
Basal Cover by Life Form

Ground cover is crucial to rangeland health. Covered ground holds more moisture, provides better habitat for soil biota, and therefore, creates a healthier forage base for livestock. Using a transect line to determine basal vegetation cover gives the land manager information on vegetative composition and the amount of bare ground on a site, allowing him/her to adjust management strategies and improve range condition. If desired, these basal cover measurements can be taken at photo transect sites that have already been established.

Equipment: 100ft transect tape, ruler or dowel, Cover by Life Form worksheet, GPS (optional), and compass (optional)

Select a monitoring site (or use an existing photo transect site) and complete the Study Location sheet to document relevant site information. Stretch out the 100ft transect tape. (If this is a new monitoring site, mark one end of the transect with a survey marker or brightly colored stake that will be easy to find in the future. Another survey marker may be placed at the other end of the transect tape, or a compass can be used to record the azimuth of the transect, so only one end of the tape would need to be marked.).

Decide whether you will collect 50 or 100 data points. If 50 points are taken, record data at every other foot of the transect tape (2', 4', 6', etc.), and if 100 points are taken, record data at every foot of the transect tape (1', 2', 3', etc.). No more than 100 data points should be collected.

At each data point, place the tip of the ruler or dowel on the ground beneath the transect tape. Using a dot tally, record the type of material that is in contact with the tip (grass, forb, bare ground, litter, etc.) on the Cover by Life Form worksheet.

Return each of the following years to collect data. Be consistent in your techniques (i.e., if you collected 50 data points the first year, collect 50 data points each of the following years).