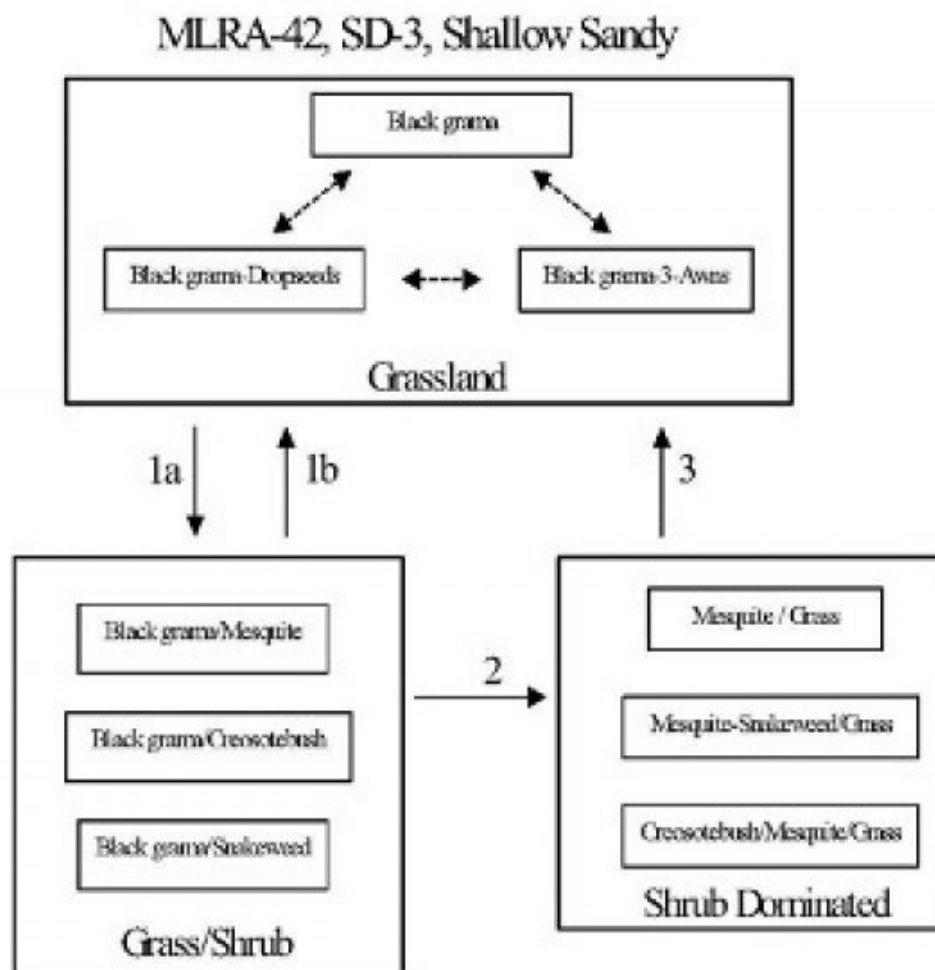
Ecological dynamics

Overview

The Shallow Sandy site occurs on upland plains, and tops of low ridges and mesas, associated with Sandy, Loamy Sand, and Shallow sites. Coarse to moderately coarse soil surface textures, shallow depth (<20 inches) to an indurated caliche layer (petrocalcic horizon), and an overwhelming dominance by black grama help to distinguish this site. The historic plant community of the Shallow Sandy site is a black grama dominated grassland sparsely dotted with shrubs. Shrubs, especially mesquite and creosotebush can increase or colonize due to the dispersal of shrub seeds by livestock or wildlife. This increase in mesquite and colonization of creosotebush may be enhanced by proximity to areas with existing high shrub densities. Fire suppression, and the loss of grass cover due to overgrazing or drought may facilitate the increase and encroachment of shrubs. Persistent loss of grass cover, competition for resources by shrubs, and periods of climate with increased winter precipitation and dry summers, may initiate the transition to a shrub-dominated state.

State and transition model

Plant Communities and Transitional Pathways (diagram)



1a. Seed dispersal, drought, overgrazing, fire suppression.

1b. Prescribed fire, brush control, prescribed grazing.

