

2.3.7.3 Results

The detailed vegetation map of the PR-11 Mine Expansion Area is presented on Map 48B. This map is the result of both a desktop analysis and field delineation of the vegetation and land cover in the PR-11 Mine Expansion Area. The results show that for the 137.08 acres within the PR-11 Mine Expansion Area vegetation study area there are four different vegetation or land cover types, along with a small amount of disturbance from historic gravel pits and more recently built corrals.

- Grassland—Historic Cropland covering 93.91 acres;
- Big Sagebrush covering 28.45 acres;
- Drainage bottoms covering 5.40 acres; with a jurisdictional Wetland subtype, including 0.61 acres;
- Mountain Shrub covering 0.15 acres;
- Disturbance covering 9.18 acres.

Within the broader mapping area extending for one-half mile outside the proposed expansion area, the same land cover types were mapped along with two additional plant communities and home sites.

- Grassland—Sub-irrigated Meadow (Big Bottom)
- Riparian (a bend of the Yampa River)
- Home Sites

Grassland (Historic Cropland) Plant Community

This vegetation type comprises the vast majority of the PR-11 expansion area. Historically, the area was a productive sagebrush habitat. In the middle of the 20th century it was converted to cropland; first to dryland wheat and then to alfalfa/grass hay. Over the past two decades the area was converted to a grassland plant community. It was replanted to introduced dryland pasture species. There is no evidence that any portion of this area has ever been irrigated. The Grassland vegetation type covers an area of approximately 94.89 acres and accounts for 69.22 percent of the PR-7 Mine Expansion Area.

Smooth Brome grass, a planted introduced perennial grass, was the dominant plant species growing on the grassland sites. Other dominant plant species included Intermediate Wheatgrass, Kentucky Bluegrass, Western Wheatgrass and Alfalfa. These species were all part of the original seed mixture seeded for this plant community.

Big Sagebrush Plant Community

This vegetation type is the second largest plant community type found within the PR-11 Mine Expansion Area and covers an area of approximately 27.91 acres and accounts for 20.36 percent of the PR-11 Mine Expansion Area. The Big Sagebrush plant communities are located on either side of the West Buzzard and East Buzzard drainages. The dominant plant species growing on the Big Sagebrush vegetation type is Mountain Big Sagebrush with an understory of primarily wheatgrasses and some forb and succulent (prickly pear) species.