

United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ecological Site Description

Site Type: Rangeland

Site Name: Wet Meadow

Site ID: R067BY038CO

Major Land Resource Area: 67B – Central High Plains, Southern Part

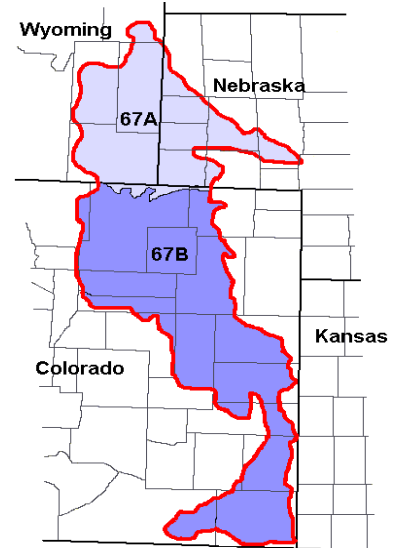
Physiographic Features

This site occurs on level to gently sloping slopes.

Landform: floodplains

Aspect: N/A

| | <u>Minimum</u> | <u>Maximum</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Elevation (feet): | 3800 | 5600 |
| Slope (percent): | 0 | 3 |
| Water Table Depth (inches): | 5 | 36 |
| Flooding: | | |
| Frequency: | occasional | frequent |
| Duration: | brief | brief |
| Ponding: | | |
| Depth (inches): | 0 | 0 |
| Frequency: | none | none |
| Duration: | none | none |
| Runoff Class: | negligible | low |



Climatic Features

The mean average annual precipitation varies from 12 to 16 inches per year depending on location and ranges from less than 8 inches to over 20 inches per year. Approximately 75 percent of the annual precipitation occurs during the growing season from mid-April to late-September. Snowfall can vary greatly from year to year but averages 35 to 45 inches per year. Winds are estimated to average about 9 miles per hour annually, ranging from 10 miles per hour during the spring to 9 miles per hour during late summer. Daytime winds are generally stronger than nighttime and occasional strong storms may bring periods of high winds with gusts to more than 90 miles per hour.

The average length of the growing season is 142 days, but varies from 129 to 154 days. The average date of first frost in the fall is September 28, and the last frost in the spring is about May 9. July is the hottest month and December and January are the coldest. It is not uncommon for the temperature to exceed 100 degrees F during the summer. Summer humidity is low and evaporation is high. The winters are characterized with frequent northerly winds, producing severe cold with temperatures dropping to -35 degrees F or lower.

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Growth of native cool season plants begins about March 15 and continues to about June 15. Native warm season plants begin growth about May 15 and continue to about August 15. Regrowth of cool season plants occurs in September and October of most years, depending on moisture.

| | <u>Minimum</u> | <u>Maximum</u> |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Frost-free period (days): | 129 | 154 |
| Freeze-free period (days): | 151 | 178 |
| Mean Annual Precipitation (inches): | 12 | 16 |

Average Monthly Precipitation (inches) and Temperature (°F):

| | Precip. Min. | Precip. Max | Temp. Min. | Temp. Max. |
|-----------|--------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| January | 0.32 | 0.36 | 12.0 | 45.1 |
| February | 0.26 | 0.38 | 15.9 | 50.9 |
| March | 0.83 | 0.87 | 22.3 | 58.9 |
| April | 1.28 | 1.38 | 30.1 | 69.1 |
| May | 2.32 | 2.49 | 39.9 | 78.0 |
| June | 1.93 | 2.57 | 49.0 | 88.7 |
| July | 1.42 | 2.31 | 55.0 | 93.9 |
| August | 1.07 | 2.38 | 53.5 | 91.9 |
| September | 1.02 | 1.40 | 43.8 | 83.8 |
| October | 0.89 | 1.00 | 32.5 | 72.9 |
| November | 0.52 | 0.53 | 20.9 | 57.4 |
| December | 0.34 | 0.37 | 11.9 | 46.9 |

| Climate Stations | | Period | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Station ID | Location or Name | From | To |
| CO0945 | Briggsdale | 1948 | 2000 |
| CO4076 | Holly | 1918 | 2000 |
| CO9147 | Windsor | 1948 | 1990 |

For local climate stations that may be more representative, refer to <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov>.

