

Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name Blanca Wetlands

Site Code S.USCOHP*2551

IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 1565 Site Class PCA
Site Alias None

Network of Conservation Areas (NCA)

| <u>NCA Site ID</u> | <u>NCA Site Code</u> | <u>NCA Site Name</u> |
|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 2043 | S.USCOHP*16597 | San Luis Valley Playa Lake |

LOCATORS

Nation United States Latitude 373250N
State Colorado Longitude 1054240W

Quad Code Quad Name

37105-E6 Dry Lakes
37105-E7 Hooper SE
37105-D6 Baldy

County

Alamosa (CO)

Watershed Code Watershed Name

13010003 San Luis

SITE DESCRIPTION

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Minimum Elevation | 7,500.00 Feet | 2,286.00 Meters |
| Maximum Elevation | 7,550.00 Feet | 2,301.24 Meters |

Site Description

The Blanca Wetlands site encompasses over 15,400 acres at the lowest elevation of the Closed Basin, 7,500 to 7,550 feet (2,286-2,301 meters). The site is characterized by a mosaic of low dunes and depressions, with little topographic relief. The Bureau of Land Management presently employs intensive management for waterfowl, waterbird, and shorebird habitat. The natural and augmented topographic depressions are seasonally flooded by canal or artesian water to produce a diverse mosaic of wetland habitats. The artesian wells are generally located at the slightly higher elevations, and water is allowed to flow by gravity through the reserve, supporting a series of wetland types. Ponds, marshes, subsaline wetlands, and hypersaline playas are produced sequentially from a given water source as flow is lost to evaporation and salts accumulate. With the exception of rinsed pond or marsh soils near the artesian wells, wetland soils are highly alkaline (pH 8.5-10.5) and poor in organic matter (BLM 1995). The Blanca Wetlands site supports a variety of wetland vegetation types. The basins historically filled from snowmelt runoff in late spring and were dry by late summer. Although management has changed conditions considerably, the site retains a flora adapted to seasonal soil saturation and, in many areas, saline conditions. Regularly flooded basins or ponds support well-developed aquatic and shoreline emergent vegetation, such as pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.), broadleaf cat-tail (*Typha latifolia*), spikerush (*Eleocharis palustris*), hardstem bulrush (*Scirpus acutus*), and saltmarsh bulrush (*Scirpus maritimus*). Basins with irregular or short duration flooding contain saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) and/or western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*) meadows, or barren salt flats. Basins which dry by mid-summer support seasonal stands of salt tolerant annuals, such as goosefoot (*Chenopodium* spp.), seablite (*Suaeda calceoliformis*), and red glasswort (*Salicornia rubra*), which complete their life cycles after surface water evaporates and the late summer rains begin. The largest stands of red glasswort in the Closed Basin, and possibly all of Colorado, occur in hypersaline playas at this site. Alkali flats and dunes adjacent to the wetlands are dominated by greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) and rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus* spp.) vegetation, respectively. The slender spiderflower (*Cleome multicaulis*) forms extensive stands at this site. This annual plant flourishes on alkali soils which remain moist throughout the growing season. Stands can be seen throughout the Blanca Wetlands site, usually growing in rings around the wetland basins at about the same microelevation as Baltic rush (*Juncus balticus*). Stands of cat-tail, spikerush, and bulrush along the margins of the ponds provide excellent habitat for nesting White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*), Western Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*), and Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*); and many other migratory birds use the site. Perennial ponds at the artesian wells provide habitat for chorus frog (*Pseudacris triseriata*) and Great Plains toad (*Bufo cognatus*). Bass, bluegill, and trout introduced for angling, and carp used for weed control, serve, among other things, to feed the abundance of nesting birds.

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Key Environmental Factors

No Data

Climate Description

No Data

Land Use History

No Data

Cultural Features

No Data

SITE DESIGN

Site Map Y - Yes

Mapped Date 09/25/1998

Designer Rondeau, R.J.

Boundary Justification

The Blanca Wetlands site boundary includes all of the known occurrences and proximate potential habitat that has not been thoroughly inventoried, but is likely to include many of the elements of concern. The adjacent San Luis Lakes site contains similar habitat, and the sites may be regarded as functionally connected. The site boundary was based on initial aerial photo analysis, a field visit by a CNHP wetland ecologist, and subsequent validation with satellite imagery.

Primary Area 16,531.29 Acres

6,690.00 Hectares

SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B2: Very High Biodiversity Significance

Biodiversity Significance Comments

The Blanca Wetlands site contains excellent (A-ranked) and good (B-ranked) occurrences of the globally imperiled (G2G3/S2S3) slender spiderflower (*Cleome multicaulis*). The Western Snowy Plover, White-faced Ibis, and Black-crowned Night Heron, all state rare birds, nest at the site. Excellent stands of the globally imperiled (G2G3/S1?) saltmarsh bulrush and red glasswort wetlands (*Salicornia rubra*) also occur at the site.

Other Values Rank No Data

Other Values Comments

No Data

LAND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Land Use Comments

No Data

Natural Hazard Comments

No Data

Exotics Comments

No Data

Offsite

No Data

Information Needs

No Data

ASSOCIATED ELEMENTS OF BIODIVERSITY

| <u>Element</u> | <u>State Scientific Name</u> | <u>State Common Name</u> | <u>Global Rank</u> | <u>State Rank</u> | <u>Driving Site Rank</u> |
|----------------|---|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 18080 | <i>Cleome multicaulis</i> | slender spiderflower | G2G3 | S2S3 | Yes |
| 17170 | <i>Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus</i> | Western Snowy Plover | G4T3 | S1B | No |
| 21213 | <i>Amphispiza belli</i> | Sage Sparrow | G5 | S3B | No |
| 18046 | <i>Schoenoplectus maritimus</i> Herbaceous Vegetation | Emergent Wetland (Marsh) | G4 | S2 | No |
| 18080 | <i>Cleome multicaulis</i> | slender spiderflower | G2G3 | S2S3 | No |
| 22123 | <i>Salicornia rubra</i> Herbaceous Vegetation | Western Slope Salt Meadows | G2G3 | S1? | Yes |
| 17170 | <i>Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus</i> | Western Snowy Plover | G4T3 | S1B | No |
| 17170 | <i>Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus</i> | Western Snowy Plover | G4T3 | S1B | No |

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|-------|--|----------------------|-----------|---------------|----|
| 17170 | <i>Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus</i> | Western Snowy Plover | G4T3 | S1B | No |
| 18080 | <i>Cleome multicaulis</i> | slender spiderflower | G2G3 | S2S3 | No |
| 18080 | <i>Cleome multicaulis</i> | slender spiderflower | G2G3 | S2S3 | No |
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| 18080 | <i>Cleome multicaulis</i> | slender spiderflower | G2G3 | S2S3 | No |

REFERENCES

| Reference ID | Full Citation |
|--------------|---------------|
| - | No Data |

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Additional Topics

No Data

VERSION

| | |
|----------------|---------------|
| Version Date | 09/25/1998 |
| Version Author | Rondeau, R.J. |

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