2. Persistent loss of grass cover, resource competition, increased winter precipitation.

3. Brush control, range seeding, prescribed grazing.

State 1

Historic Climax Plant Community

Community 1.1

Historic Climax Plant Community

Grassland: This site responds well to management and is resistant to state change, due to the shallow depth to petrocalcic horizon and sandy surface textures. The sandy surface textures allow rapid water infiltration and the petrocalcic horizon helps to keep water

perched and available to shallow rooted grasses. Black grama is the dominant species in the historic plant community, averaging 50 to 60 percent of the total production for this site. Bush muhly, blue grama, and dropseeds are present as sub-dominants. Typically, yucca, javalinabush, range ratany, prickly pear, and mesquite are sparsely dotted across the landscape. Leatherweed croton, cutleaf happlopappus, wooly groundsel, and threadleaf groundsel are common forbs. Continuous heavy grazing or extended periods of drought will cause a loss of grass cover characterized by a decrease in black grama, bush muhly, blue and sideoats grama, plains bristlegrass, and Arizona cottontop. Dropseeds and or threeawns may increase and become sub-dominant to black grama. Continued loss of grass cover in conjunction with dispersal of shrub seeds and fire suppression is believed to cause the transition to a state with increased amounts of shrubs (Grass/Shrub state). Diagnosis: Black grama is the dominant grass species. Grass cover uniformly distributed. Shrubs are a minor component averaging only two to five percent canopy cover. Litter cover is high (40-50 percent of area), and litter movement is limited to smaller size class litter and short distances (<. 5m). Other grasses that could appear on this site would include: six-weeks grama, fluffgrass, false-buffalograss, hairy grama, little bluestem, bristle panicum, cane bluestem, Indian ricegrass, tridens spp., and red lovegrass. Other woody plants include: pricklypear, cholla, fourwing saltbush, catclaw mimosa, winterfat, American tarbush and mesquite. Other forbs include: globemallow, verbena, desert holly, senna, plains blackfoot, trailing fleabane, fiddleneck, deerstongue, wooly Indianwheat, and locoweed.

Table 5. Annual production by plant type

Plant Type	Low (Kg/Hectare)	Representative Value (Kg/Hectare)	High (Kg/Hectare)
Grass/Grasslike	531	731	930
Forb	87	120	152
Shrub/Vine	54	74	94
Total	672	925	1176

Table 6. Ground cover

Tree foliar cover	0%
Shrub/vine/liana foliar cover	0%
Grass/grasslike foliar cover	30-35%
Forb foliar cover	0%
Non-vascular plants	0%
Biological crusts	0%
Litter	40-50%
Surface fragments >0.25" and <=3"	0%
Surface fragments >3"	0%

Bedrock	0%
Water	0%
Bare ground	15-25%

Figure 5. Plant community growth curve (percent production by month). NM2802, R042XC002NM-Shallow Sandy-HCPC. SD-3 Shallow Sandy - Warm season plant community.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	3	5	10	10	25	30	12	5	0	0

State 2

Grass/Shrub

Community 2.1

Grass/Shrub

Grass/Shrub: This state is characterized by the notable presence of shrubs, especially mesquite, broom snakeweed, and/or creosotebush, however grasses remain as the dominant species. Black grama is the dominant grass species. Threeawns and or dropseeds are sub-dominant. The susceptibility of the Shallow Sandy site to shrub encroachment may be higher when located adjacent to other sites with high densities of mesquite or creosotebush. Retrogression within this site is characterized by decreases in grass cover and increasing densities of shrubs. Diagnosis: Black grama remains as the dominant grass species. Grass cover varies in response to the amount of shrub increase, ranging from uniform to patchy. Shrubs are found at increased densities relative to the grassland state, especially mesquite, creosotebush, or broom snakeweed. Transition to Grass/Shrub (1a) Historically fire may have kept mesquite and other shrubs in check by completely killing some species and disrupting seed production cycles and suppressing the establishment of shrub seedlings in others. Fire suppression combined with seed dispersal by livestock and wildlife is believed to be the factors responsible for the establishment and increase in shrubs.1, 3 Loss of grass cover due to overgrazing, prolonged periods of drought, or their combination, reduces fire fuel loads and increases the susceptibility of the site to shrub establishment. Key indicators of approach to transition: Increase in the relative abundance of dropseeds and threeawns Presence of shrub seedlings Loss of organic matter—evidenced by an increase in physical soil crusts 8 Transition back to Grassland (1b) Brush control is necessary to initiate the transition back to the grassland state. If adequate fuel loads remain, possibly the reintroduction of fire as a management tool will assist in the transition back, however, mixed results have been observed concerning the effects of fire on black grama grasslands.6 Prescribed grazing will help ensure adequate rest following brush control and will assist in the establishment and maintenance of grass cover capable of sustaining fire.

