

Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name Cobert Mesa

Site Code S.USCOHP*1264

IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 820 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>
-		No Data

LOCATORS

Nation United States Latitude 370150N
State Colorado Longitude 1033459W

<u>Quad Code</u>	<u>Quad Name</u>
37103-A5	Cobert Mesa North
37103-A6	Pine Canyon

County

Las Animas (CO)

<u>Watershed Code</u>	<u>Watershed Name</u>
11040001	Cimarron headwaters

SITE DESCRIPTION

Minimum Elevation	5,100.00	Feet	1,554.00	Meters
Maximum Elevation	6,220.00	Feet	1,896.00	Meters

Site Description

Cobert Mesa is a part of the Mesa de Maya uplift straddling the Colorado/New Mexico state line. The area is capped with basaltic material which forms extensive cliffs around the edge of the mesa. The southern slopes are generally xeric grasses with the vegetation nearer the cliffs grading to pinon - juniper. Some Gambel oaks (*Quercus gambelii*) are found in the understory at or near the mesa's rim. The mesa top is largely grassland with a few scattered trees and shrubs. The grasses include several gramas, including extensive areas of sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*). Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) is also common. The northern slopes are more heavily vegetated, but with similar composition as on southern slopes. It was noted that there are pure pinon pine (*Pinus edulis*) stands on the north slopes. Many small canyons that dissect the slopes of the mesa have older stands of juniper. Signs of historic post cutting is evident, but often, these areas could be considered older growth. At the heads of some of these canyons are splash pools that support amphibian communities. These areas are also important watering holes for resident wildlife.

Key Environmental Factors

The ecosystem is dominated by the xeric climate. Along with rainfall, wind, fire, and geology play important roles. Whereas the intensity of grazing native ungulates is not well known, they did inhabit the area. Today, cattle grazing occurs throughout the area.

Climate Description

The climate has hot summers and cool to cold winters. Summer temperatures regularly climb to the upper 90's or more than 100 °F. Winter temperatures are generally mild, but the weather can be severe with blizzards and very strong winds. Rainfall is slight and short-term droughts common.

Land Use History

The entire Mesa de Maya area was inhabited by Native Americans as evidenced by points, teepee rings, rock art, and other signs. During the 18th and early 19th century, citizens of the Spanish colonial government inhabited the area, probably using the land for self-sustaining agriculture including small crops and livestock. The remnants of adobe dwellings are common on the ranch. Since the mid-19th century, citizens of the United States have used the area for ranching. From the grand ranches of the late 1800's to the somewhat more modest ranches of today, the area is supported almost entirely by ranching. Along the river bottom on the southern portion of the ranch are significant areas of hay through irrigation.

Cultural Features

Petroglyphs, camp rings, historic trails, and remnant historic homes are common.

SITE DESIGN

Site Map Y - Yes Mapped Date 01/14/1996
Designer Pague, C.A. and D.B. Burkhard

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Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn near the base of the mesa slopes. For the most part, this is at the edge of vegetation that retains its natural character. The existing land use of adjacent land provides an adequate buffer against undesirable economic change. The entire mesa is included within the design along with its side canyons.

Primary Area 9,578.28 Acres 3,876.21 Hectares

SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B2: Very High Biodiversity Significance

Biodiversity Significance Comments

This site contains two good (B-ranked) occurrences of a globally imperiled (G2/S2) xeric tallgrass prairie (*Andropogon gerardii* - *Schizachyrium scoparium*) and occurrences of mixed and shortgrass prairies.

Other Values Rank V3 - Moderate values

Other Values Comments

Other values include excellent wildlife habitat, historical artifacts, geology, and livestock uses.

LAND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Land Use Comments

The site occurs within a ranch of approximately 55,000 acres (including State Land Board leases). There are two active ranch houses and several roads that dissect the area. There are many historical structures and remnants of past times. Although not abundant, signs of indigenous people are widespread. The single current use is for livestock grazing.

Natural Hazard Comments

Rattlesnakes dwell in the area and there are some treacherous cliffs. Thunderstorms are not common but present significant threats from lightning strikes.

Exotics Comments

The area is dominated by native grass species, but some exotics are known to occur. As expected, exotic species are found in the areas of most intensive use (e.g. water holes, ditches, and developed springs).

Offsite

All lands of the area are used as grazing lands or hay production. The entire region is remote and sparsely populated.

Information Needs

Additional inventory is warranted, especially for butterflies, natural communities, and other insect groups. Additional plant surveys could be conducted for rare species. There is little information on the New Mexico portion of the site. We have a need to look much more carefully at the natural communities of the area, assuring that the existing variation is incorporated.

ASSOCIATED ELEMENTS OF BIODIVERSITY

<u>Element State ID</u>	<u>State Scientific Name</u>	<u>State Common Name</u>	<u>Global Rank</u>	<u>State Rank</u>	<u>Driving Site Rank</u>
24870	<i>Andropogon gerardii</i> - <i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i> Western Great Plains Herbaceous Vegetation	Xeric Tallgrass Prairie	G2?	S2	Yes
24680	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i> - <i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i> Herbaceous Vegetation	Shortgrass Prairie	G5	SU	No
22673	<i>Hesperostipa neomexicana</i> Herbaceous Vegetation	Great Plains Mixed Grass Prairie	G3	S3	No
24680	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i> - <i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i> Herbaceous Vegetation	Shortgrass Prairie	G5	SU	No
23027	<i>Asclepias oenotheroides</i>	zizotes milkweed	G4G5	S1	No
24870	<i>Andropogon gerardii</i> - <i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i> Western Great Plains Herbaceous Vegetation	Xeric Tallgrass Prairie	G2?	S2	Yes

REFERENCES

<u>Reference ID</u>	<u>Full Citation</u>
198519	Rondeau, R.J., J.R. Sovell, J.E. Stevens, D. Clark and L. Grunau. 2010. Final Report: Southeast Colorado Survey of Critical Biological Resources 2009. Addendum to the 2007 Survey. Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Fort Collins, CO.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Additional Topics

No Data

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VERSION

Version Date 01/14/1996

Version Author Pague, C.A. and D.B. Burkhard

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