Nevada (Alkali) Bluegrass

Description

The Nevada (alkali) bluegrass community is common on saline, fine-textured, but not anaerobic soils. These wetlands are usually closed basins where water evaporates, often leaving a salt ring on the perimeter. Slender wheatgrass and mat muhly are found in association, the former growing throughout, while muhly grows in scattered patches. Slender wheatgrass is more susceptible to grazing and trampling impacts than either muhly or bluegrass because of its taller growth form and slower carbohydrate recovery rate. If overgrazed, and compacted, the plant community degrades to foxtail barley and Baltic rush, and further degrades to yarrow, gumweed and aster species.

Location

Southern interior plateau

Representative Reference Area

Lower Stone Pasture

BEC Correlation

GS01 in BG, PP and IDF zones

Site Characteristics

Soils

Clays with high salt content. Not solonetzic.

Elevation range

500 – 1400ml.

Seral Stages

PNC Climax & Late Seral

Nevada bluegrass community forms a fringe on the moist saline soils surrounding this wetland. Late Seral

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Plant Community PNC & Late Seral	
Species	**Canopy cover (%)**
Nevada (alkali) bluegrass	50-75
Slender wheatgrass	10-20
Mat muhly	1-5
Field sedge	1-5

Productivity
300 – 400 kg/ha

Range Management consideration
Soils are subject to compaction if grazed when wet. Nevada bluegrass has a low growing point and is resistant to grazing pressure and hoof damage. Slender wheatgrass is the first species to fall out of this plant community with overgrazing and compaction. Soil compaction favours foxtail barley, Baltic rush, field sedge, yarrow and gumweed.

Properly Functioning condition
PNC and late seral sites will score as properly functioning.

Early Seral

Nevada (alkali) bluegrass site showing degradation.
Early Seral.

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Nevada (alkali) bluegrass site now dominated by foxtail barley.
Early Seral.

Plant Community Early Seral	
Species	**Canopy cover (%)**
Foxtail barley	60-80
Baltic rush	5-15
Field sedge	5-15
Gumweed	1-5
Aster spp.	1

Productivity
150 – 200 kg/ha

Range Management consideration
The key to recovery on these sites is rest, incorporation of litter to ameliorate soil compaction and restoration of natural water levels. Recovery is slow on these sites.

Properly Functioning condition
Sites will score as moderate risk to non-functional. Low scores are due to soil compaction, poor rooting depth, loss of animal habitat, lack of litter and erosion.