Influencing Water Features

This ecological site has a combination of physical and hydrological features that: 1) provide season-long ground water within 3.5 feet of the surface, 2) allows relatively free movement of water and air in the upper part of the soil, and 3) are rarely, or occasionally flooded.

| Wetland Description: | <u>System</u> | <u>Subsystem</u> | <u>Class</u> | <u>Sub-class</u> |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Cowardin, et al., 1979 | Palustrine | N/A | Emergent Wetland | Persistent |

Representative Soil Features

The soils of this site are very deep, poorly to somewhat poorly drained, and moderately to rapidly permeable. These soils occur on floodplains. Some soils have 5-40% rock fragments in underlying material. The available water capacity is typically very low to low. The soil surface layer is typically 12 to 30 inches thick.

The Historic Climax Plant Community (HCPC) should show slight to no evidence of rills, wind scoured areas or pedestalled plants. Water flow paths are broken, irregular in appearance or discontinuous with numerous debris dams or vegetative barriers. The soil surface is stable and intact. Sub-surface soil layers are non-restrictive to water movement and root penetration.

Major soil series correlated to this ecological site include: Edgewater

Other soil series that have been correlated to this site include: Bijou wet, Wet Alluvial Land, Aquepts

Parent Material Kind: alluvium

Parent Material Origin: mixed

Surface Texture: loam, sandy loam

Surface Texture Modifier: none

Subsurface Texture Group: loamy

Surface Fragments $\leq 3''$ (% Cover): 0

Surface Fragments $> 3''$ (%Cover): 0

Subsurface Fragments $\leq 3''$ (% Volume): 5 - 40

Subsurface Fragments $> 3''$ (% Volume): 0

| | <u>Minimum</u> | <u>Maximum</u> |
|---|----------------|-----------------|
| Drainage Class: | poorly | somewhat poorly |
| Permeability Class: | moderate | moderate rapid |
| Depth (inches): | 60 | 80 |
| Electrical Conductivity (mmhos/cm)*: | 0 | 2 |
| Sodium Absorption Ratio*: | 0 | 0 |
| Soil Reaction (1:1 Water)*: | 6.6 | 8.4 |
| Available Water Capacity (inches)*: | 2 | 5 |
| Calcium Carbonate Equivalent (percent)*: | 0 | 5 |

*These attributes represent 0-40 inches in depth or to the first restrictive layer.

Plant Communities

Ecological Dynamics of the Site:

Continuous grazing without adequate recovery periods following each grazing occurrence will cause prairie cordgrass, Indiangrass, big bluestem, switchgrass, Nebraska sedge and false indigo to decrease in frequency and production. Kentucky bluegrass, Baltic rush, scouring rush and other various grass-like species will increase forming a cool season dominated plant community. Heavy continuous grazing or excessive defoliation will ultimately result in a plant community dominated by foxtail barley and annuals. Excessive litter, decadence and plant mortality can result from the lack of fire or non-use. Extended periods of non-use (rest), lack of fire or heavy long term continuous grazing can lead to increase bare areas.

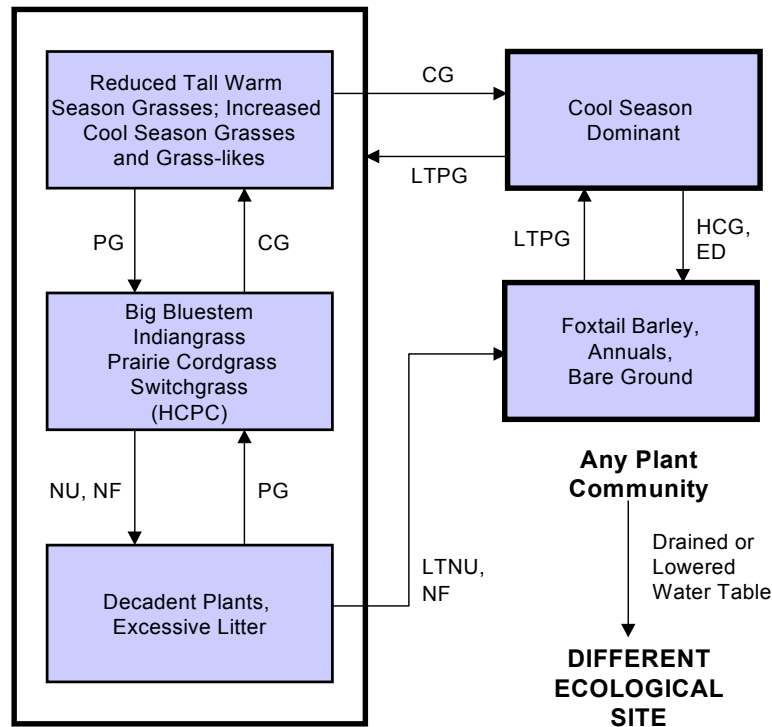
Colorado butterfly plant (*Gaura neomexicana*) and prairie gentian (*Eustoma exaltatum*) are listed in the Colorado Rare Plant Field Guide.

