

# Map Unit Description

Weld County, Colorado, Northern Part

## 1 Altvan fine sandy loam, 0 to 6 percent slopes

### Setting

Elevation: 3500 to 5500 feet  
Mean annual precipitation: 14 to 16 inches  
Mean annual air temperature: 46 to 48 degrees F  
Frost-free period: 130 to 150 days

### Composition

Altvan and similar soils: 85 percent  
Minor components: 15 percent

### Description of Altvan

#### Setting

Landform: Plains  
Down-slope shape: Linear  
Across-slope shape: Linear  
Parent material: Calcareous gravelly alluvium

#### Properties and Qualities

Slope: 0 to 6 percent  
Depth to restrictive feature: 20 to 40 inches to Strongly contrasting textural stratification  
Drainage class: Well drained  
Capacity of the most limiting layer to transmit water (Ksat): Moderately high or high (0.20 to 2.00 in/hr)  
Frequency of flooding: None  
Frequency of ponding: None  
Calcium carbonate maximum: 15 percent  
Gypsum maximum: 0 percent  
Available water capacity: Low (about 4.6 inches)

#### Interpretive Groups

Land capability classification (irrigated): 3e  
Land capability (non irrigated): 4e  
Ecological site: Loamy Plains (R067BY002CO)

#### Typical Profile

0 to 6 inches: fine sandy loam  
6 to 22 inches: sandy clay loam  
22 to 27 inches: sandy clay loam  
27 to 60 inches: gravelly coarse sand

### Minor Components

#### Ascalon

Percent of map unit: 5 percent

#### Cascajo

Percent of map unit: 5 percent

#### Peetz

Percent of map unit: 5 percent

## Map Unit Description

### Detailed Soil Map Units

The map units delineated on the detailed soil maps in a soil survey represent the soils or miscellaneous areas in the survey area. The map unit descriptions in this report, along with the maps, can be used to determine the composition and properties of a unit.

A map unit delineation on a soil map represents an area dominated by one or more major kinds of soil or miscellaneous areas. A map unit is identified and named according to the taxonomic classification of the dominant soils. Within a taxonomic class there are precisely defined limits for the properties of the soils. On the landscape, however, the soils are natural phenomena, and they have the characteristic variability of all natural phenomena. Thus, the range of some observed properties may extend beyond the limits defined for a taxonomic class. Areas of soils of a single taxonomic class rarely, if ever, can be mapped without including areas of other taxonomic classes. Consequently, every map unit is made up of the soils or miscellaneous areas for which it is named and some minor components that belong to taxonomic classes other than those of the major soils.

Most minor soils have properties similar to those of the dominant soil or soils in the map unit, and thus they do not affect use and management. These are called noncontrasting, or similar, components. They may or may not be mentioned in a particular map unit description. Other minor components, however, have properties and behavioral characteristics divergent enough to affect use or to require different management. These are called contrasting, or dissimilar, components. They generally are in small areas and could not be mapped separately because of the scale used. Some small areas of strongly contrasting soils or miscellaneous areas are identified by a special symbol on the maps. The contrasting components are mentioned in the map unit descriptions. A few areas of minor components may not have been observed, and consequently they are not mentioned in the descriptions, especially where the pattern was so complex that it was impractical to make enough observations to identify all the soils and miscellaneous areas on the landscape.

The presence of minor components in a map unit in no way diminishes the usefulness or accuracy of the data. The objective of mapping is not to delineate pure taxonomic classes but rather to separate the landscape into landforms or landform segments that have similar use and management requirements. The delineation of such segments on the map provides sufficient information for the development of resource plans. If intensive use of small areas is planned, however, onsite investigation is needed to define and locate the soils and miscellaneous areas.

An identifying symbol precedes the map unit name in the map unit descriptions. Each description indicates the composition of the map unit and selected properties of the components of the unit.

Soils that have profiles that are almost alike make up a "soil series." Except for differences in texture of the surface layer, all the soils of a series have major horizons that are similar in composition, thickness, and arrangement.

Soils of one series can differ in texture of the surface layer, slope, stoniness, salinity, degree of erosion, and other characteristics that affect their use. On the basis of such differences, a soil series is divided into "soil phases." Most of the areas shown on the detailed soil maps are phases of soil series. The name of a soil phase commonly indicates a feature that affects use or management. For example, Alpha silt loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes, is a phase of the Alpha series.

Some map units are made up of two or more major soils or miscellaneous areas. These map units are complexes, associations, or undifferentiated groups.

A "complex" consists of two or more soils or miscellaneous areas in such an intricate pattern or in such small areas that they cannot be shown separately on the maps. The pattern and proportion of the soils or miscellaneous areas are somewhat similar in all areas. Alpha-Beta complex, 0 to 6 percent slopes, is an example.

An "association" is made up of two or more geographically associated soils or miscellaneous areas that are shown as one unit on the maps. Because of present or anticipated uses of the map units in the survey area, it was not considered practical or necessary to map the soils or miscellaneous areas separately. The pattern and relative proportion of the soils or miscellaneous areas are somewhat similar. Alpha-Beta association, 0 to 2 percent slopes, is an example.

An "undifferentiated group" is made up of two or more soils or miscellaneous areas that could be mapped individually but are mapped as one unit because similar interpretations can be made for use and management. The pattern and proportion of the soils or miscellaneous areas in a mapped area are not uniform. An area can be made up of only one of the major soils or miscellaneous areas, or it can be made up of all of them. Alpha and Beta soils, 0 to 2 percent slopes, is an example.

Some surveys include "miscellaneous areas." Such areas have little or no soil material and support little or no vegetation. Rock outcrop is an example.

Additional information about the map units described in this report is available in other Soil Data Mart reports, which give properties of the soils and the limitations, capabilities, and potentials for many uses. Also, the narratives that accompany the Soil Data Mart reports define some of the properties included in the map unit descriptions.

# Rangeland Productivity and Plant Composition

Weld County, Colorado, Northern Part

Map symbol and soil name	Ecological site	Total dry-weight production			Characteristic vegetation	Rangeland composition
		Favorable year	Normal year	Unfavorable year		
		Lb/Ac	Lb/Ac	Lb/Ac		
1: Altvan	Loamy Plains	1,600	900	400	Needleandthread Western wheatgrass Prairie sandreed	25 20 15

## Rangeland Productivity and Plant Composition

In areas that have similar climate and topography, differences in the kind and amount of rangeland or forest understory vegetation are closely related to the kind of soil. Effective management is based on the relationship between the soils and vegetation and water.

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

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

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

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

Range management requires knowledge of the kinds of soil and of the potential natural plant community. It also requires an evaluation of the present range similarity index and rangeland trend. Range similarity index is determined by comparing the present plant community with the potential natural plant community on a particular rangeland ecological site. The more closely the existing community resembles the potential community, the higher the range similarity index. Rangeland trend is defined as the direction of change in an existing plant community relative to the potential natural plant community. Further information about the range similarity index and rangeland trend is available in the "National Range and Pasture Handbook," which is available in local offices of NRCS or on the Internet.

The objective in range management is to control grazing so that the plants growing on a site are about the same in kind and amount as the potential natural plant community for that site. Such management generally results in the optimum production of vegetation, control of undesirable brush species, conservation of water, and control of erosion. Sometimes, however, an area with a range similarity index somewhat below the potential meets grazing needs, provides wildlife habitat, and protects soil and water resources.

### Reference:

United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. National range and pasture handbook. (<http://www.glti.nrcs.usda.gov/>)