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**WEEDY BROME GRASSES AND THEIR
POTENTIAL EFFECT ON THE INFILTRATION
AND RECHARGE RATES IN THE VICINITY OF
YUCCA MOUNTAIN, NEVADA**

Prepared for

**Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Contract NRC-02-97-009**

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August 1999

ABSTRACT

Invasion by weedy plant species and replacement of the dominant shrub cover on Yucca Mountain (YM) and recharge zones of the Death Valley regional aquifer system may have a significant effect on the long-term integrity of the proposed high-level nuclear waste repository. The literature documents that regions where deep-rooted shrubs or trees have been replaced by relatively shallow-rooted grasses exhibit increased recharge, higher water tables, and greater streamflow. If the deep-rooted native shrubs within the catchment for the groundwater flow system beneath YM are displaced by invading grasses—a phenomenon apparently occurring across the western United States—annual transpiration rates will decline leading to increases in infiltration. Under current climatic conditions it is likely there may be significant increases in percolation fluxes through the repository horizon, and groundwater velocities may increase significantly in the saturated zone. Conversion from shrubs to grasses may greatly amplify the effect on site-scale and regional hydrology if the climate changes to cooler and wetter conditions.

Two weedy annual grass species, both members of the genus *Bromus*, are of special interest. Foxtail chess (*B. madritensis* ssp. *rubens* L.),¹ a Eurasian species that has become naturalized in warm deserts of western North America, has already invaded southern Nevada. Observations indicate that a permanent conversion from native shrub species to foxtail chess may be in progress over large areas that include the proposed repository. Cheatgrass (*B. tectorum* L.) although found only in restricted locations on YM and apparently less well adapted to the current arid climate of YM, may have a greater impact on repository performance by greatly increasing regional recharge at higher elevations, thereby increasing regional groundwater levels and groundwater velocities from the repository to the receptor locations. This species has begun to dominate rangelands across Nevada between 5,000 and 8,000 ft elevation. With future climatic changes to a pluvial environment at YM, cheatgrass invasion will become more likely.

The objective of this work is to assess the hydrologic effect of *Bromus* invasion in regard to the potential release of radionuclides from the repository, transport through the natural barriers encompassed by the unsaturated and saturated zones, and eventual exposure to a postulated critical group in the vicinity of YM. To assess the effect of brome grasses on site-scale and regional hydrology, ongoing work is being performed to (i) characterize the grasses sufficiently to perform infiltration modeling studies, (ii) determine the conditions under which brome grasses are likely to dominate, and (iii) perform consequence analyses accounting for increased net infiltration on site-scale and regional flow systems, both under current conditions and under conditions expected over a glacial cycle.

¹ Nomenclature according to Hickman, 1993.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was prepared to document work performed by the Center for Nuclear Waste Regulatory Analyses (CNWRA) for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) under Contract No. NRC-02-97-009. The report is an independent product of the CNWRA and does not necessarily reflect the views or regulatory position of the NRC.

This report was improved by thorough technical, programmatic, and editorial reviews provided by Amit Armstrong (CNWRA), David Cooper (Consultant), Budhi Sagar (CNWRA), and Barbara Long (CNWRA). The careful formatting of the document and preparing of tables by Roseanne Ard (CNWRA) and Paulette Houston (CNWRA) is greatly appreciated.

QUALITY OF DATA, ANALYSES, AND CODE DEVELOPMENT

DATA: Soil sample collection and measurements characterizing grain size distributions, noted in table 2-1 of this report, have been recorded and described in scientific notebooks by the CNWRA authors following QAP-001. The grain size distribution measurements were done at the Utah State University Analytical Laboratories using standard procedures for sieving and hydrometer analysis. This laboratory, however, has not been reviewed by quality assurance auditors from CNWRA and, as such, the data is not qualified. No other CNWRA-generated original data are contained in this report. Sources for other data should be consulted for determining the level of quality for those data.

ANALYSES AND CODES: No analyses are presented and no computer codes were used in this report.

1 INTRODUCTION

Performance assessments (PAs) of the high-level waste (HLW) repository proposed to be sited at Yucca Mountain (YM), Nevada, consistently identify both percolation fluxes passing through the repository horizon to the water table and groundwater fluxes in the regional aquifer as being critical factors in repository performance. Fluxes through the repository horizon determine both modeled radionuclide release rates and the velocities from the repository to the water table. Groundwater fluxes in the regional aquifer affect the travel time from the repository to the water table (the water table may rise or fall with changing fluxes) and the travel time from the repository footprint to receptor locations.

Fluxes in the unsaturated and saturated zones are dependent on net infiltration, which in turn is dependent on precipitation, evapotranspiration, and runoff. Replacement of native deep-rooted shrubs by shallow-rooted grasses would be expected to increase net infiltration by decreasing evapotranspiration. In large precipitation events, wetting pulses may penetrate to below the relatively shallow rooting zone of the grasses, which roughly corresponds to the zone where evaporation is effective. Based on water balance studies, deep-rooted shrubs are able to intercept most or all of the moisture otherwise escaping to depth as net infiltration, particularly in areas with deep soil such as the alluvial flats common across southern Nevada. For example, net infiltration in the deep alluvium in Frenchman Flat is estimated at 0.04 mm/yr (Conrad, 1993). Noting that there is no competitive advantage in possessing phenologically expensive deep roots unless significant moisture penetrates to depth, shrubs must tap soil zones recharged by precipitation that are well below the shallow depths noted for *Bromus* roots. Therefore, removal of deep-rooted shrubs or replacement with shallow-rooted grasses would be expected to significantly increase net infiltration. There is evidence that such replacement is currently occurring across western North America, and in the YM region in particular, due to the invasion of two Eurasian weedy *Bromus* species that have become naturalized in western North America. The dominance of *Bromus* species under cooler and wetter conditions associated with a return to a glacial cycle would increase percolation above the repository and increase recharge to the regional aquifer thus leading to water table rises both below the repository and along the flow paths from the repository to the Amargosa Desert.

Throughout this report, the word soil is used in the context of any unconsolidated sediments ranging from the thin colluvial layers mantling hillslopes to the thick alluvial sequences filling washes and valleys.

The implications of shrub replacement by annual grasses have not been addressed in the context of YM PAs. This report is intended to (i) document that shrub replacement appears to be occurring at YM and in the region, (ii) provide a synopsis of mechanisms for replacement, (iii) identify potential impacts on repository performance under current and forecasted cooler and wetter climate conditions, and (iv) describe ongoing and recommended studies to bound the effect of shrub replacement by annual grasses on percolation estimates over the repository and recharge estimates over saturated zone regional and site-scale model domains. A description of the current status and ecology of the two grass species is provided in chapter 2, while mechanisms employed for invasion and consequent shrub replacement are discussed in chapter 3. Implications of this vegetation conversion for repository performance are presented in chapter 4.

2 ECOLOGY OF BROME GRASSES

2.1 BACKGROUND

Two Eurasian grass species, foxtail chess, [*B. madritensis* ssp. *rubens* L. (also known as red chess)] and cheatgrass [*B. tectorum* L. (also known as downy chess)], are important invasive species that have become naturalized in western North America. And in many locations, they are rapidly increasing in population by replacing native perennials and grasses. Pictures of foxtail chess and cheatgrass are shown in figure 2-1, using specimens collected at YM. One effect of the seed morphology for both species that provides a mechanism for dispersal is demonstrated in figure 2-2. The ecological requirements for both brome species are similar, with the greatest difference between their preferred habitats being that foxtail chess favors warmer temperatures. Cheatgrass is more widespread in North America than foxtail chess, and thus has been considered to a greater extent in the literature; however, the similarity in their life history characteristics means that information about cheatgrass may largely apply to foxtail chess as well. For ecological measures including rooting depth, livestock palatability, phenology, proliferation, and takeover following range fires, foxtail chess and cheatgrass can probably be regarded as equivalent. Because foxtail chess occupies warmer, generally more arid habitats, this species probably has warmer cardinal temperatures for growth than cheatgrass.

Cheatgrass is increasing throughout large areas of Nevada, probably through a combination of factors including repeated burning, subtle climate change (increased annual variability of precipitation), and grazing (Young and Tipton, 1990) in addition to the intrinsic competitive ability and preadaptation that permits exploitation of the native flora's susceptibility to invasion (Mack, 1981). Alien annuals, especially cheatgrass, have been documented to reduce the reproduction of native perennials, and this tendency is enhanced under disturbances such as grazing (Harper et al., 1996).

Both brome species are relatively recent invaders to the region, in general, and to YM, in particular, and both are undergoing population explosions. In the Nevada Test Site (NTS) region, both species were first found in the 1930s, confined to disturbed areas in the Charleston Mountains (Clokey, 1951). Within the NTS, Beatley (1966) noted cheatgrass was absent or at densities less than 2 plant/m² below 4,000 ft and present at densities greater than 1,000 plant/m² on burned areas above 4,000 ft. This study assumed that the areas of weedy brome infestation were stable and not expanding. In 1987 and 1988 at the same sites, foxtail chess occurred at densities of 1,803 ± 474 plant/m² (below 4,000 ft) and 1,434 ± 304 plant/m² (above 4,000 ft), with cheatgrass found to be considerably patchier than foxtail chess and more strongly associated with the disturbed areas (Hunter, 1991). Although both species have affinity for disturbance, Hunter (1991) rejected a hypothesis that the increases in both species result from human activities, because the NTS has been protected from grazing, development, and recreation during the period of the invasion. In support of this conclusion, grazing, fires, and documentable human impacts did not occur on Anaho Island in Pyramid Lake, Nevada, during the period that cheatgrass invaded and replaced native perennial shrubs (Tausch et al., 1994).

Depending on location, cheatgrass may have no, promotional, or detrimental effects on rangeland use by livestock and native grazing species. Cheatgrass is useful as livestock feed if used during late winter through spring (Emmerich et al., 1993). Trammel and Butler (1995) found that grazing use by bison, elk, and deer was no different on cheatgrass and non-cheatgrass infested habitats. However, the forage value provided by cheatgrass is short lived while the loss of native species, especially because burning, may



Figure 2-1. Cheatgrass (top) and foxtail (bottom) collected on Yucca Mountain



Figure 2-2. Cheatgrass and socks filled with cheatgrass seeds. The cheatgrass seeds tend to stick to animal fur, which provides a dispersal mechanism.

impact native ungulates. Replacement of native browse species, big sagebrush, and bitterbrush by cheatgrass on burned areas in northeastern California and northwest Nevada has resulted in a strong downward trend in numbers of deer using the range (Updike et al., 1990). Wildlife behavior also may exist that actually favors native vegetation over cheatgrass; for example, seed caching by rodents may control cheatgrass establishment and favor establishment of Indian ricegrass (McMurray et al., 1997). However, such mechanisms appear of minor consequence compared to fire ecology, fecundity, and the natural competitive ability of cheatgrass.

2.2 LIFE CYCLE

The two weedy brome grasses are winter annuals that germinate with the first fall rains, over winter as a basal rosette, and complete their life cycle during the spring (Klemmedson and Smith, 1964; Evans and Young, 1982). Dormancy of foxtail chess seed is maintained by warm temperatures that prevent premature germination following a summer thunder shower. After several months in dry soils, the seed is released from dormancy (Corbineau et al., 1992). Thus, intrinsic factors favor seed germination coinciding with the first rains of winter. Similar factors are likely for cheatgrass.

Winter activity by cheatgrass and foxtail chess is conferred through special adaptation. Root growth for these species is more tolerant of low temperatures than native grass species. For example, growth of cheatgrass can proceed until soil temperatures drop below 3°C, while root growth ceases in native wheatgrass when soil temperatures drop below 8–10 °C (Harris, 1967).

Cheatgrass has been found to maintain seed viability for one or more years. Such variable dormancy can buffer this plant from environmental perturbation such as wildfire or germination-producing precipitation followed by intensive drought that would destroy or severely decrease a population (Young et al., 1969; Young and Evans, 1976, 1978). In addition, this species maximizes seed production, which can induce carryover seedbed density of between 5,000 to 8,000 seeds/m² (Young et al., 1969; Young and Evans, 1975). These levels of seed reserves can lead to establishment of such heavy densities of seedlings [sometimes greater than 10,000 plant/m² (Young et al., 1969)] that germinating native perennial shrub seedlings are overwhelmed (Young and Evans, 1978).

The winter-annual nature of cheatgrass and foxtail chess confers additional competitive advantages over native vegetation. Because these species are active when soils are relatively moist, standard adaptive mechanisms for retarding water loss employed by native perennial species occupying the Mojave and other deserts, such as thickened epidermis and waxy coatings on leaves, thickened endodermis, and suberization of roots, are unnecessary. Released from these physiologically expensive requirements, cheatgrass can produce relatively large amounts of biomass, mostly in the form of reproductive structures and seeds (Hull, 1963). Growth is accomplished at a much greater water use efficiency than summer annuals (Hull, 1963), which probably results from growth and activity during late winter/early spring when the evaporative demand is relatively low (Harris, 1967). However, cheatgrass and foxtail chess must complete their life cycles quickly because the poorly suberized roots provide little protection against hot dry soil, resulting in ready plant desiccation (Harris, 1967; Thill et al., 1984). Such water deficit tends to induce early onset of maturation and reduce the seed set for cheatgrass, even though cheatgrass is considered to be drought tolerant (Richardson et al., 1989).

Blank et al. (1994) found that burned soils have a promotional effect on cheatgrass over unburned soils. This relationship is not well understood and reasons that cheatgrass may occupy one microsite versus

another, for example occupying the zones beneath former tree canopies on a burn, are difficult to explain using commonly measured soil variables (Tausch et al., 1995). Cheatgrass is apparently an intense sink for soil nitrogen, as indicated by reductions in assimilated nitrogen content in plants growing on sites where water is readily available compared to sites where soil water contents are reduced (Rickard, 1985). Perhaps burning returns some of the nitrogen to the soil.

Cheatgrass has been shown to have genetic plasticity that permits environmental selection that may optimize germination requirements to micro-environments (Beckstead et al., 1996; Meyer et al., 1997). Especially after a fire, large fluctuations in population size have the potential to produce a new population that is fitted to microsite ecological conditions (Young and Evans, 1985). This genetic plasticity probably exists as well for foxtail chess but is not reported in the literature. Ultimately, genetic plasticity may permit these brome grasses to adapt to a wide variety of habitats through southern Nevada up to some upper elevational limit, with foxtail chess typically dominating at lower elevations and cheatgrass at higher elevations.

2.3 ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AS GUIDANCE FOR INFILTRATION MODELING

Cheatgrass has a finely divided root system that can penetrate to depths of 33 cm (Klemmedson and Smith, 1964), at least 80 cm (Cline et al., 1977), and, under some circumstances, as deep as 150 cm (Hulbert, 1955). Most of cheatgrass roots excavated on YM and elsewhere were observed shallower than 40 cm. At Lida Pass, Nevada, a cheatgrass ecotone was cursorily investigated for rooting depths and to ascertain whether soil textures or other readily observable factors are responsible for the ecotone. No evidence of fire was present at this site. Pictures of the site investigation are shown in figures 2-3 and 2-4. Four locations were investigated, one on the north side of State Route 266 in the middle of a large cheatgrass zone, one on the south side of State Route 266 in the middle of the cheatgrass ecotone, and in two locations bracketing the ecotone. Soil textures are presented in table 2-1, with quite similar sandy loam textures and rock content at each location. The soil textures are similar to those measured at YM (Schmidt, 1989). Cheatgrass roots were generally absent below 40 cm (16 in). No noticeable difference of soils, native vegetation, or recent burning existed from within the cheatgrass growth to the zone below the cheatgrass. Accordingly, the spread of cheatgrass appears to be in progress and the ecotone is only a temporary artifact of this process. The heavy near-surface proliferation of roots allows extraction of all available water in this zone during the growth cycle (Harris, 1967).