Irrigation (pumping) or drainage will cause water table levels to drop. Sustained reduction in water table levels will cause a different ecological site to develop.

The historic climax plant community (description follows the plant community diagram) has been determined by study of rangeland relic areas, areas protected from excessive disturbance, seasonal use pastures, short duration/time controlled grazing and historical accounts.

The following diagram illustrates the common plant communities that can occur on the site and the transition pathways (arrows) among communities. Bold lines surrounding each plant community or communities represent ecological thresholds. The ecological processes are discussed in more detail in the plant community descriptions following the diagram.

Plant Communities and Transitional Pathways



CG - continuous grazing without adequate recovery opportunity, **ED** - excessive defoliation, **HCG** - heavy continuous grazing, **HCPC** - Historic Climax Plant Community, **LTNU** - long term non-use (>40 years), **LTPG** - long-term prescribed grazing (>20 years), **NF**, **NU** - no fire, non-use, **PG** - prescribed grazing with adequate recovery opportunity

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| | | | Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, Switchgrass, Prairie Cordgrass (HPCP) | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|---|-------------|---------|
| COMMON/GROUP NAME | SCIENTIFIC NAME | SYMBOL | Group | lbs./acre | % Comp |
| GRASSES & GRASS-LIKES | | | 1 | 3400 - 3800 | 85 - 95 |
| big bluestem | Andropogon gerardii | ANGE | 1 | 600 - 1000 | 15 - 25 |
| Indiangrass | Sorghastrum nutans | SONU2 | 1 | 600 - 1000 | 15 - 25 |
| prairie cordgrass | Spartina pectinata | SPPE | 1 | 600 - 1000 | 15 - 25 |
| switchgrass | Panicum virgatum | PAVI2 | 1 | 600 - 800 | 15 - 20 |
| western wheatgrass | Pascopyrum smithii | PASM | 1 | 200 - 400 | 5 - 10 |
| Canada wildrye | Elymus canadensis | ELCA4 | 1 | 80 - 200 | 2 - 5 |
| slender wheatgrass | Elymus trachycaulus | ELTR7 | 1 | 40 - 120 | 1 - 3 |
| little bluestem | Schizachyrium scoparium | SCSC | 1 | 40 - 80 | 1 - 2 |
| American sloughgrass | Beckmannia syzigachne | BESY | 1 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| annual rabbitsfoot grass | Polypogon monspeliensis | POMO5 | 1 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| foxtail barley | Hordeum jubatum | HOJU | 1 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| vine mesquite (south) | Panicum obtusum | PAOB | 1 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| | | | | | |
| Nebraska sedge | Carex nebrascensis | CANE2 | 1 | 200 - 400 | 5 - 10 |
| Baltic rush | Juncus balticus | JUBA | 1 | 40 - 80 | 1 - 2 |
| bulrush | Scirpus spp. | SCIRP | 1 | 40 - 80 | 1 - 2 |
| scouring rush | Equisetum laevigatum | EQLA | 1 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| other perennial grass-likes | | 2GLP | 1 | 80 - 200 | 2 - 5 |
| | | | | | |
| other perennial grasses | | 2GP | 1 | 40 - 200 | 1 - 5 |
| FORBS | | | 2 | 160 - 400 | 4 - 10 |
| showy prairie gentian | Eustoma exaltatum ssp. russellianum | EUEXR | 2 | 40 - 200 | 1 - 5 |
| American licorice | Glycyrrhiza lepidota | GLLE3 | 2 | 40 - 80 | 1 - 2 |
| Colorado butterflyplant | Gaura neomexicana ssp. coloradensis | GANEC | 2 | 40 - 80 | 1 - 2 |
| false boneset | Brickellia eupatorioides | BREU | 2 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| giant goldenrod | Solidago gigantea | SOGI | 2 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| heath aster | Symphyotrichum ericoides | SYER | 2 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| maximilian sunflower | Helianthus maximiliani | HEMA2 | 2 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| Pennsylvania smartweed | Polygonum pensylvanicum | POPE2 | 2 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| rag sumpweed | Iva xanthifolia | IVXA | 2 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| swamp milkweed | Asclepias incarnata | ASIN | 2 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| threelobe beggarticks | Bidens tripartita | BITR | 2 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| | | | | | |
| other perennial forbs | | 2FP | 2 | 40 - 200 | 1 - 5 |
| SHRUBS | | | 3 | 40 - 200 | 1 - 5 |
| desert false indigo | Amorpha fruticosa | AMFR | 3 | 40 - 80 | 1 - 2 |
| western snowberry | Symphoricarpos occidentalis | SYOC | 3 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| Woods' rose | Rosa woodsii | ROWO | 3 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |
| | | | | | |
| other shrubs | | 2SHRUB | 3 | 0 - 40 | 0 - 1 |