State 3

Shrub Dominated

Community 3.1

Shrub Dominated

Shrub-Dominated: Across the range of soil types included in the Shallow Sandy site, mesquite is typically the dominant shrub, but it does occur as a co-dominant or sub-dominant species with creosotebush or broom snakeweed. Mesquite tends to dominate when the Shallow Sandy site occurs as part of a complex or in association with Sandy or Loamy Sand sites. Creosotebush tends to dominate on Shallow Sandy sites that occur as part of, or adjacent to Shallow Sites. Broom snakeweed increases in response to heavy grazing, but tends to cycle in and out depending on timing of rainfall. However, once the site is dominated by shrubs and snakeweed becomes well established, it tends to remain as a major component in the shrub dominated state. Diagnosis: Mesquite, creosotebush, or snakeweed cover is high, exceeding that of grasses. Grass cover is patchy with large connected bare areas present. Black grama, threeawns, or dropseeds may be the dominant grass. Evidence of accelerated wind erosion in the form of pedestalling of plants, and soil deposition around shrub bases may be common. Transition to Shrub-Dominated (2) Persistent loss of grass cover and the resulting increased competition between shrubs and remaining grasses for dwindling resources (especially soil moisture) may drive this transition.⁵ Additionally periods of increased winter precipitation may facilitate periodic episodes of shrub expansion and establishment. 4 Key indicators of approach to transition: Increase in size and frequency of bare patches. Loss of grass cover in shrub interspaces. Increased signs of erosion, evidenced by pedestalling of plants, and soil and litter deposition on leeward side of plants. 7 Transition back to Grassland (3) Brush control is necessary to reduce competition from shrubs and reestablish grasses. Range seeding may be necessary if insufficient grasses remain, The benefits, and costs, will vary depending upon the degree of site degradation, and adequate precipitation following seeding.

Additional community tables

Table 7. Community 1.1 plant community composition

Group	Common Name	Symbol	Scientific Name	Annual Production (Kg/Hectare)	Foliar Cover (%)
Grass/Grasslike					
1	Warm Season			463–555	
	black grama	BOER4	<i>Bouteloua eriopoda</i>	463–555	–
2	Warm Season			46–93	
	bush muhly	MUPO2	<i>Muhlenbergia porteri</i>	46–93	–
3	Warm Season			46–93	

	blue grama	BOGR2	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	46–93	–
4	Warm Season			28–46	
	sideoats grama	BOCU	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	28–46	–
5	Warm Season			46–93	
	spike dropseed	SPCO4	<i>Sporobolus contractus</i>	46–93	–
	sand dropseed	SPCR	<i>Sporobolus cryptandrus</i>	46–93	–
	mesa dropseed	SPFL2	<i>Sporobolus flexuosus</i>	46–93	–
6	Warm Season			19–46	
	threeawn	ARIST	<i>Aristida</i>	19–46	–
7	Warm Season			46–93	
	Arizona cottontop	DICA8	<i>Digitaria californica</i>	46–93	–
	plains bristlegrass	SEVU2	<i>Setaria vulpiseta</i>	46–93	–
8	Warm Season			46–93	
	mat sandbur	CELO3	<i>Cenchrus longispinus</i>	46–93	–
	hooded windmill grass	CHCU2	<i>Chloris cucullata</i>	46–93	–
9	Other Perennial Grasses			28–46	
	Grass, perennial	2GP	<i>Grass, perennial</i>	28–46	–
Shrub/Vine					
10	Shrub			9–28	
	javelina bush	COER5	<i>Condalia ericoides</i>	9–28	–
11	Shrub			9–28	
	yucca	YUCCA	<i>Yucca</i>	9–28	–
12	Shrub			9–28	
	jointfir	EPHED	<i>Ephedra</i>	9–28	–
	littleleaf ratany	KRER	<i>Krameria erecta</i>	9–28	–
13	Shrub			9–28	
	featherplume	DAFO	<i>Dalea formosa</i>	9–28	–
14	Shrub			9–28	
	broom snakeweed	GUSA2	<i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i>	9–28	–
15	Other Shrubs			28–46	
	Shrub (>.5m)	2SHRUB	<i>Shrub (>.5m)</i>	28–46	–
Forb					
16	Forb			19–46	
	leatherweed	CRPOP	<i>Croton pottsii</i> var. <i>pottsii</i>	19–46	–