Fayer and Jones (1990) provide guidance on calculating cheatgrass transpiration in the context of demonstrating model usage for the one-dimensional (1D) simulator, UNSAT-H. Field experiments at the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve in the Hanford Washington Site (Hinds, 1975) found that 63, 81, and 88 percent of cheatgrass root biomass is in the top 10, 20 and 30 cm of the soil column at the end of the growing season. Based on these observations, Fayer and Jones (1990) describe root zone biomass using a small constant value plus an exponential function with an extinction depth (the depth at which biomass decreases to $1/e$ times the surface density) of 7.75 cm. At the same site, the native bluebunch wheatgrass species had a much more gradual decline in biomass with depth. Fayer and Jones (1990) suggest that transpiration be characterized using a ratio between potential transpiration and net radiation, with the ratio increasing linearly from 0 at the beginning of October to 0.3 in early April, maintaining steady throughout May, and linearly dropping to 0 through June. Actual plant uptake is modeled as proportional to root-length density and soil moisture, as well as net radiation. Fayer and Jones (1990) make no attempt to account for root growth. They note that the

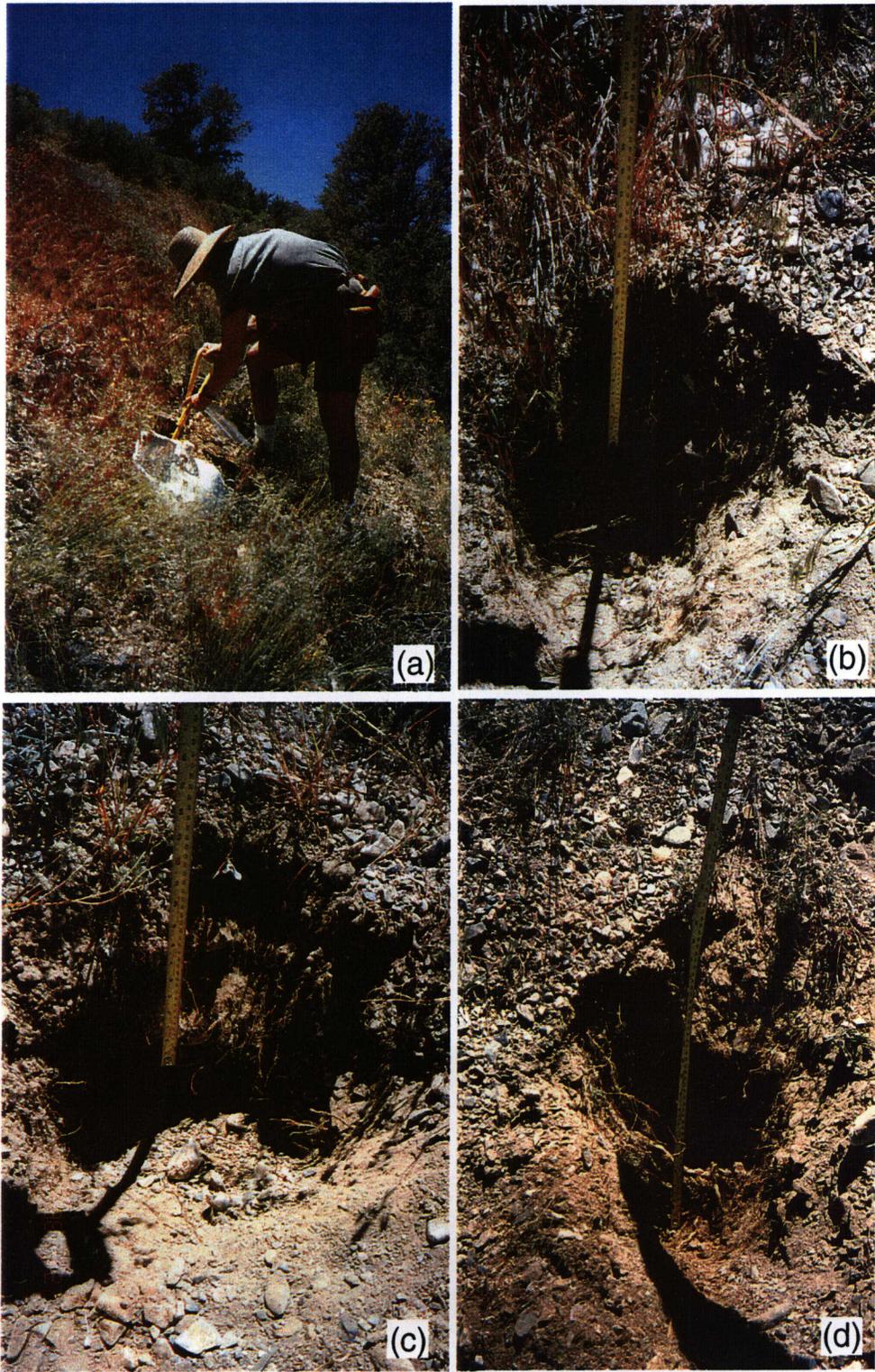


Figure 2-3. Soil pits dug near Lida Pass, Nevada, as shown in figure 2-4 (a) at the cheatgrass ecotone, (b) within the cheatgrass cover and above the ecotone, (c) at the ecotone, and (d) below the ecotone and outside the cheatgrass cover. All pits had a sandy loam texture (table 2-1) with no noticeable difference of soils, native vegetation, or previous burns from within the cheatgrass growth to outside the ecotone.

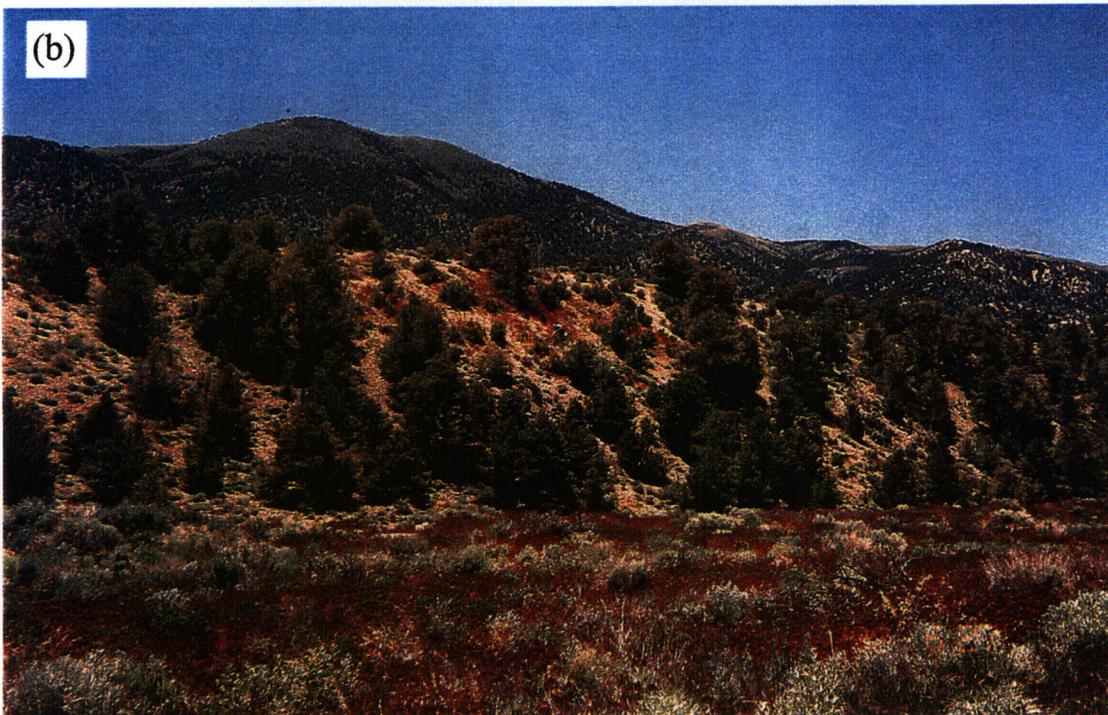
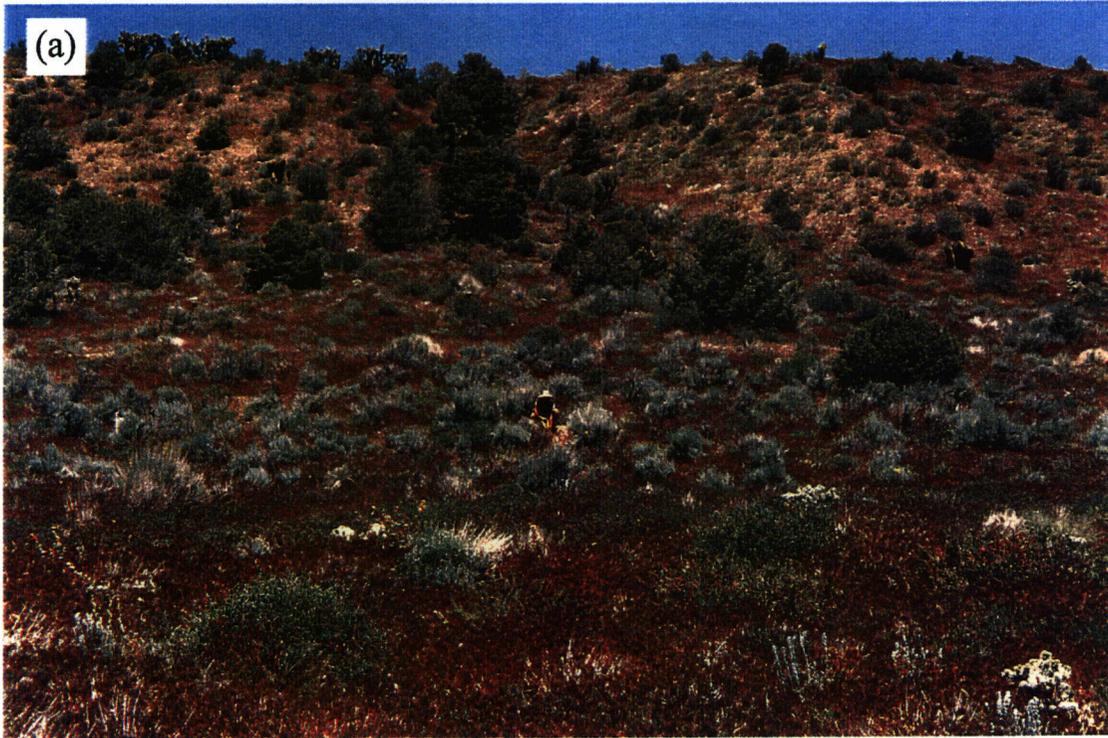


Figure 2-4. Investigation site along State Route 266 at Lida Pass, Nevada, south of Tonopah at about 7,000 ft elevation. Cheatgrass is the reddish grass visible between shrub crowns. (a) The north side of the road. (b) A terrace immediately on the other side of the road where the ecotone between a cheatgrass patch and surrounding vegetation was investigated. The soil pits pictured in figure 2-3 are from this location.

Table 2-1. Soil samples obtained at Lida Pass, Nevada, located approximately 80 m northwest of Yucca Mountain. The sample obtained opposite the ecotone corresponds to figure 2-4, and the samples above, in, and below the ecotone correspond to figures 2-4 and 2-3a-d.

Location	Depth (cm)	>2 mm (percent)	Sand (percent)	Silt (percent)	Clay (percent)
Opposite ecotone	0 to 14	67	57	35	8
	14 to 40	74	59	29	12
Above ecotone	0 to 30	69	69	20	11
	30 to 50	72	64	22	14
In ecotone	0 to 30	60	69	22	9
	30 to 40	76	67	19	14
Below ecotone	0 to 7	69	69	21	10
	30 to 50	72	69	20	11

relationship between plant biomass and transpiration has not been determined, suggesting that a direct proportionality be used. Note that deep roots may be relatively more efficient than shallow roots at extracting soil water because the proportion of the root biomass devoted to transporting water increases upward.

3 INVASION OF BROME GRASSES

3.1 FIRE AND PESTILENCE

Fire figures prominently in the large-scale replacement of native vegetation by cheatgrass and foxtail chess. Cheatgrass matures earlier than native species, dries during early summer to provide fuels that can readily carry wildfire, and increases the likelihood of repeated wildfires (Young et al., 1987). These factors greatly increase wildfire frequency and extent. For example, fire frequency in lands formerly vegetated by sagebrush steppe increased from once in 60–110 yr to intervals of less than 5 yr due to dominance by cheatgrass (Whisenant, 1990). Cheatgrass has become sufficiently abundant to provide fuel for extensive and disastrous range fires in the Great Basin (Billings, 1994). Similar trends exist for foxtail chess. For example, Brown and Minnich (1986) found that stands formerly dominated by creosote bush and bursage, once burned, were replaced with plant cover dominated by annual species, especially foxtail chess. Due to the increased ability for such weed-invaded sites to carry fire, such trends are likely to become reinforced. Similar replacement of blackbrush by brome grasses may be happening in areas of the NTS where target practice has caused fires, such as areas near Shoshone Mountain (see figure 3-1).

Brome grasses also provide a mechanism for native parasitic vegetation to attack native shrubs. In 2 of the past 5 yr, the authors observed infestations of dodder (*Cuscuta denticulata* Engelm) in Amargosa Valley, just south of the NTS. Dodder is highly recognizable during portions of its life cycle, looking like orange “silly string” sprayed over the vegetation (see figure 3-2). Dodder attacks and kills a shrub by girdling the shrub's branches while extracting water and nutrients through vascular tissue that invades the host branches. Without grasses, the natural shrub spacing is far enough apart to limit infestation; however, a dense growth of grasses between shrubs provides a ready highway for dodder to cross from shrub to shrub. Creation of a pathway for native parasitic vegetation is less important than fire as a mechanism for eradicating native shrubs, because fire may induce a relatively complete kill of native shrubs over much larger patches.

3.2 PHENOLOGY

Although agents such as fire, grazing, and even drought may hasten the invasion and takeover by these weedy brome grasses, there is evidence that such disturbance may not be necessary for these species to establish dominance. For example, cheatgrass apparently can invade and replace stands of native shrubs without human-caused disturbance or fire as has been demonstrated on Anaho Island in Pyramid Lake, Nevada: grazing, fires, and human-induced disturbance have not occurred on this island during the period that cheatgrass invaded and replaced native perennial shrubs (Tausch et al., 1994).

The phenology of cheatgrass and foxtail chess confers distinct advantages over the native species: these brome grasses are in the greatest phase of growth, depleting the shallow soil zone of moisture and nutrients, precisely when native species are undergoing the precarious process of germination and seedling establishment. The key to this cycle is fall germination and slow growth through winter when native species may be dormant. Further, the winter cycle enables brome grasses to dispense with phenologically expensive mechanisms for minimizing water loss, enabling relatively profuse seed production that can yield seedling densities greater than 10,000 plant/m² (Young et al., 1969).



Figure 3-1. Invasion of brome grasses in a burn near Shoshone Mountain in the Nevada Test Site. The golden areas are dominated by cheatgrass with some rabbitbrush. Dark areas are the native blackbrush.

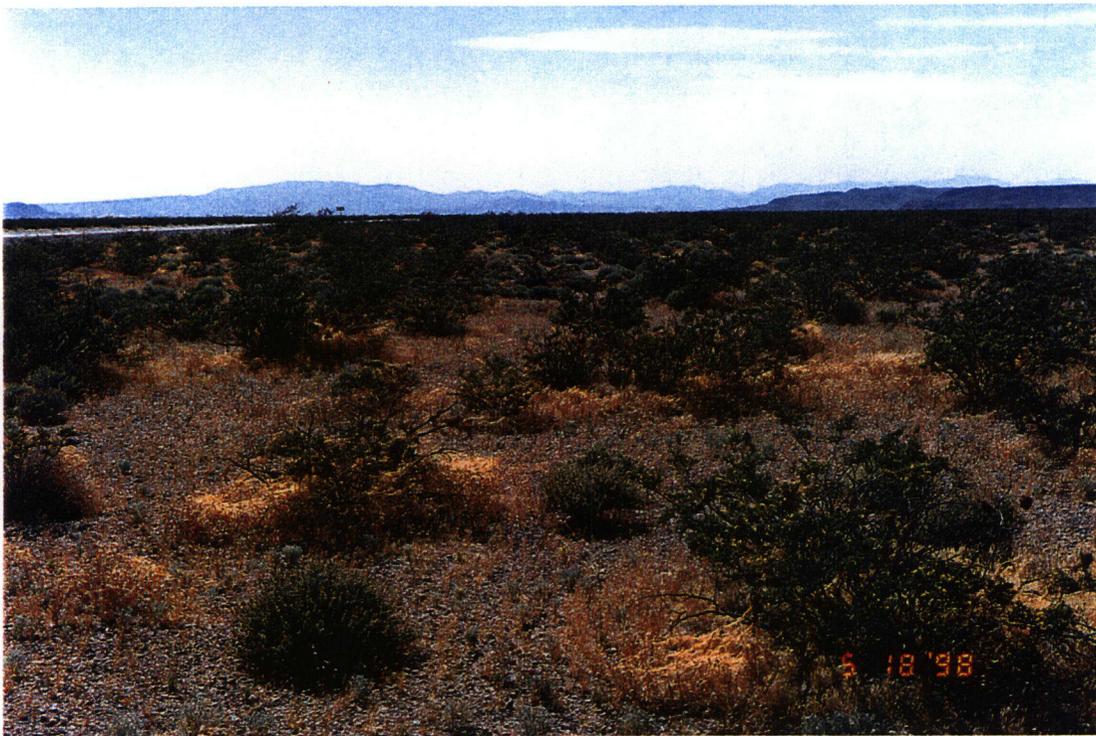


Figure 3-2. Dodder infestation in Amargosa Valley, with shrub-to-shrub transfer abetted by a carpet of foxtail chess and another annual introduced weedy grass, *Vulpia octofloro* (Walter) Rydb.