| | Annual Production lbs./acre | | LOW | RV* | HIGH |
|--|----------------------------------|--|--------|------|-------|
| | GRASSES & GRASS-LIKES | | 3310 - | 3600 | -4370 |
| | FORBS | | 155 - | 280 | -425 |
| | SHRUBS | | 35 - | 120 | -205 |
| | TOTAL | | 3500 - | 4000 | -5000 |

Technical Guide

Section IIE

Plant Community Narratives

Following are the narratives for each of the described plant communities. These plant communities may not represent every possibility, but they probably are the most prevalent and repeatable plant communities. The plant composition table shown above has been developed from the best available knowledge at the time of this revision. As more data is collected, some of these plant communities may be revised or removed, and new ones may be added. None of these plant communities should necessarily be thought of as “Desired Plant Communities”. According to the USDA NRCS National Range and Pasture Handbook, Desired Plant Communities will be determined by the decision makers and will meet minimum quality criteria established by the NRCS. The main purpose for including any description of a plant community here is to capture the current knowledge and experience at the time of this revision.

Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, Switchgrass, Prairie Cordgrass Plant Community

This plant community is the interpretive plant community for this site and is considered to be the Historic Climax Plant Community (HCPC). This community evolved with grazing by large herbivores and is well suited for grazing by domestic livestock. Historically, fires occurred infrequently. This plant community can be found on areas that receive adequate recovery periods following each grazing event during the growing season. The potential vegetation is about 85-95% grasses and grass-like, 4-10% forbs and 1-5% woody plants.

Tall warm season grasses dominate this community. The major grasses include big bluestem, Indiangrass, prairie cordgrass and switchgrass. Other grasses and grass-like occurring on the community include western wheatgrass, Canada wildrye, Baltic rush, spikerushes, bulrushes and Nebraska sedge. Key forbs and shrubs include American licorice, Colorado butterfly plant, prairie gentian and false indigo.

This plant community is diverse, stable, productive and is well adapted to the Northern Great Plains. The high water table supplies much of the moisture for plant growth. Plant litter is properly distributed with little movement and natural plant mortality is very low. This is a sustainable plant community in terms of soil stability, watershed function and biologic integrity.

Total annual production ranges from 3500 to 5000 pounds of air-dry vegetation per acre and will average 4000 pounds during an average year.

The following is an estimated growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year. Vegetative growth begins earlier in the southern reaches (Baca, Bent, Kiowa, Las Animas and Prowers counties) of MLRA-67B. Vegetative growth will typically be suppressed during the months of June through August in these counties due to higher evapotranspiration rates.

