

SECTION 2 – NATURAL RESOURCES INFORMATION

1. Soils

Soil Interpretations

Rangeland Interpretations

General

Information in this subsection can be used to plan the use and management of soils for rangeland, grazed forest land, and native pasture. Different kinds of soils vary in their capacity to produce native grasses and other plants suitable for grazing. Information in this subsection provides groupings of similar soils and estimates of potential forage production, which can be used to determine livestock stocking rates.

Definitions

Rangeland. Range is land on which the native vegetation (climax, or natural potential, plant community) is predominantly grasses, grasslike plants, forbs, and shrubs suitable for grazing and browsing. Range includes natural grasslands, savannas, many wetlands, some deserts, tundra, and certain shrub and forb communities. Rangeland receives no regular or frequent cultural treatment. The composition and production of the plant community are determined by soil, climate, topography, overstory canopy, and grazing management.

Grazed Forest Land. Includes land on which the understory includes, as an integral part of the forest plant community, plants that can be grazed without significantly impairing other forest values.

Native Pasture. Includes land on which the potential (climax) vegetation is forest but which is used and managed primarily for production of native plants for forage. Native pasture includes cut-over forest land and forest land cleared and now managed for native or naturalized forage plants.

In areas that have similar climate and topography, differences in the kind and amount of vegetation produced on rangeland are closely related to the kind of soil. Effective management is based on the relationship between the soils and vegetation and water. Information on rangeland production and plant communities can be found in two reports.

Rangeland Productivity Without Composition - Table C1

This table shows, for each soil that supports rangeland vegetation, the ecological site and the potential annual production of vegetation in favorable, normal, and unfavorable years. An explanation of the column headings in this table follows.

An ecological site is the product of all the environmental factors responsible for its development. It has characteristic soils that have developed over time throughout the soil development process; a characteristic hydrology, particularly infiltration and runoff that has developed over time; and a characteristic plant community (kind and amount of vegetation). The hydrology of a site is influenced by development of the soil and plant community. The vegetation, soils, and hydrology are all interrelated. Each is influenced by the others and influences the development of the others. The plant community on an ecological site is typified by an association of species that differs from that of other ecological sites in the kind and/or proportion of species or in total production. Descriptions of ecological sites are provided in this section of the Field Office Technical Guide.

Total dry-weight production is the amount of vegetation that can be expected to grow annually on well managed rangeland that is supporting the potential natural plant community. It includes all vegetation, whether or not it is palatable to grazing animals. It includes the current year's growth of leaves, twigs, and fruits of woody plants. It does not include the increase in stem diameter of trees and shrubs. It is expressed in pounds per acre of air-dry vegetation for favorable, normal, and unfavorable years. In a favorable year, the amount and distribution of precipitation and the temperatures make growing conditions substantially better than average. In a normal year, growing conditions are about average. In an unfavorable year, growing conditions are well below average, generally because of low available soil moisture. Yields are adjusted to a common percent of air-dry moisture content.

Rangeland Productivity With Composition - Table C2

This table shows, for each soil that supports vegetation suitable for grazing, the ecological site; the total annual production of vegetation in favorable, normal, and unfavorable years; the characteristic vegetation; and the average percentage of each species. An explanation of the column headings in this table follows.

An ecological site is the product of all the environmental factors responsible for its development. It has characteristic soils that have developed over time throughout the soil development process; a characteristic hydrology, particularly infiltration and runoff that has developed over time; and a characteristic plant community (kind and amount of vegetation). The hydrology of the site is influenced by development of the soil and plant community. The vegetation, soils, and hydrology are all interrelated. Each is influenced by the others and influences the development of the others. The plant community on an ecological

site is typified by an association of species that differs from that of other ecological sites in the kind and/or proportion of species or in total production. Descriptions of ecological sites are provided in the Field Office Technical Guide, which is available in local offices of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Total dry-weight production is the amount of vegetation that can be expected to grow annually in a well managed area that is supporting the potential natural plant community. It includes all vegetation, whether or not it is palatable to grazing animals. It includes the current year's growth of leaves, twigs, and fruits of woody plants. It does not include the increase in stem diameter of trees and shrubs. It is expressed in pounds per acre of air-dry vegetation for favorable, normal, and unfavorable years. In a favorable year, the amount and distribution of precipitation and the temperatures make growing conditions substantially better than average. In a normal year, growing conditions are about average. In an unfavorable year, growing conditions are well below average, generally because of low available soil moisture. Yields are adjusted to a common percent of air-dry moisture content.

Characteristic vegetation, the grasses, forbs, and shrubs that make up most of the potential natural plant community on each soil, is listed by common name. Under rangeland composition, the expected percentage of the total annual production is given for each species making up the characteristic vegetation. The amount that can be used as forage depends on the kinds of grazing animals and on the grazing season.

Two additional reports of interest are **Ecological Site/Plant Association w/ Production & Forest Understory - MO1** and **Ecological Site / Plant Association and Vegetation - MO1**. These reports combine the forestland and rangeland production and characteristic vegetation based on Ecological Site.

These reports are available on the Soil Data Mart <http://soildatamart.nrcs.usda.gov/Survey.aspx?State=WA>. Refer to the National Range and Pasture Handbook (and associated publications) – see FOTG Section I, (Reference List) for more information.