Cheatgrass competition for water and nutrients reduces the growth of native grass and shrubs even at 12 yr following the fire that permitted its establishment; this competitive ability enhances exploitation of soil resources within plant communities formed of native species (Melgoza et al., 1990). Additionally, cheatgrass is apparently an intensive sink for soil nitrogen, as indicated by reductions in assimilated nitrogen content in plants growing on sites where water is readily available compared to sites where soil water contents are reduced (Rickard, 1985).

Completion of the growth cycle in spring, earlier than native grasses, was found to confer competitive advantage of cheatgrass against the native grass *Agropyron spicatum*, which is only beginning its growth cycle during this period (Harris, 1967). The effects of rapid root growth, including depletion of near-surface soil water, were found to provide a strong competitive advantage against *Agropyron cristatum*, which initially experienced high germination rates but whose seedlings later succumbed to water stress within an established stand of cheatgrass (Stewart and Hull, 1949).

The same mechanisms used by brome grasses to compete with native grasses may be used to compete with seedlings of native shrub species, that are more vulnerable than fully established deep-rooted shrubs occupying a different ecological niche. Such competition may be preventing recruitment of native shrubs to replace those that succumb to old age or other causes in southern Nevada, in general, and YM, in particular. Areas where shrubs died during the drought period 1989–1991 (Schultz and Ostler, 1995) have been noted by these authors to show virtually no recruitment of shrubs during the wetter years that have occurred since that time. On these sites, the brittle carcasses of shrubs can still be seen while the growth of foxtail chess apparently surpasses 1,000 plant/m² (see photographs in figures 3-3a, Abandoned Wash, and 3-3b, just south of Highway Ridge, both at 4,000 ft elevation on YM). In the absence of fire, shrubs that can reproduce through cloning may be more likely to avoid germination pressures and, thus, be able to compete with brome grasses.

Based on these observations, the most cogent model for the replacement of native perennial species is that the intensive competition for water and nutrients during the vulnerable germination and seedling phases of the native species tends to prevent seedling establishment. Thus, even though established shrubs may easily coexist with brome grasses, complete disappearance of shrubs may occur within as short a period as the lifespan of a typical shrub (30–100 yr). At heavy infestation rates well in excess of 1,000 plants/m² (Hunter, 1991), these weedy species may be bringing recruitment of perennial plants to an abrupt end over large areas of southern Nevada. Increased fire-frequency rates in the presence of brome grasses may only serve to speed this replacement.

3.3 OBSERVATIONS OF BROME INFESTATION

The invasion of brome grasses in western United States has been documented extensively in the literature (Stewart and Hull, 1949; Harper et al., 1996; Mack, 1981; and Young et al., 1987). Based on observations, the invasion of *Bromus* is also occurring in southern Nevada. Several locations in southern Nevada and western Utah were identified where *Bromus* is currently invading native shrub steppe. As shown in figure 3-3, foxtail chess is active at YM, at about 4,000 ft elevation. Other sites have heavy cheatgrass infestation up to 8,000 ft elevation. Pictures of the sites, from east to west, are shown in figure 3-4 (7,000–8,000 ft, Paradise Mountains, western Utah); figure 3-5 (7,500 ft, Quinn Canyon Range, Nevada); figure 3-6 (6,000 ft, Reveille Valley, Nevada); figure 3-7 (6,000 ft, Saulsbury Summit, east of Tonopah, Nevada); figure 3-8 (6,000 ft, McKinney Tanks Summit, east of Tonopah, Nevada); and figure 2-4 at the site

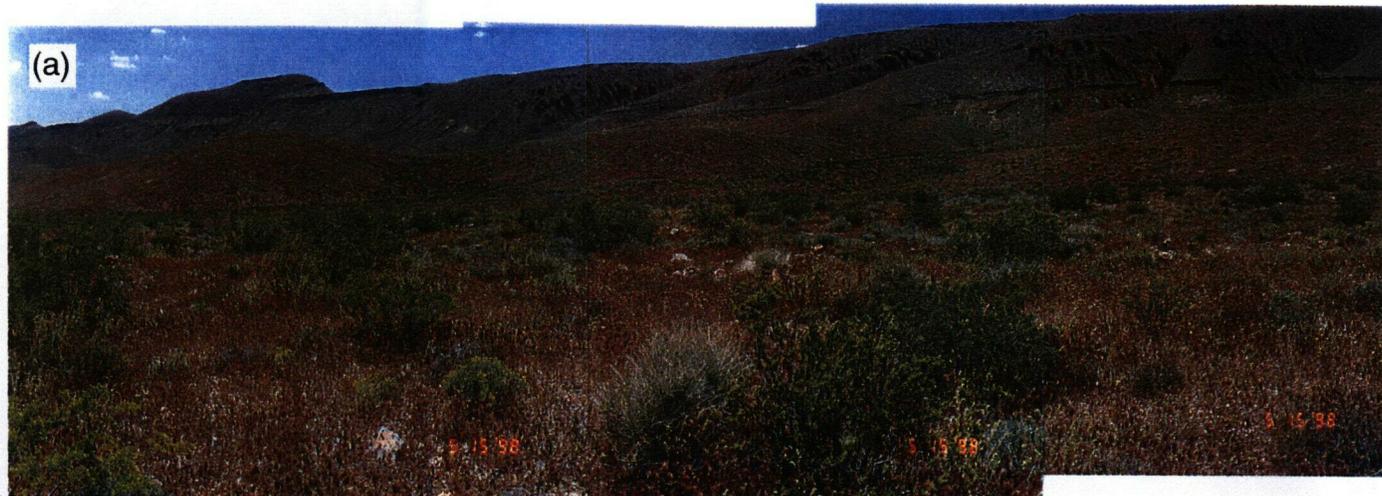


Figure 3-3. Photomosaics of foxtail chess growing on Yucca Mountain. (a) At the base of Abandoned Wash, perennial shrubs are interspersed with foxtail chess with almost no shrub recruitment. (b) Just south of Highway Ridge, the drought-prone areas have low shrub cover (some areas with less than 5 percent cover), heavy foxtail chess infestation, and shrub carcasses from the 1989–1991 drought.



Figure 3-4. A burn between 7,000 and 8,000 ft elevation in the Paradise Mountains in Utah, just over the Nevada-Utah state line. The reddish color is cheatgrass-dominated vegetation. The burn is probably between 3 and 5 yr old.



Figure 3-5. A burn at approximately 7,500 ft elevation in the Quinn Canyon Range, Nevada, north of Nellis Air Force Base. Cheatgrass (reddish color) has become dominant on portions of the burn. The burn is approximately 5 yr old.

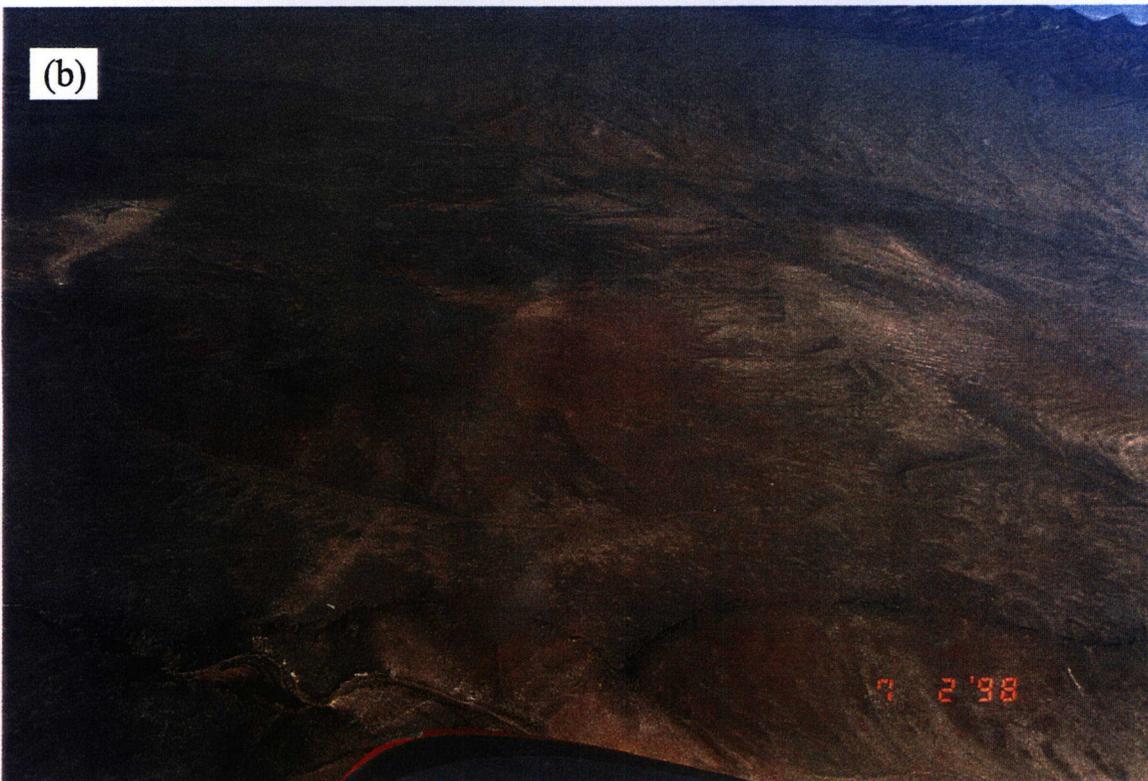
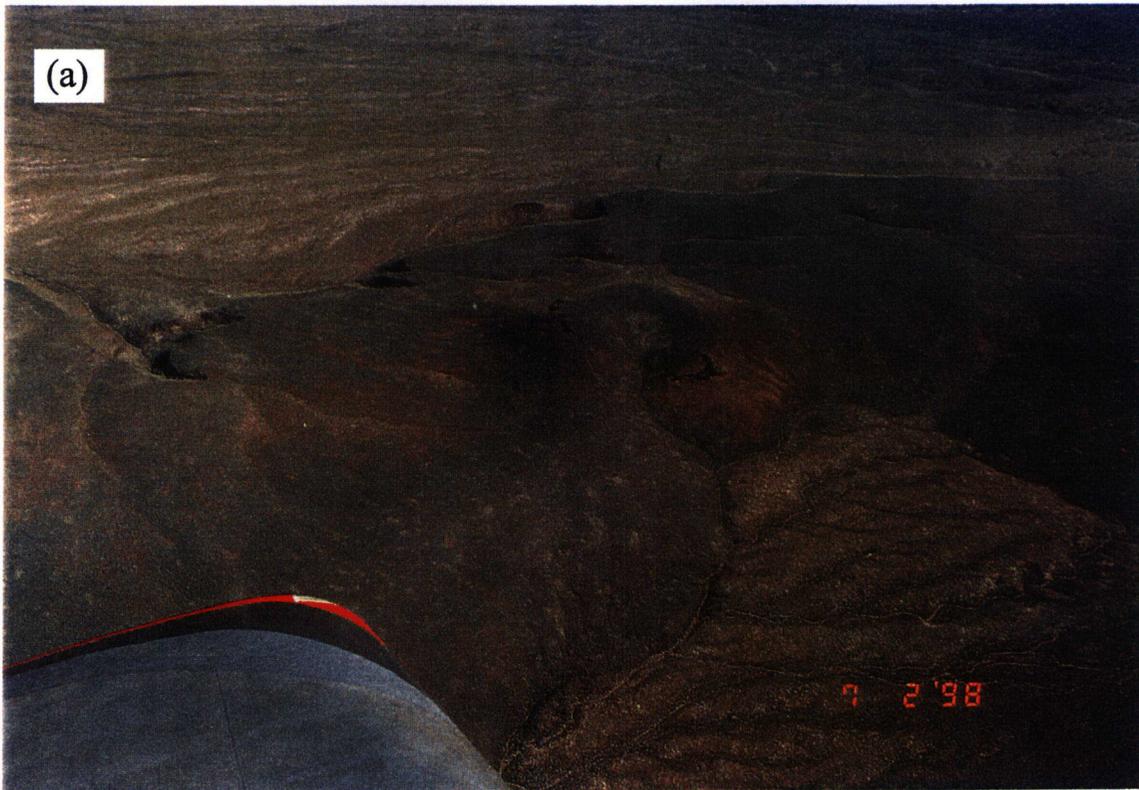


Figure 3-6. Two views (a) and (b) of Reville Valley, Nevada, slightly west of Quinn Canyon Range. The elevation is approximately 6,000 ft. Spreading patches of cheatgrass are visible as a light reddish brown color among the sage green cover of shrub canopies.

3-7

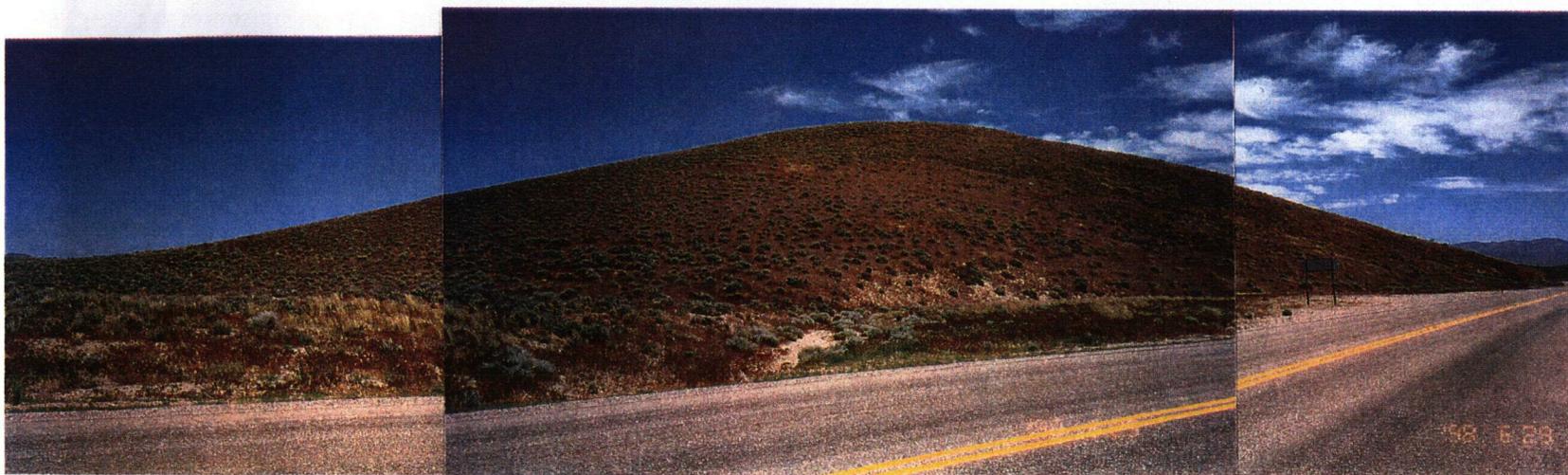


Figure 3-7. Photomosaic of the south-facing side of U.S. Highway 6 at Saulsbury Summit, east of Tonopah, Nevada, at about 6,000 ft elevation. Infestation of cheatgrass coincides with low density of shrubs where cover was lost in the 1989–1991 drought.

15/22

3-8

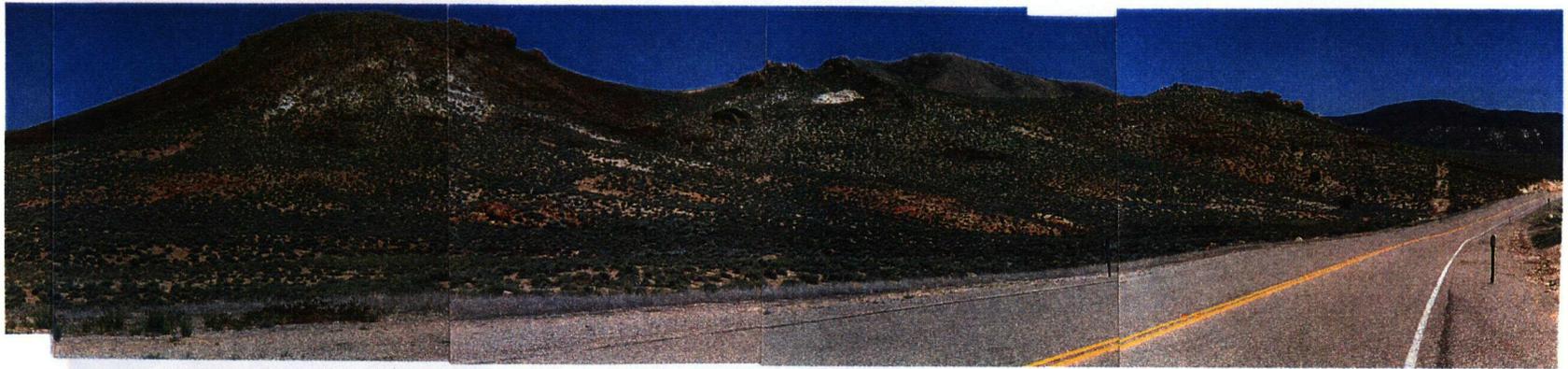


Figure 3-8. Photomosaic of U.S. Highway 6 at McKinney Tanks Summit east of Tonopah, Nevada, at about 6,000 ft elevation. Cheatgrass infestation (purplish among native shrub cover) areas have less shrub cover than non infested areas.

of the soil excavation described in chapter 2 (7,000 ft, Lida Pass, Nevada). The significance of the elevations given here is that plant communities at present-day sites in southern Nevada, but higher elevations than YM, can be studied as future climate analog for YM due to decreases in temperature with increases in elevation.