Growth curve number: CO6713

Growth curve name: Warm season dominant, cool season sub-dominant; MLRA-67B; lowland water influenced soils.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 0 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 20 | 30 | 20 | 12 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

(monthly percentages of total annual growth)

Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows:

- Continuous grazing without adequate recovery periods between grazing events will shift this plant community toward the *Reduced Tall Warm Season Grasses; Increased Cool Season grasses and Grass-like Plant Community*.
- Non-use (no grazing and/or no haying) and no fire will move this plant community toward the *Decadent Plants, Excessive Litter Plant Community*. Initially, excess litter begins to build-up. Eventually native plants can show signs of mortality and decadence.

- Prescribed grazing that allows for adequate recovery opportunity following each grazing event and proper stocking will maintain the *Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, Prairie Cordgrass, Switchgrass Plant Community (HCPC)*.

Reduced Tall Warm Season Grasses; Increased Cool Season Grasses and Grass-likes Plant Community

This plant community developed with continuous grazing without adequate recovery opportunities between grazing events. Big bluestem, prairie cordgrass, Indiangrass, switchgrass, Canada wildrye, Nebraska sedge and false indigo have been significantly reduced. Western wheatgrass may initially increase or decrease depending upon the season of use. Baltic rush has increased. Forbs and shrubs are still present in small amounts. This plant community is at risk of losing tall warm season grasses, palatable forbs and shrubs.

The plants in this community have decreased in frequency and production. Less litter can be expected however, the soil remains stable with water and nutrient cycles still functioning although, somewhat impaired.

Total annual production, during an average year, ranges from 1800 to 3500 pounds per acre air-dry weight and will average 2500 pounds.

The following is an estimated growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year. Vegetative growth begins earlier in the southern reaches (Baca, Bent, Kiowa, Las Animas and Prowers counties) of MLRA-67B. Vegetative growth will typically be suppressed during the months of June through August in these counties due to higher evapotranspiration rates.

Growth curve number: CO6714

Growth curve name: Cool season dominant, warm season sub-dominant; MLRA-67B; lowland water influenced soils.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 0 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 25 | 40 | 15 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

(monthly percentages of total annual growth)

Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows:

- Continuous grazing without adequate recovery periods between grazing events will shift this plant community across an ecological threshold toward the *Cool Season Dominated Plant Community*.
- Prescribed grazing with adequate recovery periods between grazing events and proper stocking will move this plant community back toward the *Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, Prairie Cordgrass, Switchgrass Plant Community (HCPC)*.

Decadent Plants, Excessive Litter Plant Community

This plant community developed under the absence (20 years or more) of grazing, fire and/or haying. The dominant plants tend to be similar to those found in the Historic Climax Plant Community.

Prescribed grazing, haying or fire followed by prescribed grazing can move this plant community toward the HCPC. Much of the plant nutrients are tied up in excessive litter. Organic matter oxidizes in the air rather than being incorporated into the soil due to the absence of animal impact. Excessive litter levels prevent sunlight from reaching plant crowns and in time can stagnate the plant community. Tall grasses such as Indiangrass, big bluestem, switchgrass and prairie cordgrass, can become decadent and eventually die.

Total annual production can vary substantially from 1000 to 3500 pounds of air-dry vegetation per acre depending on how long this plant community has developed in the absence of haying, grazing or fire.

The following is an estimated growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year. Vegetative growth begins earlier in the southern reaches (Baca, Bent, Kiowa, Las Animas and Prowers counties) of MLRA-67B. Vegetative growth will typically be suppressed during the months of June through August in these counties due to higher evapotranspiration rates.

Growth curve number: CO6715

Growth curve name: Warm season/cool season co-dominant, excess litter; MLRA-67B; lowland water influenced soils.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 20 | 35 | 20 | 10 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

(monthly percentages of total annual growth)

Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows:

- Prescribed grazing with adequate recovery opportunities between grazing events or prescribed burning followed by prescribed grazing will move this plant community toward the *Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, Prairie Cordgrass, Switchgrass Plant Community (HCPC)*. This can occur relatively fast.
- Long term non-use (no haying, no grazing) in absence of fire will shift this plant community across an ecological threshold to the *Foxtail Barley, Annuals, and Bare Ground Plant Community*. This transition can take greater than 40 years to achieve.

Cool Season Dominated Plant Community

This plant community develops under continuous grazing without adequate recovery opportunities between grazing events. The plant community is predominantly cool season grasses and grass-like. Baltic rush and foxtail barley has increased and Kentucky bluegrass has invaded. Remnant amounts of western wheatgrass may still persist in localized colonies. Tall warm season grasses (prairie cordgrass, big bluestem, Indiangrass, switchgrass) as well as false indigo have been removed.