	Goodding's tansyaster	MAPIG2	<i>Machaeranthera pinnatifida</i> <i>ssp. gooddingii</i> var. <i>gooddingii</i>	19–46	–
17	Forb			19–46	
	woolly groundsel	PACA15	<i>Packera cana</i>	19–46	–
	threadleaf ragwort	SEFLF	<i>Senecio flaccidus</i> var. <i>flaccidus</i>	19–46	–
18	Forb			9–28	
	whitest evening primrose	OEAL	<i>Oenothera albicaulis</i>	9–28	–
19	Other Forbs			9–28	
	Forb (herbaceous, not grass nor grass-like)	2FORB	<i>Forb (herbaceous, not grass nor grass-like)</i>	9–28	–

Animal community

This site provides habitats which support a resident animal community that is characterized by pronghorn antelope, swift fox, black-tailed jackrabbit, spotted ground squirrel, Ord's kangaroo rat, northern grasshopper mouse, coyote, horned lark, meadowlark, lark bunting, scaled quail, morning dove, side-blotched lizard, round-tailed horned lizard, marbled whiptail, prairie rattlesnake and ornate box turtle.

Hydrological functions

The runoff curve numbers are determined by field investigations using hydraulic cover conditions and hydrologic soil groups.

Hydrologic Interpretations

Soil Series Hydrologic Group

Jarag D

Simona D

Recreational uses

This site offers recreation for hiking, horseback riding, nature observation and photography, and quail and dove hunting. During years of abundant spring moisture, this site displays a riot of color from wildflowers during May and June. A few summer and fall flowers also occur.

Wood products

The natural potential plant community of this site affords little or no wood products. Where the site has been invaded by mesquite or cholla cactus the roots and stems of these plants provide attractive material for a variety of curiosities, such as lamps and small furniture.

Other products

This site is suitable for grazing by all kinds and classes of livestock during all seasons of the year. Because of the sandy textures and shallow profile, this site will respond rapidly to management. As this site deteriorates, plants such as black grama, bush muhly, blue and sideoats grama, plains bristlegrass and Arizona cottontop, will decrease and be replaced by plants such as threeawns, mesquite, creosote bush, and broom snakeweed. This also causes a decrease in ground cover, leaving the soil to blow. This site responds best to a system of management that rotates the season of use.

Other information

Guide to Suggested Initial Stocking Rate Acres per Animal Unit Month

Similarity Index Ac/AUM

100 - 76 2.5 – 3.5

75 – 51 3.2 – 4.6

50 – 26 4.5 – 7.5

25 – 0 7.6 +

Inventory data references

Data collection for this site was done in conjunction with the progressive soil surveys within the Southern Desertic Basins, Plains and Mountains, Major Land Resource Areas of New Mexico. This site has been mapped and correlated with soils in the following soil surveys. Eddy County, Lea County, and Chaves County.

Other references

Literature References:

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Kozlowski, T. T.; Ahlgren, C. E., eds. Fire and ecosystems. New York: Academic Press: 365-400.

4. Moir, W.H., and J. A. Ludwig. 1991. Plant succession and changing land features in desert grasslands. P. 15-18. In P.F. Ffolliott and W.T. Swank (eds.) People and the temperate region: a summary of research from the United States Man and the Biosphere Program 1991. U.S. Dept. State, Publ No. 9839, Nat. Tech. Info. Serv., U.S. Dept. Commerce, Springfield, Illinois. 63 p.

5. Tiedemann, A. R. and J. O. Klemmedson. 1977. Effect of mesquite trees on vegetation and soils in the desert grassland. J. Range Manage. 30: 361-367.

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7. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2001. Soil Quality Information Sheets. Rangeland Soil Quality—Wind Erosion. Rangeland Sheet 10 [Online]. Available: <http://www.statlab.iastate.edu/survey/SQL/range.html>

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Contributors

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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	

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

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:**