Brome grass invasion has also been documented on the NTS and on YM. Hunter (1991) identified a trend of increasing infestation over the past 20–40 yr on the NTS. Although bromus grass is widespread, no data are available to evaluate whether *Bromus* is increasing at YM. The prevalence of foxtail chess on the YM block has been characterized by Rasmuson et al. (1999). Their study of eight sites on the eastern flank of YM determined that foxtail chess was the only plant species that covered more than 10 percent of any of the study plots, ranging from 6 to 23 percent. No other species that covered more than 1 percent of any site was found at all sites. The grasses, when grouped together, covered an average 17 percent of the area whereas shrubs covered an average 10 percent and forbs 11 percent of the area.

3.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLACEMENT OF NATIVE PLANTS IN THE YUCCA MOUNTAIN REGION BY WEEDY BROMES

Controls on growth and dominance have not been fully established for these species. Upper elevational limits for these species are expected, as these species most often function as winter annuals whose root systems cannot grow at soil temperatures below 3°C [measured for cheatgrass (Harris, 1967)]. Where cool winter temperatures reduce cheatgrass success, competition with native species may further reduce the importance of this plant. For example, in a comparison of modern vegetation with that recorded during boundary surveys in Skull Valley, Utah, juniper (*J. osteosperma*) apparently competed well with cheatgrass. While at lower elevations, sagebrush and shadscale dominated sites, cheatgrass has become dominant (Sparks et al., 1990). As seen in figures 3-4 and 3-5, however, cheatgrass may successfully compete (at least in disturbed areas) at elevations up to 8,000 ft where mean annual temperature (MAT) may be 7–10°C cooler than at the base of YM. Similar reductions in MAT are typically used as analogs for full glacial maximum conditions in PAs.

Deep alluvial soils are ideal habitat for brome grasses. In areas with deep alluvium, it is quite possible that foxtail chess will replace native shrubs at lower elevations and cheatgrass at higher elevations. In areas where soil is thin to nonexistent, brome grass must be sparser than in deep alluvium. Thus, *Bromus*-amplified fire frequency may be less of a threat to native species; however, the usual mechanisms for stifling recruitment of native perennials are also active in shallow soils. Species that reproduce by cloning (e.g., *Ephedra viridis*) may be able to successfully compete in shallow soils. The dense cover of foxtail chess in shallow soils on YM ridges and sideslopes, with apparent suppression of shrub recruitment in drought-prone regions (e.g., south-facing slopes with shallow soil cover), suggests that brome grasses may also compete successfully where soils are less than 10–20 cm (4–8 in) in thickness. Lower soil-thickness limits for successful brome-grass competition have not been established.

Based on the observations at higher elevations, it is likely that cheatgrass will compete well with native species if climatic change results in cooler and wetter conditions. This, of course, assumes that conditions are not so cold that cheatgrass seedling survival during winter and early spring is inhibited. Cheatgrass is currently growing on south-facing roadcuts above 9,000 ft elevation in Colorado under climatic conditions far cooler and wetter than would exist at YM under forecasted full glacial maximum. Thus, it is unlikely that climatic change will prohibit regional growth of cheatgrass.

Under monsoonal conditions (warm, with summer storms), such as experienced at roughly 12–9 ka, cacti dominated the Amargosa Valley with significant presence of grasses (Spaulding and Graumlich, 1986; Bull, 1991). Net infiltration under monsoonal conditions would likely be less than present for locations today with corresponding mean annual precipitation (MAP) and MAT, due to the increased effectiveness of evapotranspiration resulting from the change in precipitation seasonality from winter to summer dominance. The potential for foxtail chess to dominate under monsoonal conditions, such as exist in the Sonoran Desert, has not been ascertained. The summer rainfall patterns of a monsoonal climate are not well matched to the winter-annual behavior of weedy annual brome grasses; however, these species could compete at higher elevations under monsoonal conditions and would be expected to reinvade once monsoonal conditions cease.

Elevational limits and related factors such as aspect, soil thickness, and interspecies competition are presently not well understood for the brome grasses, especially for developing realistic projections of vegetation cover over a glacial cycle. The works of Rasmuson et al. (1999) could be taken in the context of climate-induced changes to infiltration. Rasmuson et al. (1999) estimated a 30 percent increase would occur in brome grass cover at the expense of shrub cover over the repository footprint due to the thermal pulse-induced increase in soil temperature and corresponding increase in water stress for the shrubs. Their conclusions were based on eight field plots covering a natural thermal gradient on the east flank of YM.

The approximately 50,000-yr packrat midden record from Fortymile Canyon near YM documents vegetation assemblages that range from species present during today's climate to species that occurred during glacial conditions (Spaulding, 1994). With the exception of white fir and limber pine that were present but not dominant about 16,000 yr before today, all of the plant species noted, including pinyon and juniper, have been documented susceptible to conversion to cheatgrass cover through agencies of fire, phenology, and competitive ability as discussed previously.

4 HYDROLOGIC IMPLICATIONS OF BROME DOMINANCE FOR REPOSITORY PERFORMANCE

The interplay of precipitation, temperature, and plants on a seasonal basis is an important factor for controlling infiltration and recharge. Based on precipitation summaries of meteorological stations in the YM region (CRWMS M&O, 1998), precipitation intensity is commonly high during August and November through March for 1-hr data. November through March is also a period of longer duration storms and more days with rain. El Niño events appear to have their greatest impact during winter months and may, in fact, play a large part in the onset of periods of infiltration that percolate to depth. Evaporation and transpiration potentials generally decrease during the winter months because of lower temperatures and plant dormancy. At Rainier Mesa, a high elevation recharge zone, the water percolating at depth carries a stable isotope data signature characteristic of winter precipitation (Russell et al., 1987). In the deep alluvial basins, which are generally lower elevation areas, water balance studies indicate there is little recharge except in stream channels during large storm events (CRWMS M&O, 1998). Any change in the seasonality of plants and the way that water is extracted from the soil, such as shrub replacement by *Bromus*, has the potential to modify the infiltration rate near the surface and also the percolation rate at depth.

4.1 DIRECT INFLUENCES ON NET INFILTRATION AND RECHARGE

Numerous scientific studies have shown that changes in vegetation cover may alter basinwide water yields (Bosch and Hewlett, 1982). Decrease of vegetation cover has been found to induce rising water tables (Peck and Williamson, 1987). Profound effects on runoff (>3-fold increase) and water tables (rise of 2.3 m/yr) have been found from basins where vegetation cover was reduced by only 53 percent (Ruprecht and Schofield, 1991a, b). Analysis of streamflow in a basin where vegetation conversion from trees (eucalyptus) to meadow (grass and clover) occurred showed that increased streamflow was due to two mechanisms: greater flow of water through the root zones to recharge the water table and increased content of water in aquifers that induced drainage of groundwater directly to the stream (Ruprecht and Schofield, 1989). Finally, conversion of deep-rooted shrubs to shallow-rooted annual grasses produced large increases (59 percent as a proportion of precipitation) in groundwater discharge that can be measured in the form of baseflow (Pitt et al., 1978).

A conversion from relatively deep-rooted perennial shrubs to shallow-rooted annual brome grasses would increase net infiltration by reducing the amount of water transpired over a growing season. A pulse of infiltrating water becomes net infiltration when it moves below the rooting zone. Under the current climate, net infiltration typically occurs from winter storms because of the low evapotranspiration demand in the winter that allows wetting pulses more time to reach depths below the rooting zone. By the end of a growing season, it is typical for the entire thickness of the rooting zone to be dry, as arid-zone plants extract all useable moisture. As the brome rooting zone is much thinner than the shrub rooting zone, there is less distance for wetting pulses to travel to escape evapotranspiration, and a greater proportion of the wetting pulses becomes net infiltration. If no shrubs are present, moisture would remain in the soil below the evaporation zone and potentially percolate downward during and after the next precipitation event. Cline et al. (1977) compared annual water use in an annual grass community with that in a shrub/grass community. It was concluded that twice as much water was extracted by the perennial community compared to the annual grass community.

Interestingly, a brome-dominated landscape may actually transpire more than a comparable shrub-dominated landscape during the winter, when most net infiltration occurs, as shrubs tend to be dormant during the winter while brome grasses are slowly growing. The annual evapotranspiration rate for a brome-dominated landscape, however, is less than would occur for a shrub-dominated landscape because of a greater proportion of the infiltration from large precipitation events escaping the thin rooting depths of *Bromus* and the drop in transpiration during the off-growing season for the grasses. Brome grass is most effective at reducing infiltration during late winter and spring, especially for the numerous, small precipitation events. For large precipitation events a greater portion of the precipitation in a *Bromus*-dominated area will become shallow infiltration, thus leading to increased percolation at depth.

Replacement of shrubs with brome grasses would directly affect infiltration on YM and indirectly affect regional groundwater levels. Replacement of shrubs with foxtail chess on YM, under current climatic conditions, may have a relatively minor effect on net infiltration because evaporative demand is high and soil water storage tends to be low in the thin soil mantle that predominates in the hillslope over the repository footprint. Changes would be more significant where soil thicknesses are larger, such as wash bottoms and the caprock environment. The effect can be bounded by contrasting estimates of mean annual infiltration (MAI) obtained under ambient conditions with and without shrubs. Numerous lines of evidence offered by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) suggest that deep percolation rates within the repository block are between 1 and 10 mm/yr (Bodvarsson et al., 1997), at least below the repository horizon, while Stothoff et al. (1996) produced a comparable estimate of roughly 20 mm/yr through simulations that completely neglected transpiration (yielding an upper-bound estimate for net infiltration in the presence of grasses in arid environments). Such comparisons are ultimately unsatisfying, because the comparisons are somewhat indirect. In addition, some of the data collected by the DOE may show early effects of brome replacement at YM. Ideally, it would be better to compare infiltration measured in the field with and without shrubs, but this is impractical for the rocky YM hillslopes. Instead, it is recommended that a direct comparison be performed through simulation to examine potential changes in net infiltration.

Even under current climatic conditions, widespread replacement of shrubs with brome grasses may begin to induce regionally significant recharge increases. Current estimates of recharge in the YM region vary from the high elevations in the north where recharge is 3 percent of the annual 200–300 mm precipitation to the low elevations in the south where recharge is less than 0.5 percent of the 100–200 mm precipitation based on water balance studies for the basins (CRWMS M&O, 1998). Due to the large evapotranspiration potential, especially at lower elevations, recharge predominately occurs as transmission losses in stream channels rather than interchannel recharge in the alluvial basins (Osterkamp et al., 1994). Long-term fluxes in alluvial basins to the north and east of YM within the NTS, are low, with perhaps an upper extreme of 2.6 mm/yr at one borehole (Conrad, 1993; Tyler, 1987; Tyler and Jacobsen, 1990). Simulations of bare-soil infiltration in deep alluvium (Stothoff, 1997) suggest that MAI could increase to more than 30 mm/yr under current climatic conditions in alluvial basins. However, even large increases in MAI would require significant periods of time to propagate the wetting pulses to deep water tables typical of many alluvial basins. Changes in recharge at higher elevations may also occur; although there is a question regarding the ability of cheatgrass to dominate in shallow soils typical of mountain slopes. Even if MAI instantaneously increased ten-fold, significant changes to the water table or groundwater fluxes at YM are unlikely to be seen for decades to centuries, due to the time lag required for net infiltration to reach the saturated zone. The response time, however, should be less than the aquifer residence time. Based on carbonate-aquifer residence times, Winograd et al. (1992) provide an upper bound on response time of less than 10,000 yr and perhaps on the order of several thousand years from waters discharged at Devil's Hole.

Two studies considered the effects of climate change on the Death Valley regional groundwater flow system, and these studies provide guidance for quantifying the effects of changing recharge. Czarnecki's (1985) simulations found that the water table below YM rose approximately 130 m when precipitation input was doubled. D'Agnesse et al. (1997) simulations found that the water table rose from 60 to 150 m in the YM area for a climate producing five times as much recharge as under current conditions. Both studies used the Maxey-Eakin method (Maxey and Eakin, 1949) to apportion recharge (recharge increases with increasing elevation). Initial estimates, from the previous paragraph, of brome-induced recharge support the fact that a 30-fold increase would occur in the broad alluvial valleys. Replacing shrubs with brome grasses will probably produce a different pattern of recharge increase than does climate change, possibly resulting in a different flow system, but it is reasonable to assume that a similar magnitude of water table rise would occur if recharge increased by a similar factor (averaged over the flow system).

Under cooler and wetter conditions, the replacement of native shrub species with cheatgrass would induce conditions that have not occurred in the past. If past glacial climatic conditions were to recur in the future with cheatgrass as the dominant vegetative species, it is likely that recharge would be significantly greater than in the past, and the rise in the water table would also likely be greater than under past conditions. Predicting the magnitude of water table rise would require modeling at several levels, with perhaps the most important being the prediction of changes in net infiltration under changes in vegetation and climate for typical recharge locations. With these results, recharge patterns in the regional groundwater flow models could be adapted to represent the altered vegetative conditions. A detailed autecological understanding of controlling factors for cheatgrass must be developed to provide realistic input to such a regional simulation.

4.2 INDIRECT INFLUENCES ON YUCCA MOUNTAIN HYDROLOGY

Replacement of shrubs by brome grasses may indirectly affect infiltration rates by affecting the surficial materials over shallow bedrock. The simulations reported by Stothoff (1997) are strongly affected by the depth and texture of the surficial cover materials, with MAI decreasing as soil thickness increases and soil texture becomes finer. Replacement of shrubs by brome grasses at YM will likely lead to enhanced erosion rates of surficial materials with decreasing soil thicknesses and concomitant loss of finer grain sizes on ridges and hillslopes. Observations on hillslope locations in California where brome grasses have replaced shrubs, with replacement enhanced because of anthropogenic activities, indicate that erosion is greatly enhanced in these areas, primarily because of slumping. The relatively shallow-rooted brome grasses may offer less resistance to mass wasting on hillslopes than the more deeply rooted shrubs by providing less resistance to slumping or creep, although soils present on YM are already so shallow that creep is likely not a dominant process.

Dense covers of grasses offer greater splash protection and overland-flow resistance—to more efficiently trap fine particles—than offered by the more sparse ground-covering shrubs. Such protection is no longer present when a fire has removed the grass cover. Thus, the expected higher fire frequency for grasslands compared to present shrub cover may result in a net soil loss due to enhanced erosion during those relatively rare rainfall events that occur with no vegetative protection for the soil.

Changes to soil profiles due to brome invasion might be more significant as the climate becomes cooler and wetter. Based on field observations at YM and a future climate analog site at Phinney Canyon (an east-draining canyon at roughly 6,500–7,500 ft in the nearby Grapevine Mountains), it is likely that soils were considerably finer and deeper at YM during portions of previous glacial cycles than exist at present.

Soil development has many feedback mechanisms, including those provided by vegetation. Disruption of previous vegetation replacement cycles may prevent recurrence of past developmental processes resulting in a significantly shallower and coarser soil cover than would otherwise have occurred. If the protection from erosion offered by grasses enhances soil development, the deeper and finer soils would enhance evaporation, partially offsetting the reduced transpiration that brome grasses offer compared to shrubs. If soil development is disrupted, evaporation as well as transpiration may be reduced relative to previous glacial cycles, which may increase MAI to unprecedented levels.

5 SUMMARY

Two naturalized Eurasian weedy brome grasses, foxtail chess (*B. madritensis* ssp. *rubens* L.) and cheatgrass (*B. tectorum* L.), have been present in the YM area since at least the 1930's. These species are documented as replacing native shrubs across much of western North America. Currently, brome grasses are actively replacing shrubs across southern Nevada. There is a heavy presence of foxtail chess and a lighter presence of cheatgrass at YM, with drought-prone areas such as low-elevation south-facing slopes appearing to undergo more active replacement. In the vicinity of nearby Shoshone Mountain, fire-burned areas 4–40 yr old also show heavy infestations of foxtail chess and cheatgrass.

Weedy annual brome grasses and well-established native shrubs can easily coexist, as they inhabit different ecological niches, shallow-rooted winter annuals versus deep-rooted perennials. However, such coexistence may be transitory because of several effective mechanisms for replacement of shrubs with brome grasses. This includes greatly enhanced fire rates (that are much more frequent than the natural shrub life expectancy), increased mobility of parasitic vegetation, and probably the most important mechanism, greatly reduced survival rates for vulnerable shrub seedlings. Without recruitment of seedlings to replace shrubs dying of old age and other factors, replacement will occur over the normal shrub lifetime, perhaps 30–100 yr.