This community remains stable but has lost much of its production and diversity. Nutrient cycle is impaired due to the loss of tall grass species, deep-rooted forbs (legumes and others) and shrubs. Soil compaction can be a concern if continuously grazed during wet cycles. Desertification is advanced.

Total annual production, during an average year, ranges from 1000 to 1700 pounds per acre air-dry weight and will average 1300 pounds.

The following is an estimated growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year. Vegetative growth begins earlier in the southern reaches (Baca, Bent, Kiowa, Las Animas and Prowers counties) of MLRA-67B. Vegetative growth will typically be suppressed during the months of June through August in these counties due to higher evapotranspiration rates.

Growth curve number: CO6717

Growth curve name: Cool season dominant; MLRA-67B; lowland water influenced soils.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 0 | 0 | 5 | 13 | 25 | 30 | 15 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

(monthly percentages of total annual growth)

Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows:

- Heavy continuous grazing or excessive defoliation without adequate recovery periods following each grazing event will shift this plant community across an ecological threshold to the *Foxtail Barley, Annuals and Bare Ground Plant Community*.

- Long term prescribed grazing with adequate recovery periods following each grazing occurrence will move this plant community toward the *Reduced Tall Warm Season Grasses; Increased Cool Season Grasses and Grass-like Plant Community* and will eventually return to the HCPC or associated successional stages assuming an adequate seed/vegetative source is available. This is a long-term transition requiring 20 years or more to accomplish.

Foxtail Barley, Annuals, Bare Ground Plant Community

This plant community develops from continuous and heavy grazing especially through the growing season. The plant composition consists of primarily foxtail barley and introduced annuals such as Russian thistle and kochia. Kentucky bluegrass may persist in small amounts. Remnants of western wheatgrass and other species may be present.

Compared to the Historic Climax Plant Community, all perennial plants have been greatly reduced with only remnants of the most grazing tolerant species remaining. Plant diversity and production are very low. Planned rest periods during the growing season will improve the vigor of any the plant species present.

Wind and water erosion may occur at low amounts due to increased bare ground. Litter amounts are greatly reduced. Mineral crusting caused by raindrop impact disrupts surface soil aggregates, increasing ponding and slowing infiltration. Carbon storage/nutrient cycling has been greatly reduced. Continued heavy use will cause severe compaction problems. Animal wastes can contaminate ground water or runoff. Desertification is obvious.

Total annual production, during an average year, ranges from 100 to 600 pounds per acre air-dry weight.

The following is an estimated growth curve of this plant community expected during a normal year. Vegetative growth begins earlier in the southern reaches (Baca, Bent, Kiowa, Las Animas and Prowers counties) of MLRA-67B. Vegetative growth will typically be suppressed during the months of June through August in these counties due to higher evapotranspiration rates.

Growth curve number: CO6714

Growth curve name: Cool season dominant, warm season sub-dominant; MLRA-67B; lowland water influenced soils.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 0 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 25 | 40 | 15 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

(monthly percentages of total annual growth)

Transitions or pathways leading to other plant communities are as follows:

- Long term prescribed grazing with adequate recovery periods between grazing events and proper stocking will shift this plant community toward the *Cool Season Dominated Plant Community*. The rate of this transition can be extremely variable depending on how degraded the community has become and availability of an adequate seed/vegetative source.

Formation of Different Ecological Site

If any plant community is subjected to persistent water table depletion due to irrigation or drainage, a different ecological site will eventually form.

Ecological Site Interpretations

Animal Community – Wildlife Interpretations

Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, Switchgrass, Prairie Cordgrass Plant Community and Reduced Tall Warm Season Grasses; Increased Cool Season Grasses and Grass-like Plant Community

The lack of shrubs in these plant communities affects the expected wildlife species. Common bird species expected include lark and grasshopper sparrow, chestnut collared longspur, lark bunting, western meadowlark, and ferruginous and Swainson's hawks. Pheasants may use these sites for nesting if other habitat components such as cropland are nearby. Migratory waterfowl may use these communities if seasonal water is available.