Deep soils are ideal substrate for brome grasses, and it is likely that foxtail chess will replace the native shrub species at lower elevations and cheatgrass at higher elevations. Under cooler and wetter climate conditions, cheatgrass would be expected to dominate over foxtail chess. It has not been established whether brome grasses are likely to replace native shrubs and trees (i) on shallow rocky slopes, such as exist at YM; (ii) under monsoonal conditions; and (iii) during much cooler and wetter climatic conditions. Photographs shown in this report demonstrate, however, that under current climatic conditions, replacement by foxtail chess is occurring on YM slopes. Cheatgrass can grow and dominate, at least in disturbed areas, up to elevations 7,500–8,000 ft that provide cooler and wetter conditions than full glacial maximum conditions at YM.

Replacement of native shrubs with brome grasses would be expected to increase significantly the net infiltration and recharge to the regional aquifer, even under current climatic conditions, raising the water table and increasing groundwater fluxes. It is unlikely, however, that significant changes in regional hydrology would be noticed within less than a century. If replacement of shrubs with brome grasses occurs over large areas of the Death Valley regional groundwater flow system under cooler and wetter portions of future glacial cycles, unprecedented amounts of recharge may occur, possibly raising the water table beneath YM to unprecedented elevations. Under full glacial maximum conditions, the upper elevation for brome dominance would be much lower than at present, so replacement is most likely in alluvial valleys. Also, if the brome grasses are successful in removing shrubs over the repository footprint, unprecedented magnitudes of net infiltration fluxes may occur so that similar unprecedented fluxes of deep percolation may pass through the repository footprint.

Current work to evaluate the potential impact of brome grass invasion is focused on establishing bounded estimates of its effect on infiltration on YM over the repository and the effect of increased recharge in deep alluvial valleys on the flow pathways and water table elevation. A bounding calculation of the effect of increased infiltration caused by *Bromus* over the repository can be modeled using existing data and models. The bounding analysis of increased recharge over the alluvial valleys of the regional saturated zone groundwater model requires further refinement of potentially affected areas. Note that all areas (alluvial basins and mountain ranges) could be affected. It is believed, however, that recharge over the alluvial basins

will have the largest effect on flow paths and water table rise. Studies are underway in the regional groundwater catchment using satellite data and local ground confirmation to delineate current and past areas of brome grass invasion.

Based on the results of the bounded analyses, further work would involve characterization of brome grass invasion processes: (i) determination of rooting depths and soil-moisture uptake patterns under various soil conditions for both cheatgrass and foxtail chess; (ii) determination of elevational extent of *Bromus* under current climatic conditions for use as a predictor for future climatic conditions including cooler and wetter future climates and the potential for *Bromus* invasion under monsoonal conditions; and (iii) determination of the relationship of *Bromus* invasion with soils, aspect, and slope. As information is developed from the characterization of brome grass invasion extent and processes, the models for infiltration and recharge would be modified. Estimates of infiltration from 1D models would be used to estimate the impact in different environments (e.g., ridgetops, upland slopes, and alluvial valleys). As the Nuclear Regulatory Commission regional saturated groundwater flow model is developed, the changes in infiltration rates would be used as input for the recharge boundary condition to constrain possible rises in the water table because of brome grass invasion.

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A Brief Guide to Plant Species in the Yucca Mountain Region: A Compilation to Support Infiltration Studies

David P. Groeneveld
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Randall W. Fedors
Center for Nuclear Waste Regulatory Analyses

rabbit thorn
California buckwheat bladder-sage
apricot mallow



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Plates 1-16 are photos of the plants on the landscape

Plates 17-24 are photos of plant specimens

Introduction

This botanical guide has been assembled to enable scientists with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the Center For Nuclear Waste Regulatory Analyses (CNWRA) who are not trained in botany to recognize the most common and important plant species growing on Yucca Mountain. Yucca Mountain is the site of a proposed interment of high-level radioactive waste. A major concern for the safe operation of such a repository is the potential for infiltration of precipitation to become seepage into the proposed repository. In their role of extraction and transpiration of soil water, plants may greatly reduce the infiltration rate. The inclusion of transpiration, specified in terms of leaf cover, rooting patterns, and life cycle, is important for determining the present-day distribution of infiltration rates and for estimating future infiltration rates under different climate conditions. Thus, an understanding of plants and their distribution on Yucca Mountain is central to any determination about infiltration.

Sources of Information Contained in this Guide

This guide was assembled based upon field observations at Yucca Mountain over a period of 2 years, from photographs taken for illustration, and from descriptions and drawings contained in several books. Drawings contained in this guide were copied from these books and included in this guide with the understanding that this guide may be generally distributed as part of an NRC document, but can not be commercially distributed. The drawings associated with each plant description include a circled number corresponding to the source references listed below. In order of reliance and usage, the sources of data and drawings are as follows:

1. Hickman, J.C. (ed.), 1993. *The Jepson Manual: Higher Plants of California*. University of California Press. These illustrations are under copyright by the Regents of the University of California and are reproduced with the permission of the Jepson Herbarium, University of California, Berkeley.
2. Jaeger, E.C., 1969. *Desert Wildflowers*. Stanford University Press (no longer in print). Gratis permission to reproduce these illustrations has been granted by the Stanford University Press.
3. Munz, P.A., 1962. *California Desert Wildflowers*. University of California Press; these illustrations are under copyright by the Regents of the University of California and are reproduced with the permission of the University of California Press.
4. Hitchcock, A.S. 1955. *Vascular plants of the Pacific Northwest*. University of Washington Press.

How to Use

This guide contains only the most common plants that are likely to be encountered at Yucca Mountain. Because of their larger representation on the landscape, these species are also the most important from the hydrologic perspective. In some cases, for example desert larkspur and heliotrope phacelia, the plant may not be very common but is quite showy. Such plants have been included because they may be of interest to the lay scientist in the field.

A key to the plants contained in this guide is not included because of the potential complexity it would present to persons lacking botanical training, and probably more importantly, because of the highly variable phenology that occurs for plants in a desert environment where flowers, fruits or even leaves may be present or absent dependent upon the preceding weather. Instead, labeled color plates are included to provide visual cues to appearance. The plants can then be found within the guide listed alphabetically by common name, scientific name and life form in a species list that follows. Within each life form, the plants are presented alphabetically by scientific name. For cacti and Sandberg bluegrass,

color plates are lacking. Illustrations have been copied from the four sources listed and placed adjacent to the plant descriptions. The source for each illustration is cued by (1), (2), (3) or (4), in the order of the four sources listed above.

The plants in this guide are divided into the following life forms:

grasses - further divided into annual and perennial

forbs - non-grass herbaceous species, further divided into annual and perennial

shrubs - which may have woody branches that persist for more than one year

trees - at Yucca Mountain the sole plant fitting this life form is the Joshua tree

cacti- thorny and succulent, all members of the cactus family

Each species has been classified into one of these life form for discussion within the text.

Species List

(The list is alphabetic by common name; the names and authorities per Hickman, 1993. Bold numbers denote the order of presentation in the text.)

<u>Species and Authority</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Life Form</u>
<i>Lycium andersonii</i> Gray	37 Anderson desert thorn	shrub
<i>Sphaeralcea ambigua</i> Gray	16 Apricot mallow	perennial forb
<i>Opuntia basilaris</i> Engelm. & J. Bigelow	47 beavertail cactus	cactus
<i>Artemisia tridentata</i> Nutt.	48 big sagebrush	shrub
<i>Coleogyne ramosissima</i> Torr.	25 blackbrush	shrub
<i>Salazaria mexicana</i> Torr.	41 bladder-sage	shrub
<i>Ambrosia dumosa</i> (Gray) Payne	18 burrow-weed	shrub
<i>Eriogonum fasciculatum</i> Benth.	31 California buckwheat	shrub
<i>Bromus tectorum</i> L.	4 cheatgrass	annual grass
<i>Amsinckia tessellata</i> A. Gray	8 checker fiddleneck	annual forb
<i>Hymenoclea salsola</i> A. Gray	33 cheesebush	shrub
<i>Echinocactus polycephalus</i> Engelm. & J. Bigelow	44 clustered barrel cactus	cactus
<i>Ericameria cooperi</i> (Gray) Hall	29 Cooper goldenbush	shrub
<i>Tetradymia axillaris</i> A. Nels.	42 cottonthorn	shrub
<i>Larrea tridentata</i> (DC.) Cov.	36 creosote bush	shrub
<i>Cuscuta denticulata</i> Engelm.	11 desert dodder	annual forb (parasite)
<i>Mirabilis bigelovii</i> Gray	14 desert four-o'clock	perennial forb
<i>Castilleja angustifolia</i> (Nutt.) G. Don	9 desert Indian paintbrush	perennial forb
<i>Delphinium parishii</i> A. Gray	12 desert larkspur	forb
<i>Achnatherum speciosum</i> Trin. and Rupr. Barkworth	2 desert needlegrass	perenn. grass
<i>Cirsium neomexicanum</i> Gray	10 desert thistle	perennial forb
<i>Eriogonum inflatum</i> Torr. & Frem.	13 desert trumpet	perennial forb
<i>Stephanomeria pauciflora</i> (Torr.) A. Nels.	17 fewflower wirelettuce	perennial forb

Species List, Continued

<u>Species and Authority</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Life Form</u>
<i>Mammillaria tetrancistra</i> Engelm.	46 fish-hook cactus	cactus
<i>Atriplex canescens</i> (Pursh) Nutt.	20 four-wing saltbush	shrub
<i>Bromus rubens</i> L.	3 foxtail chess	annual grass
<i>Psoralea fremontii</i> (a.Gray) Barneby	40 Fremont indigo bush	shrub
<i>Pleuraphis jamesii</i> Torrey	6 galleta grass	perenn. grass
<i>Opuntia echinocarpa</i> Engelm & J.Bigelow	48 golden cholla	cactus
<i>Ephedra viridis</i> Colville	28 green ephedra	shrub
<i>Echinocereus engelmannii</i> (Engelm) Lemaire	45 hedgehog cactus	cactus
<i>Phacelia crenulata</i> Torr. Ex S. Wats.	15 heliotrope phacelia	annual forb
<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i> (Roemer & Schultes)	1 Indian ricegrass	perenn. grass
<i>Yucca brevifolia</i> Engelm.	43 Joshua tree	tree
<i>Krameria erecta</i> Willd. Ex J.A. Schultes	34 littleleaf rhatany	shrub
<i>Ericameria linearifolia</i> Urb. & J.Wussow	30 narrowleaf goldenbush	shrub
<i>Chrysothamnus teretifolius</i> (Dur. & Hilg.) Hall	23 needleleaf rabbitbrush	shrub
<i>Ephedra nevadensis</i> S. Wats.	27 Nevada ephedra	shrub
<i>Lycium pallidum</i> Miers	38 rabbit thorn	shrub
<i>Chrysothamnus nauseosus</i> (Pallas) Britton	22 rubber rabbitbrush	shrub
<i>Poa secunda</i> J.S. Presl.	7 Sandberg bluegrass	perenn. grass
<i>Atriplex confertifolia</i> (Torr. & Frem.) S. Wats.	21 shadscale	shrub
<i>Grayia spinosa</i> (Hook.) Moq.	32 spiny hopsage	shrub
<i>Menodora spinescens</i> Gray	39 spiny menodora	shrub
<i>Elymus elymoides</i> (Raf.) Swezey	5 squirreltail	perenn. grass
<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i> (Hook.) Nutt.	24 stickyleaf rabbitbrush	shrub
<i>Encelia virginensis</i> A. Nels.	26 Virgin River encelia	shrub
<i>Krascheninnikovia lanata</i> (Pursh)	35 winterfat	shrub

A.D.J. Meeuse & Smit

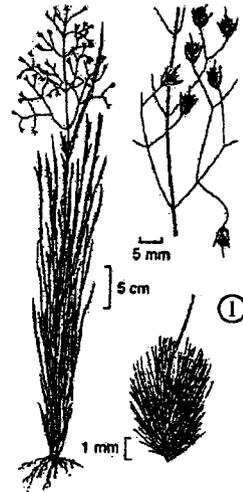
-----Grasses at Yucca Mountain-----

1. *Achnatherum hymenoides* (Roemer & Schultes)

Indian ricegrass. Grass family - Poaceae.

(Plate 21)

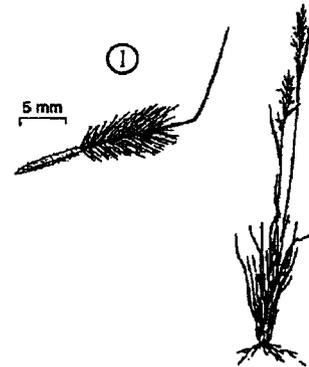
This perennial bunchgrass was formerly known as *Oryzopsis hymenoides*. It is generally 2.5-7 cm. tall with narrow (<1mm wide) rolled leaves. The inflorescence is an open panicle (loose feathery collection of branches and spikelets) with the stalks widely spreading and spikelets borne at the tips. It inhabits dry, well-drained soils generally sandy. Native Americans used this species for food.



2. *Achnatherum speciosum* Trin. and Rupr. Barkworth desert needlegrass. Grass family - Poaceae.

(Plates 6 and 23)

A perennial grass formerly known as *Stipa speciosa*, desert needlegrass forms bunches that are 3-6 dm tall. The inflorescence is a spike 10-15 cm long, often partly enclosed by the uppermost leaf sheath. A distinguishing characteristic is the presence of long awns (bristles that extend from the coat around seeds), 35-40 mm, that are once-bent. Desert needlegrass generally inhabits rocky slopes.

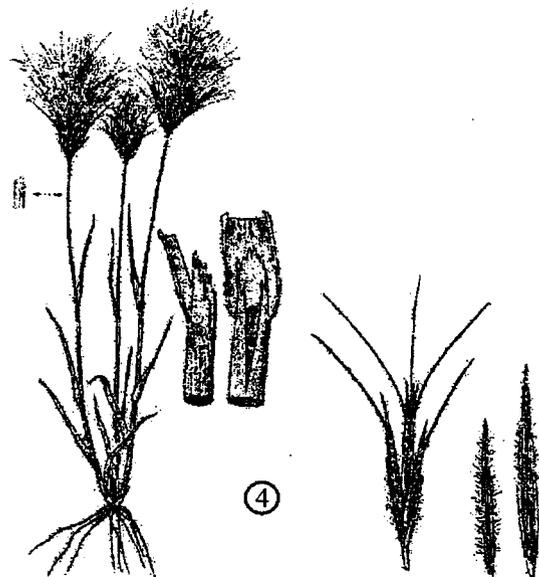


3. *Bromus madritensis* L. foxtail chess.

Grass family - Poaceae.

(Plates 1 and 2)

This annual grass, formerly known as *B. rubens*, is 1-5 dm in stature with short soft-hairy leaf blades and a 3-11 cm cylindrical to slightly compressed inflorescence. This species was introduced from Eurasia and probably reached the region of Yucca Mountain during the 1930's. It has become the dominant annual species on Yucca Mountain and is apparently replacing native shrub species by out-competing their seedlings. Foxtail chess germinates during the fall, grows slowly as a basal rosette during the winter and reaches full growth rate during the spring period at about the time that the seedlings of most native species are just becoming established. The upper elevational limit of this species is partly determined by competition with another weedy brome, cheatgrass. On Yucca Mountain, the upper limit of foxtail dominance may occur between 5,000 and 6,000 feet. Foxtail chess will grow in all habitats on Yucca Mountain but has become established more aggressively in locations where the soil is relatively deep and where slopes are aligned to the south-east through south-west.

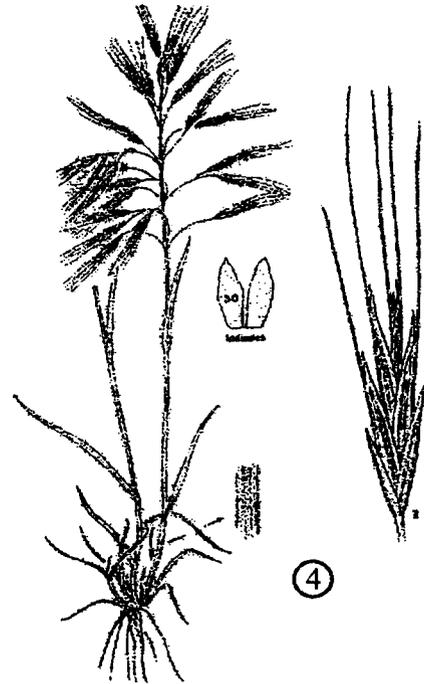


4. *Bromus tectorum* L. **cheatgrass.**

Grass family - Poaceae.