White-tailed and black-tailed jackrabbit, badger, pronghorn, coyote, swift fox, plains pocket gopher, long-tailed weasel, and several species of mice are mammals that commonly use this plant community. Reptiles using this community include western rattlesnake, bullsnake, plains garter snake, western hognose snake, racer, western box turtle, and six-lined racerunner.

Decadent Plants, Excessive Litter Plant Community

Although the HCPC species are still expected here although the degraded habitat conditions will limit wildlife carrying capacity.

Cool Season Dominated Plant Community and Foxtail Barley, Annuals, Bare Ground Plant Communities

The shift away from tall grasses to short and mid grasses and grass like species results in a change in bird species expected here. Killdeer, McCown's longspur, horned lark, long-billed curlew, mountain plover, and burrowing owl replace the HCPC bird species as the shorter grasses become dominant.

Reptiles from the HCPC are still expected on these communities. The HCPC mammals would be expected here along with increasing numbers of black-tailed prairie dog, desert cottontail, and thirteen-lined ground squirrel.

Other Potential Species

The plains spadefoot is the only common species of frog or toad inhabiting grasslands in Eastern Colorado. This species requires water for breeding. Tiger salamanders may be found on grassland sites, but require a water body for breeding. Either of these species may be found in any plant community if seasonal water requirements are met. Mule and white-tailed deer may use this ecological site, however the shrub cover is too low to provide escape or hiding cover. On ecological site locations near riparian areas, deer will use the vegetation for feeding. Deer mouse is a common grassland species on the eastern plains. Big brown bats will use any plant community on this ecological site if a building site is in the area. The gray wolf, black-footed ferret, and wild bison used this ecological site in historic times. The wolf and ferret are thought to be extirpated from Eastern Colorado. Bison are currently found only as domestic livestock.

Animal Preferences (Quarterly – 1,2,3,4[†])

| Common Name | Cattle | Sheep | Horses | Deer | Antelope | Bison | Elk |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------|---------|
| Grasses and Grass-like | | | | | | | |
| big bluestem | U D P D | U D U U | U D P D | U D U U | U D U U | U D P D | U D P D |
| Canada wildrye | U D U U | N U N N | U D U U | N U N N | N U N N | U D U U | U D U U |
| foxtail barley | U D N N | N P N N | U D N N | N P N N | N P N N | U D N N | U D N N |
| Indiangrass | U D P D | U D U U | U D P D | U D U U | U D U U | U D P D | U D P D |
| little bluestem | U D P U | N D D N | U D P U | N D D N | N D D N | U D P U | U D P U |
| prairie cordgrass | U D D U | N N N N | U D D U | N N N N | N N N N | U D D U | U D D U |
| slender wheatgrass | U P U U | N D U N | U P U U | N D U N | N D U N | U P U U | U P U U |
| switchgrass | U D D U | U D U U | U D D U | U D U U | U D U U | U D D U | U D D U |
| vine mesquite | U D P U | U D D U | U D P U | U D D U | U D D U | U D P U | U D P U |
| western wheatgrass | U P D D | U P D D | U P D D | U P D D | U P D D | U P D D | U P D D |
| Baltic rush | N N N N | N N N N | N N N N | N N N N | N N N N | N N N N | N N N N |
| bulrush | U U U U | N N N N | U U U U | N N N N | N N N N | U U U U | U U U U |
| Nebraska sedge | U P U D | U P N D | U P U D | U P N D | U P N D | U P U D | U P U D |
| Forbs | | | | | | | |
| American licorice | U U D U | N U U N | U U D U | N U U N | N U U N | U U D U | U U D U |
| false boneset | U U D U | N D U N | U U D U | N D U N | N D U N | U U D U | U U D U |
| goldenrod | U U D U | N U U N | U U D U | N U U N | N U U N | U U D U | U U D U |
| heath aster | U U D U | U U P U | U U D U | U U P U | U U P U | U U D U | U U D U |
| maximilian sunflower | U D P U | U D P U | U D P U | U D P U | U D P U | U D P U | U D P U |
| Pennsylvania smartweed | U U D U | N N N N | U U D U | N N N N | N N N N | U U D U | U U D U |
| rag sumpweed | U U U U | N N N N | U U U U | N N N N | N N N N | U U U U | U U U U |
| showy prairie gentian | U U U U | N U U N | U U U U | N U U N | N U U N | U U U U | U U U U |
| Shrubs | | | | | | | |
| western snowberry | U U U U | U U U U | U U U U | U U U U | U U U U | U U U U | U U U U |
| Woods' rose | U D D U | U D D U | U D D U | U D D U | U D D U | U D D U | U D D U |

N = not used; **U** = undesirable; **D** = desirable; **P** = preferred; **T** = toxic

[†] Quarters: 1 – Jan., Feb., Mar.; 2 – Apr., May, Jun.; 3 – Jul., Aug., Sep.; 4 – Oct., Nov., Dec.