(Plates 1 and 2)

This weedy annual grass was also introduced from Eurasia. It grows between 1-5 dm tall and has a more open inflorescence than foxtail chess that is 6-22 cm long, cylindric to slightly compressed. Leaves are hairless to densely soft hairy and 1-5 mm broad. This species and foxtail chess contrast markedly from native vegetation in the spring and early summer by assuming red-brown color that later in summer turns to a straw color. Like foxtail chess, cheatgrass often germinates during the fall and becomes established over winter, a habit which permits it to out-compete the seedlings of native shrub species and thereby eventually establish near pure stands. This habit and the potential that this species has for carrying wildfire hasten replacement of native shrub species. Presently on Yucca Mountain, the distribution of cheatgrass is spotty. However, in the event of return to cooler and wetter climatic conditions, this species is expected to dominate over foxtail chess since it is dominant at higher elevations and latitudes.

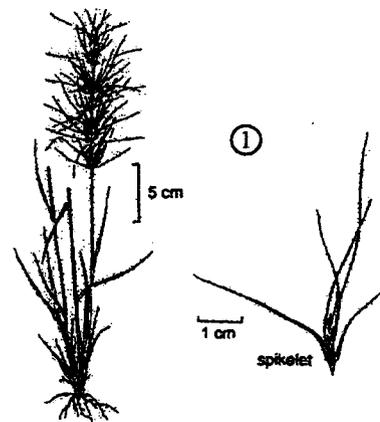


5. *Elymus elymoides* (Raf.) Swezey **squirreltail.**

Grass family - Poaceae.

(Plate 17)

This bunchgrass was formerly known by the name *Sitanion hystrix*. It is 1-6.5 dm tall and can be distinguished easily from other grass species by the appearance of its 2.5-15 cm inflorescence which has long (90 cm) awns that form the appearance of a squirrel's tail. Leaves are generally less than 1 mm broad. This species prefers dry open areas and rocky slopes on Yucca Mountain.



6. *Pleuraphis jamesii* Torrey **galleta grass.**

Grass family - Poaceae.

(Plates 7 and 19)

Formerly known as *Hilaria jamesii*, this small bunchgrass grows 1.5 to 4 dm tall. The leaves are generally basal and the inflorescence is 3-7 cm long with spikelets borne in distinct clusters of 6-9 mm (a distinguishing characteristic for this species). On Yucca Mountain, this species generally inhabits the zone near ridges, most commonly in association with big sagebrush.

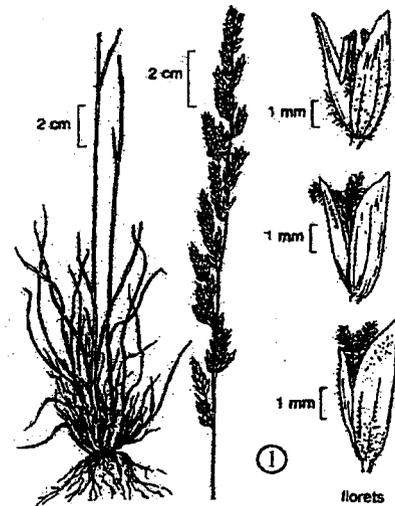


7. *Poa secunda* J.S. Presl. **Sandberg bluegrass.**

Grass family - Poaceae.

(No Plate)

This perennial grass grows in short dense bunches that, on Yucca Mountain tend to be between 1 and 4 dm tall. The inflorescence is 2-10 cm long in an appressed, often one-sided panicle. On Yucca Mountain, this species is generally restricted to north-facing slopes of rocky hillsides.



-----**Forbs at Yucca Mountain**-----

8. *Amsinckia tessellata* Gray **checker fiddleneck.**

Borage family - Boraginaceae.

(Plates 2, 4 and 23)

Checker fiddleneck is the most common of the native annual species that inhabit Yucca Mountain. It has yellow or orange flowers that are borne in a scorpioid cyme (curving like a scorpion's tail, with flowers borne along the outside). This species has dense hooked prickles that, to the human skin, are highly irritating. It inhabits sandy soil, often very densely, and is persistent in a dried state for up to a year after growth.



9. *Castilleja angustifolia* (Nutt.) G. Don **Desert Indian paintbrush.** Snapdragon family - Scrophulariaceae.

(Plates 7, 9 and 17)

This perennial species grows 1.5-4.5 dm tall, is few-branched with gray-green foliage. The inflorescence consists of a calyx (sepals, collectively) 15-25 mm, a corolla tube of yellowish green and bracts that are bright red to yellowish orange. On Yucca Mountain it is found on the crest or associated commonly with sagebrush on north-facing hillsides.

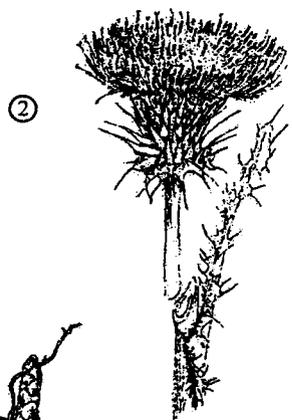


10. *Cirsium neomexicanum* Gray desert thistle.

Aster family - Asteraceae

(Plate 11)

Because this perennial is tall, 4 to 29 dm, with large white to lavender inflorescences, it is easily identified. It inhabits Yucca Mountain along the crest where the erosion-resistant caprock has created deep, relatively well-watered soils between boulders.

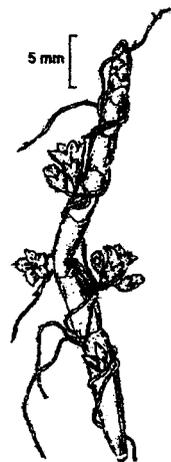


11. *Cuscuta denticulata* Engelm. desert dodder.

Dodder family - Cuscutaceae.

(Plate 13)

This annual species is parasitic on shrubs in the creosote scrub vegetation. It can be recognized by its yellow-orange color of its elongated hairlike stems that twine and clasp the branches and leaves of various shrubs and grasses. Within the creosote bush dominated vegetation, this species may form large patches of up to several square miles and, if the infestation is severe, may cause the mortality of shrubs they parasitize.



12. *Delphinium parishii* A. Gray desert larkspur.

Buttercup family - Ranunculaceae.

(Plate 14)

Desert larkspur can be easily identified by its sky-blue, irregular flowers that have a spur extending aft of the point of attachment. Leaves are mostly basal with a few attached to the stem and deeply cleft into several to many lobes. On Yucca Mountain desert larkspur is most commonly found in soils derived from resistant caprock where the remnant rock pans permit extra water to accumulate.

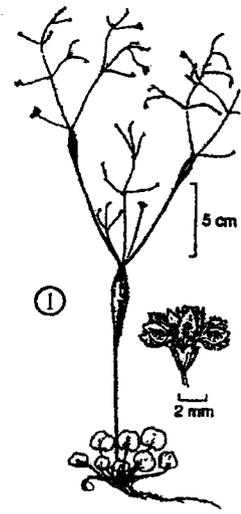


13. *Eriogonum inflatum* Torr. & Frem. desert trumpet.

Buckwheat family - Polygonaceae.

(Plate 19)

The leaves on this annual to perennial species are basal and the upright stems are inflated. The flowers are borne in loose and spreading umbels with the tops at up to 10 dm tall. It is easily identified by its persistent inflated stems.

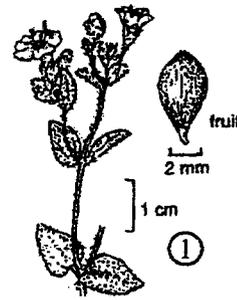


14. *Mirabilis bigelovii* Gray desert four-o'clock.

Four-o'clock family - Nyctaginaceae.

(Plate 16)

This perennial white-flowered species is less than 8 dm tall with a growth habit of spreading along the ground. The stem and leaves are glandular hairy and bright green. The flower is a five petaled, 12-15 mm long, funnel shaped and slightly hairy. On Yucca Mountain, it is found in protected areas along the sides of the caprock.

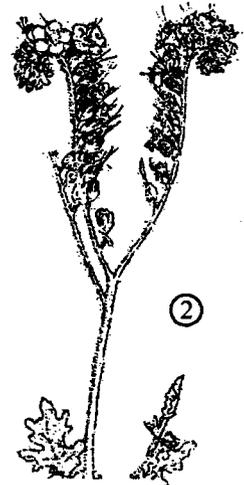


15. *Phacelia crenulata* Torr. Ex S. Wats. heliotrope phacelia.

Waterleaf family - Hydrophyllaceae.

(Plate 15)

This annual forb is erect (1 to 6 dm tall), with no to few branches from the base. Leaves may have margins that vary from rounded projections to deeply lobed, are 20 to 80 mm long and elliptic. Flowers are bell shaped, blue to purple and borne in a scorpioid cyme. This species is generally found in rocky areas, frequently near the caprock where large rocks provide greater water catchment and protection. Another favored habitat is sandy or gravelly washes where runoff may concentrate additional water.

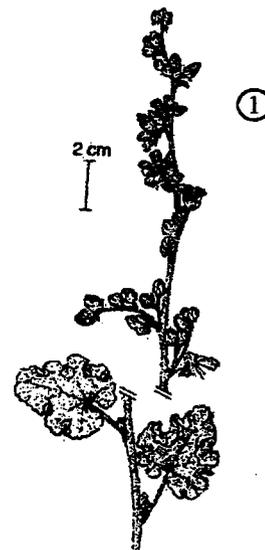


16. *Sphaeralcea ambigua* Gray apricot mallow.

Mallow family - Malvaceae.

(Cover and Plates 6 and 11)

A perennial forb between 5 and 10 dm tall, apricot mallow is covered with hairs (canescent) and has leaves that are 15 to 50 mm, more or less triangular, weakly three lobed with three veins and rounded margins. The flowers are large, regular and five petaled, 20-30 mm across and of red orange to apricot color. This species inhabits all of the micro-environments on Yucca Mountain and is often found in disturbed ground along roadways.



17. *Stephanomeria pauciflora* (Torr.) A.Nels.

fewflower wirelettuce. Aster family - Asteraceae.

(Plate 4)

This perennial forb forms a subshrub (herbaceous with a woody base) that is 3-6 dm in height. The stems are bright green, with no hairs to hairs that are dense and short. The leaves are generally reduced to scales. Flowers are pink with only a few on each plant. On Yucca Mountain this species generally inhabits washes and lower side-slopes.



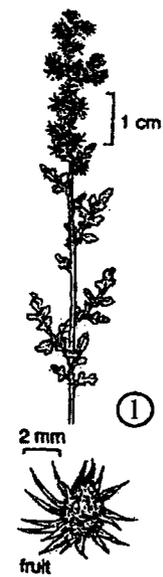
-----Shrubs at Yucca Mountain-----

18. *Ambrosia dumosa* (Gray) Payne burrow-weed.

Aster family - Asteraceae

(Plates 8, 12, 14 and 18)

A short 2-9 dm shrub, much branched with soft white pubescence covering leaves and growing stems. Leaves are generally clustered at nodes with the blades 0.5-4 mm long, ovate, and 1-3 pinnate. Flowers are borne in separate staminate and pistillate heads, the latter which are two-flowered. Fruit is a bur. Burrow-weed is commonly found in association with creosote bush. On Yucca Mountain, however, burrow-weed also grows on the steep slopes and ridges where creosote bush is largely absent.

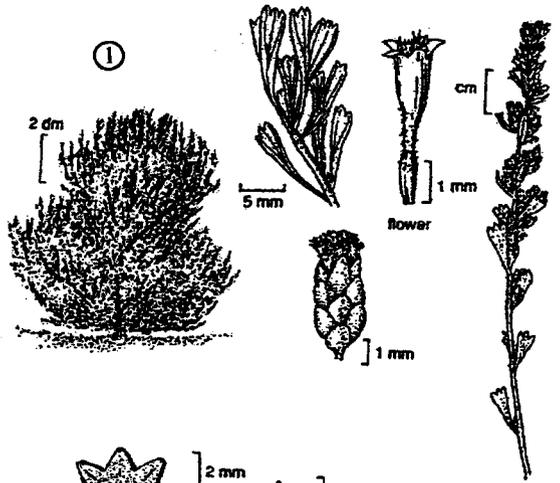


19. *Artemisia tridentata* Nutt. big sagebrush.

Aster family - Asteraceae.

(Plates 8 and 19)

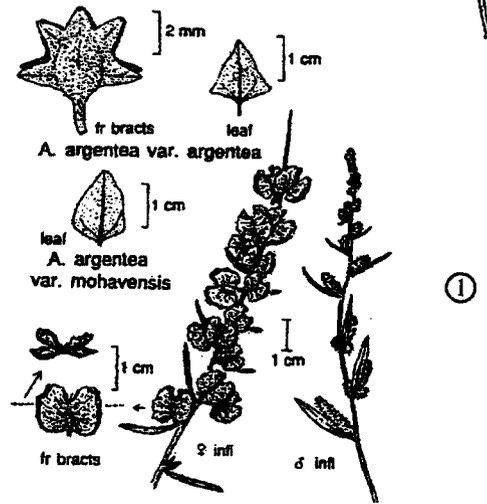
This species of shrub is easily identified with its three-toothed grey-green densely hairy aromatic leaves. It is tall, 5 to 20 dm at Yucca Mountain, and here is found on north facing slopes near the crest. The small flowers (2-2.5 mm diam.) are borne in open cymes in the fall.



20. *Atriplex canescens* (Pursh) Nutt. four-wing saltbush. Goosefoot family - Chenopodiaceae.

(Plates 10 and 20)

The fruit of the four-wing saltbush is the most easily distinguished characteristic of this 5-20 dm tall shrub that has erect ascending and spreading branches. The leaves are linear to oblanceolate 8-50 mm and covered with dense white scaly hairs. Blooming in the summer, the fruit is four-winged bract that covers the 1.5-2.5 mm seed. These plants are mostly dioecious. On Yucca Mountain fourwing saltbush is found in varied habitats.



21. *Atriplex confertifolia* (Torr. & Frem.) S. Wats.
shadscale. Goosefoot family - Chenopodiaceae.

(Plates 6, 12 and 22)

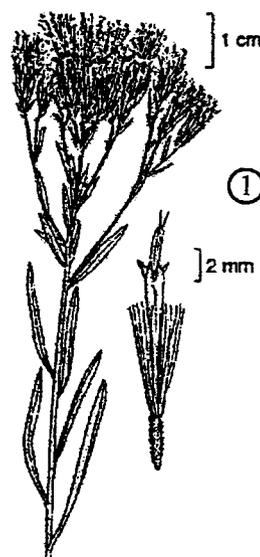
Shadscale is a dioecious shrub that is less than 10 dm tall and having many spreading stiff, often prickly branches. The leaves are short-petioled, elliptic to ovate, 8-24 mm and covered with densely gray scaly. The pistillate inflorescence develops terminal bracts that enclose the seed that may have a fold and that are elliptic to round. This species inhabits all micro-environments on Yucca Mountain.



22. *Chrysothamnus nauseosus* (Pallas) Britton
rubber rabbitbrush Aster family - Asteraceae.

(Plates 7 and 19)

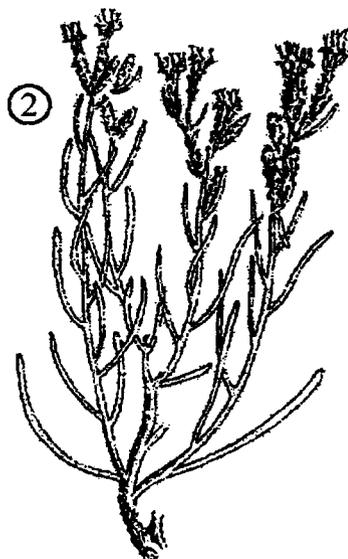
Rubber rabbitbrush is an erect tomentose shrub that may reach 20 dm tall on Yucca Mountain. The leaves are linear and threadlike and tend to be shed during drought leaving the upper stems intact as a photosynthesizing and transpiring surface of restricted area. It blooms in the fall with a profusion of yellow flowers that are borne in umbels that tend to dominate the upper crown. On Yucca Mountain it is restricted to the north-facing slopes near the crest.



23. *Chrysothamnus teretifolius* (Dur. & Hilg.) Hall
needleleaf rabbitbrush . Aster family - Asteraceae.

(Plates 6, 10, 11 and 20)

Needle-leaved rabbitbrush is a bright green shrub that can achieve 15 dm at Yucca Mountain. It is much branched with brittle gland dotted gland-dotted leaves 1-7.5 cm long that are threadlike, subcylindric, dark green and resinous. It flowers in the fall with yellow flowers borne in cymes. On Yucca Mountain, this species has been found to be strongly associated with rock fissures through which it must receive a more stable supply of water not subject to competition: when more shallow-rooted species have gone dormant and lost all leaves, needleleaf rabbitbrush is green and productive.



24. *Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus* (Hook.) Nutt.
stickyleaf rabbitbrush Aster family - Asteraceae.