Animal Community – Grazing Interpretations

The following table lists suggested initial stocking rates for cattle under continuous grazing (year long grazing or growing season long grazing) under normal growing conditions however, *continuous grazing is not recommended*. These are conservative estimates that should be used only as guidelines in the initial stages of the conservation planning process. Often, the current plant composition does not entirely match any particular plant community (described in this ecological site description). Because of this, a field visit is recommended, in all cases, to document plant composition and production. More precise carrying capacity estimates should eventually be calculated using the following stocking rate information along with animal preference data, particularly when grazers other than cattle are involved. Under more intensive grazing management, improved harvest efficiencies can result in an increased carrying capacity.

| Plant Community | Production (lbs./acre) | Stocking Rate (AUM/acre) |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, Switchgrass, Prairie Cordgrass (HCPC) | 4000 | 1.28 |
| Reduced Tall Warm Grass; Increased Cool Seasons | 2500 | 0.80 |
| Cool Season Dominated | 1300 | 0.42 |
| Decadent Plants, Excessive Litter | * | * |
| Foxtail Barley, Annuals, Bare Ground | * | * |

Grazing by domestic livestock is one of the major income-producing industries in the area. Rangelands in this area provide yearlong forage under prescribed grazing for cattle, sheep, horses and other herbivores. During the dormant period, livestock may need supplementation based on reliable forage analysis.

* Highly variable; stocking rate needs to be determined on site.

Hydrology Functions

Water is the principal factor limiting forage production on this site. This site is dominated by soils in hydrologic group A and B. Infiltration is moderate and runoff potential for this site varies from moderately poor to poor depending on ground cover. Areas where ground cover is less than 50% have the greatest potential to have reduced infiltration and higher runoff (refer to NRCS Section 4, National Engineering Handbook (NEH-4) for runoff quantities and hydrologic curves).

Recreational Uses

This site provides hunting, hiking, photography, bird watching and other opportunities. The wide varieties of plants that bloom from spring until fall have an esthetic value that appeals to visitors.

Wood Products

No appreciable wood products are present on the site.

Other Products

None noted.

Supporting Information

Associated Sites

- (R067BY035CO) – Salt Meadow
- (R067BY031CO) – Sandy Bottomland
- (R067BY029CO) – Sandy Meadow
- (R067BY073CO) – Riverbottom

Similar Sites

- (R067BY035CO) – Salt Meadow
[presence of alkali tolerant species, less production]
- (R067BY073CO) – Riverbottom
[presence of trees and more shrubs]

Inventory Data References

Information presented here has been derived from NRCS clipping data, numerous ocular estimates and other inventory data. Field observations from experienced range trained personnel were used extensively to develop this ecological site description. Specific data information is contained in individual landowner/user case files and other files located in county NRCS field offices.

Those involved in developing this site description include: Harvey Sprock, Rangeland Management Specialist, NRCS; Ben Berlinger, Rangeland Management Specialist, NRCS; James Borchert, Soil Scientist, NRCS; Terri Skadeland, Biologist, NRCS.

State Correlation

This site is specific to Colorado.

Field Offices

Akron, Brighton, Burlington, Byers, Cheyenne Wells, Eads, Flagler, Fort Collins, Fort Morgan, Greeley, Holly, Hugo, Kiowa, Lakewood (metro), Lamar, Longmont, Simla, Springfield, Sterling

Other References

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USDA, NRCS. National Water and Climate Center, 101 SW Main, Suite 1600, Portland, OR 97204-3224. (<http://wcc.nrcs.usda.gov>)

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Site Description Approval

/s/

03/25/2004

State Range Management Specialist

Date