(Plates 3, 10, 16 and 18)

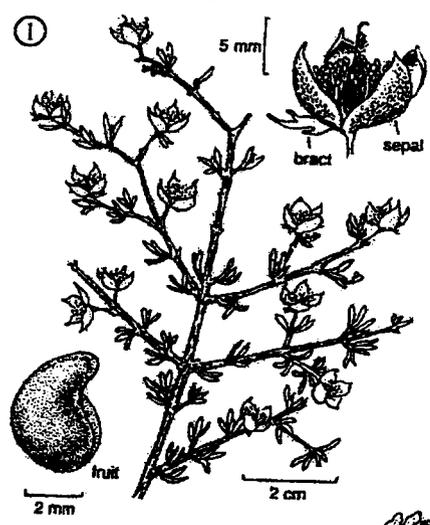
This rabbitbrush can be distinguished easily from the previous two species by its more yellow appearance and more delicate branches and foliage. On Yucca Mountain it generally grows to no more than 8 dm. Leaves are 1-7.5 cm, 1-10 mm broad and threadlike and very sticky. The inflorescence is a dense, flat-topped cyme, blooming in the fall. On Yucca Mountain, this species is generally found on the crest and on slopes. It is often the first perennial species to colonize a disturbed area.



25. *Coleogyne ramosissima* Torrey **blackbrush**
Rose family - Rosaceae.

(Plates 5 and 17)

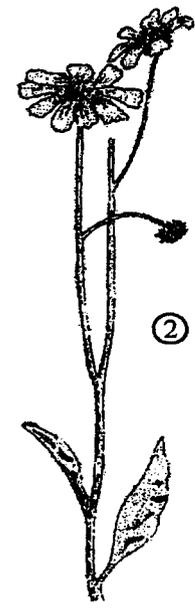
This much branched, often thorny shrub has a dark gray appearance in comparison to other shrubs. The leaves are borne in opposite clusters are 5-15 mm and linear-oblongate. The inflorescence is single, terminal yellow flowers with reddish sepals with the base (an hypanthium) leathery. On Yucca Mountain this species is found in deeper soils at the base of slopes and soils on the crest, It is intolerant of fire: large stands of pure blackbrush indicate sites that have not burned for many centuries.



26. *Encelia virginensis* Nelson **Virgin River encelia.**
Aster family - Asteraceae.

(Plates 3 and 23)

This shrub may be up to 8 dm tall on Yucca Mountain with many slender branches arising only from the base. Young stems and leaves are hairy. Leaves tend to be scattered along the stems with long petioles (2-7 mm) with the leaves 1.2-2.5 cm, ovate to deltate and acute to obtuse tips and gray-green. Ray flowers and disk flowers are present in the inflorescence. This species is found on many types of locations on Yucca Mountain.



27. *Ephedra nevadensis* S. Watson. **Nevada ephedra.**
 Ephedra family - Ephedraceae.

(Plates 9 and 24)

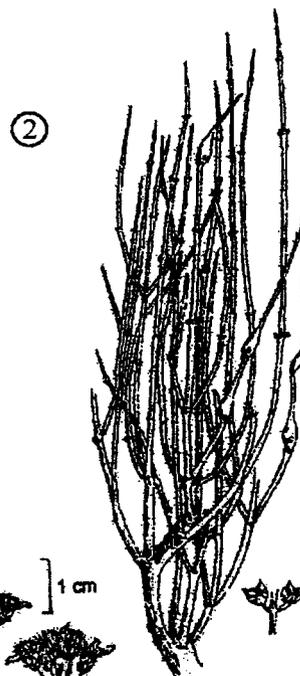
This shrub may grow to 8 dm on Yucca Mountain. Its grayish green stems are pale green when young with leaves reduced to scales at the nodes. It is distinguishable from green ephedra by its color. More so than green ephedra, this species spreads clonally and may form large but sparse patches of several meters in diameter. On Yucca Mountain, this species can be found in all habitats.



28. *Ephedra viridis* Colville **green ephedra.**
 Ephedra family - Ephedraceae.

(Plate 6, 9 and 24)

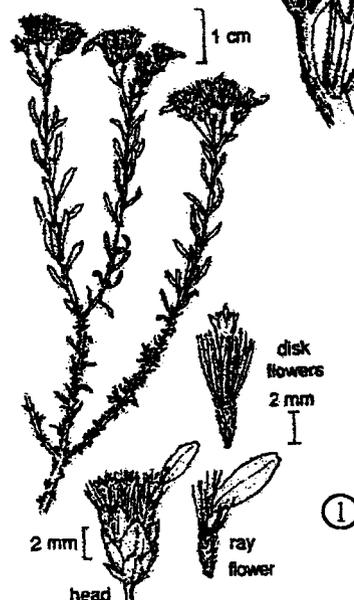
On Yucca Mountain green ephedra grows much more robust than Nevada ephedra and may reach 15 dm tall. Like the needle-leaved rabbitbrush, the bright green foliage of green ephedra stands out against the more drab background of the other arid plant species. Like the Nevada ephedra, the leaves are reduced and only located nodes. On Yucca Mountain, green ephedra is often found growing around talus slopes that are penetrated by its long root systems. Under these conditions, the talus slope acts as a significant moisture store and green ephedra grows especially robust.



29. *Ericameria cooperi* (Gray) Hall
Cooper goldenbush. Aster family - Asteraceae.

(Plates 4, 8, 10, 16 and 18)

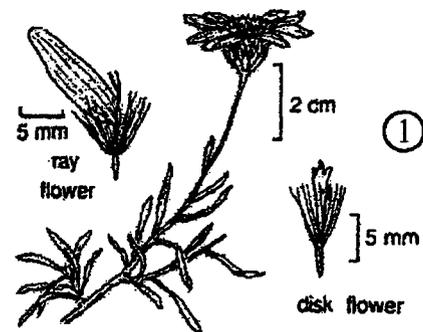
A short, 3-6 dm tall, rounded, dark green shrub. Leaves are 3-15 mm linear, acute, mostly lacking hairs and dotted with glands. The inflorescence is borne in radiate open cymes with the flower heads having ray flowers 0-2 with ligules 4-9 mm and disk flowers 4-12. This shrub may be found in any habitat on Yucca Mountain but generally not on exposed south-facing slopes.



30. *Ericameria linearifolia* Urb. & J. Wussow
narrowleaf goldenbush Aster family - Asteraceae.

(Plates 3, 9, 10 and 18)

This goldenbush is less rounded than Cooper goldenbush and much less dense. The leaves are dark green and may or may not have fine hairs, are 10-55 mm long, and linear to acute with bases narrowed. The yellow flower heads are relatively large and showy with ray flowers 13-18 and 9-20 mm long. Disk flowers are many. This species tends to be found only on the caprock at Yucca Mountain. Both narrowleaf goldenbush and Cooper goldenbush bloom in the spring.



31. *Eriogonum fasciculatum* (Benth.) Torrey & Gray
California buckwheat. Buckwheat family - Polygonaceae.

(Cover and Plates 7 and 9)

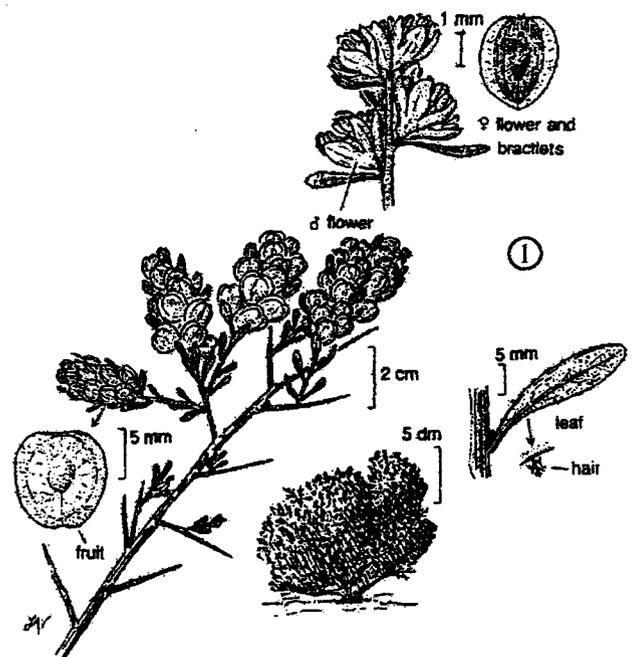
On Yucca Mountain this shrub grows to 8 dm tall with erect brittle branches. Leaves arise from stems and are clustered at the nodes with blades 6-18 mm, linear to oblanceolate, leathery and rolled under with dense short white hairs on under surfaces. Flowers are cream colored to pinkish and are borne in umbels of heads. On Yucca Mountain, this species may inhabit any habitat but is most numerous on north facing slopes near the crest.



32. *Grayia spinosa* (Hook.) Moq. spiny hopsage
 Goosefoot family - Chenopodiaceae.

(Plates 4, 6, and 22)

This generally <10 dm shrub has many stiff branches that often have linear striations. Leaves are oblanceolate to elliptic, flat, smooth, bright green and relatively succulent. The bracts of the fruit may have a bright red to purple tinge when nearing maturity in mid- to late-summer. This species may be found in all habitats on Yucca Mountain.

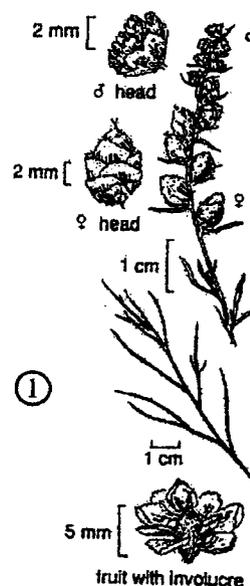


33. *Hymenoclea salsola* A. Gray cheesebush.

Aster family - Asteraceae

(Plates 8 and 18)

This wispy bright green subshrub grows <15 cm at Yucca Mountain. Woody stems are straw colored and the finer new growth is highly branched. The fruit is winged, straw colored and papery with 5-19 wings that are 2-7 mm and 1.5-8 mm wide and often kidney shaped.

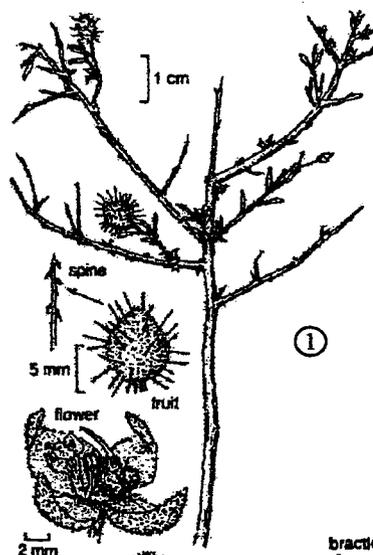


34. *Krameria erecta* Schultes littleleaf rhatany.

Rhatany family - Krameriaceae.

(Plate 21)

The roots of this small shrub (<5 dm) are parasitic on other plants. The stems are relatively delicate and the leaves are linear, about 5 mm long, a dark olive green color and covered with hairs. Flowers are pink with glandular petals and the fruit is covered with spines. In the Yucca Mountain region, this species tends to occupy alluvial terraces and washes but is largely absent from rocky slopes.



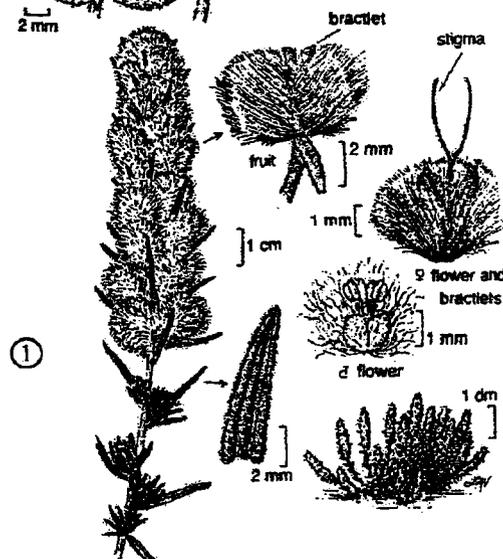
35. *Krascheninnikovia lanata* (Pursh)

A.D.J. Meeuse & Smit winterfat.

Goosefoot family - Chenopodiaceae.

(Plate 21)

Winterfat is a common shrub that can be readily distinguished by its whitish appearance due to wooly pubescence covering leaves and stems. It is generally less than 10 dm tall. The fruit has cotton-like hairs and the leaves have inrolled margins and are 6-30 m; 1.5-5 mm wide. On Yucca Mountain winterfat is found in any of the habitats.

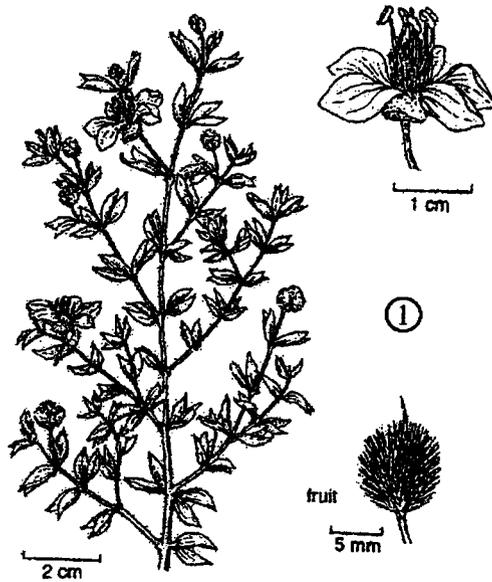


36. *Larrea tridentata* (DC.) Cov. creosote bush.

Caltrop family - Zygophyllaceae

(Plates 8, 13 and 21)

A tall (15-30 dm) widely spreading shrub easily identified by its shiny dark green leaves that are <18 mm long and <8.5 mm wide. Stems are light gray and have pronounced transverse scars from leaf attachment. Flowers are yellow (<2.5 mm wide), petals 5 and clawlike, and in wet years may be quite showy. At Yucca Mountain creosote bush is an indicator of extensive patches of soil that are at least 0.5 m deep. Creosote bush is generally absent from highly rocky slopes.

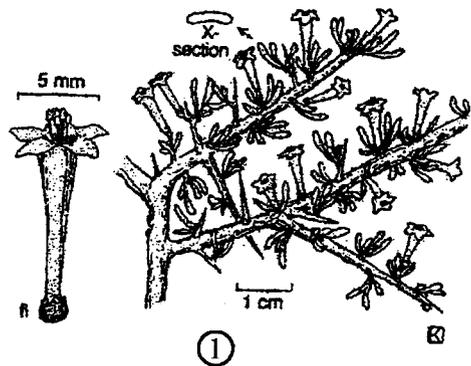


37. *Lycium andersonii* Gray Anderson desert thorn.

Nightshade family - Solanaceae.

(Plates 4 and 21)

This shrub generally lacks hairs on leaves and stems, has erect, stiffly spreading branches and is less than 12 dm tall near Yucca Mountain. Leaves are 3-15 mm, linear and elliptic in cross section. The flowers are funnel-shaped whitish, often with a violet tinge with the tube 5-10 mm long. The fruit is 3-8 mm, red or orange and juicy. On Yucca Mountain, this species is most common in the lower washes and is generally absent on north-facing slopes.

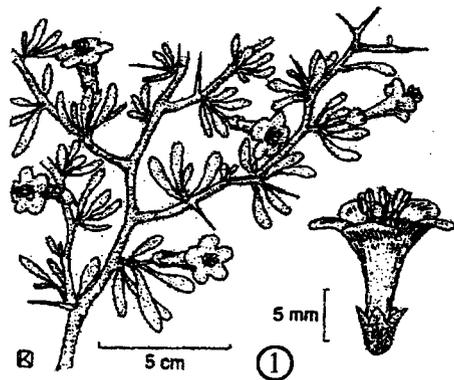


38. *Lycium pallidum* Miers rabbit thorn.

Nightshade family - Solanaceae.

(Cover and Plate 8)

Rabbit thorn is less common than Anderson desert thorn and tends to be more robust. Branches are many, spreading and ascending. All foliage and stems lack hairs. Leaves are oblong to narrowly oblong-ovate with a waxy bloom, 10-50 mm long. Flower tube is 8-12 mm long, bell shaped and greenish white with purple veins. The fruit is fleshy, firm and greenish purple. Near Yucca Mountain, this species is generally restricted to the lower washes.



39. *Menodora spinescens* Gray spiny menodora.

Olive family - Oleaceae.

(Plates 4 and 18)

This short, compact and very green shrub has short intricate branching that gives rise to a profusion of spines. Leaves are alternate or clustered 3-11 mm, oblong to oval and fleshy. Flowers are borne in axils with the white corolla tube 4-9 mm. On Yucca Mountain this species is generally absent from steep rocky slopes, apparently preferring deeper soils.



40. *Psorothamnus fremontii* (A. Gray) Barneby

Fremont indigo bush. Pea family - Fabaceae.

(Plate 12)

A widely spreading shrub, <10 dm in the Yucca Mountain region. Generally with stiff appressed silvery hairs. Leaves in pinnately compound leaflets, each 3-25 mm. The inflorescence is an open raceme of purple flowers. In the region of Yucca Mountain indigo bush occupies the lowermost washes and alluvial fans. A diagnostic clue is an astringent, pine-like, odor to the leaves and stems when crushed.

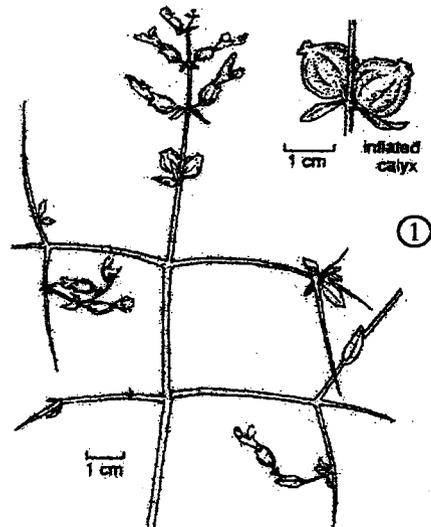


41. *Salazaria mexicana* Torrey bladder-sage.

Mint family - Lamiaceae.

(Cover and Plates 9 and 24)

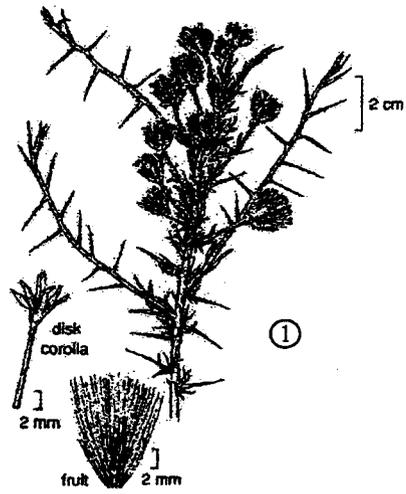
Bladder sage, 8-15 dm tall, can be readily distinguished by bladder-like 1-2 cm fruits in the late summer through early winter period and earlier by its irregular mint-family flowers that are purplish and 15-25 mm long. Its widely divergent branching pattern and sparse foliage are diagnostic. On Yucca Mountain it is found almost exclusively in lower washes.



42. *Tetradymia axillaris* A. Nels. **cotton-thorn.**
Aster family - Asteraceae.

(Plate 15)

This spiny shrub can be readily distinguished by its white densely hair covered stems and lower leaves. It is tall (15 dm) with 1-5 cm leaves that become glabrous and forming straight spines. Flowers, borne 1-3 heads per axil, are yellow, discoid, and about 8 mm long. On Yucca Mountain cotton-thorn is uncommon and found on the rim of the caprock.



-----Trees at Yucca Mountain-----

43. *Yucca brevifolia* Engelm. **Joshua tree.**
Lily family - Liliaceae.

(Plate 3)

Tree-like open-branched yucca with 20-35 cm thorn-tipped leaves borne in rosettes at branch ends. Flowers are white, and borne at the tips of branches with perianth 4-7 cm long. On Yucca Mountain, Joshua trees are restricted to several clumps on the crest.

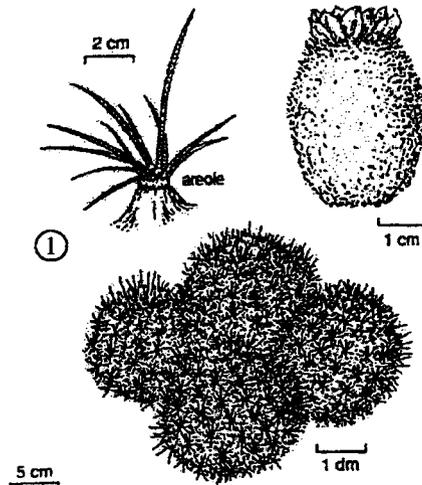


-----Cacti at Yucca Mountain-----

44. *Echinocactus polycephalus* Engelm. & J. Bigelow clustered barrel cactus. Cactus family - Cactaceae

(No Plate)

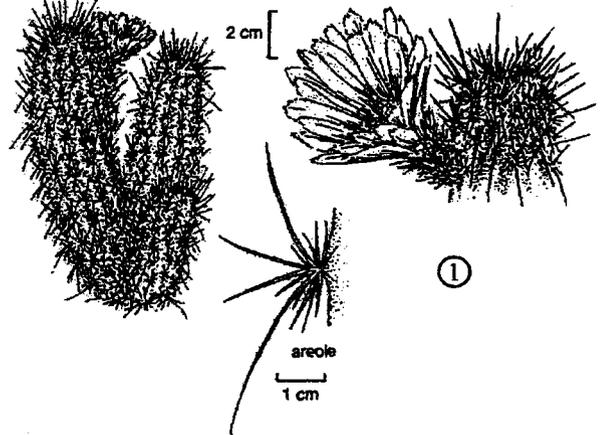
A less than 10 dm tall cactus with multiple heads (1-30) that are 10-20 cm diameter with 13-21 ribs. Central spines 4, 6-7.5 cm are red or yellow with fine white hairs at the base. Radial spines, 6-8, 3-4.5 cm are spreading, slightly curved and red or yellow. Flower is 4-5 cm diameter with petals yellow tinged with pink. This cactus generally inhabits very rocky locations on Yucca Mountain.



45. *Echinocereus engelmannii* (Engelm) Lemaire hedgehog cactus. Cactus family - Cactaceae.

(No Plate)

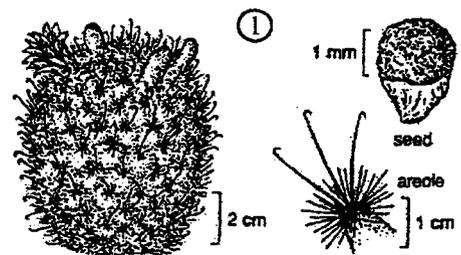
This cactus is branched, forming clumps or mounds (<1 m diameter) with numerous branches (<60) that are green, 4-9 cm in diameter, and with 10-13 ribs. Central spines 2-7 and <8 cm and spreading. Radial spines 6-14 are 2-20 cm long. Flower is 5-7.5 cm in diameter and purplish, magenta or lavender in color. This cactus generally inhabits very rocky locations on Yucca Mountain.



46. *Mammillaria tetrancistra* Engelm. fish-hook cactus. Cactus family - Cactaceae.

(No Plate)

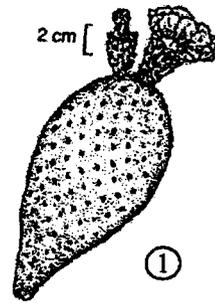
Generally with only one stem, this cactus is 3.5-7.5 cm diameter and 7-25 cm long. Central spines 3-4 are diagnostically hooked. Radial spines number 30-60. Flowers are 2.5-4 cm in diameter and deep pink to lavender. On Yucca Mountain, this cactus is generally found on moderately rocky south-facing slopes.



47. *Opuntia basilaris* Engelm. & J. Bigelow
beavertail cactus. Cactus family - Cactaceae.

(No Plate)

Stems are erect and ascending 7-40 cm with multiple flat segments that bare no spines but many soft highly irritating bristles. The flower is 5-8 cm in diameter and pink-magenta. On Yucca Mountain beavertail cactus may all inhabits except shady north-facing slopes and the crest.



48. *Opuntia echinocarpa* Engelm & J. Bigelow
golden cholla. Cactus family - Cactaceae.

(No Plate)

This cactus has a tree-like form often reaching 15 dm in the Yucca Mountain region. The segments are cylindric 2-3 cm diameter with spines <4 cm in length and of a silver to golden translucent appearance that gives this species its common name. The flower is green yellow and <2.5 cm diameter. At Yucca Mountain this species inhabits alluvial fans and lower washes.

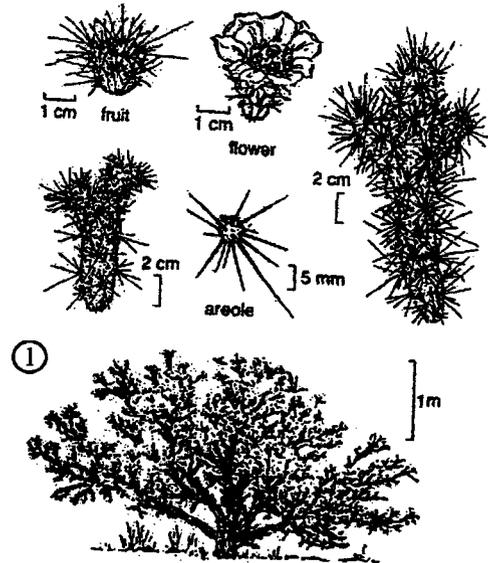


Plate 1



foxtail chess

cheatgrass

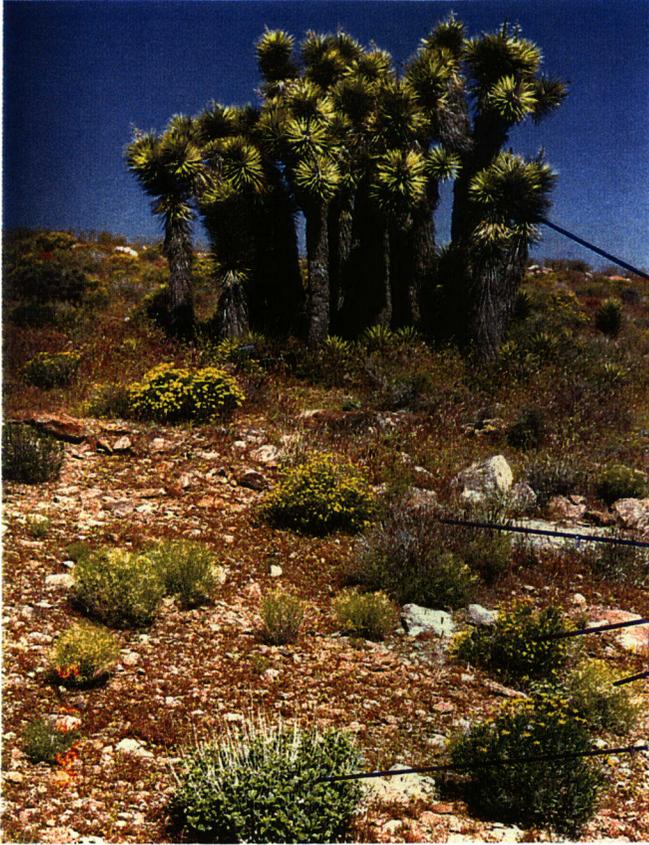
Plate 2

cheatgrass

checker fiddleneck

foxtail chess





Joshua tree

Plate 3

foxtail chess

narrow-leaved goldenbush

sticky-leaved rabbitbrush

Virgin River encelia

Cooper goldenbush

foxtail chess

Plate 4

spiny menodora

Anderson desert thorn

fewflower wirelettuce



Plate 5

Cooper goldenbush

checker fiddleneck



blackbrush

winterfat

foxtail chess

Plate 6

desert needlegrass

winterfat

shadscale (male)

needle-leaved rabbitbrush

spiny hobsage

green ephedra

foxtail chess

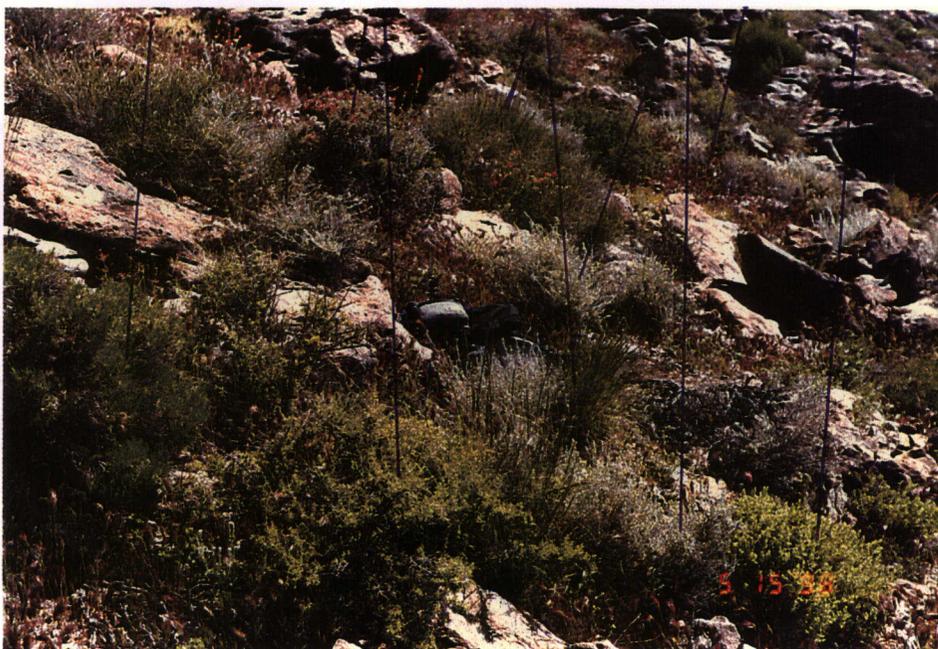


Plate 7

big sagebrush

desert Indian paintbrush

rubber rabbitbrush



galleta grass

California buckwheat

Plate 8

rabbit thorn

burro-weed

cheese weed

creosote bush



Plate 9

narrow-leaved goldenbush blackbrush bladder-sage green ephedra



desert Indian paintbrush Nevada ephedra California buckwheat

Plate 10

narrow-leaved goldenbush four-winged saltbush
Cooper goldenbush sticky-leaved rabbitbrush California buckwheat



Plate 11

needle-leaved rabbitbrush

spiny hopsage

desert thistle



foxtail chess

winterfat

apricot mallow

Plate 12

shadscale (female)

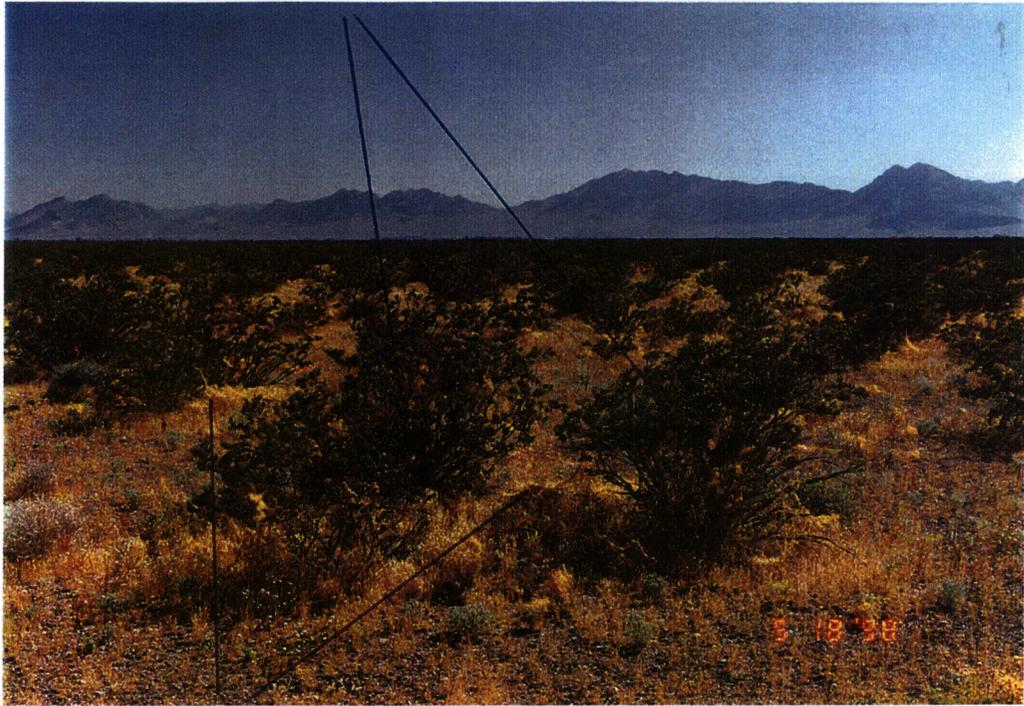
burro-weed

Fremont indigo bush



Plate 13

creosote bush



desert dodder

Plate 14

burro-weed foxtail chess desert larkspur winterfat





cottonthorn

Plate 15

heliotrope phacelia

checker fiddleneck

Plate 16

Cooper goldenbush desert four-o'clock



Plate 17

squirreltail
 blackbrush narrow-leaved goldenbush
 desert Indian paintbrush



Plate 18

Cooper goldenbush spiny menodora
 cheesebush burro-weed



Plate 19

galleta grass
desert trumpet

big sagebrush
rubber rabbitbrush



Plate 20

four-wing saltbush (male)
sticky rabbitbrush

four-wing saltbush (female)
needle-leaved rabbitbrush



Plate 21

burro-weed	little leaf rhatany
Indian rice grass	
Anderson desert thorn	creosote bush



Plate 22

spiny hopsage (with fruit)	shadscale (male)
spiny hopsage (without fruit)	winterfat



Plate 23

desert needlegrass
checker fiddleneck Virgin River encelia



Plate 24

green ephedra bladder-sage
Nevada ephedra California buckwheat

