

# Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name Cotton Creek

Site Code S.USCOHP\*10843

## IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 1018 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>
1956	S.USCOHP*5778	Sangre de Cristo

## LOCATORS

Nation United States Latitude 380844N  
State Colorado Longitude 1054543W

### Quad Code Quad Name

38105-B6 Electric Peak  
38105-B7 Valley View Hot Springs

### County

Saguache (CO)

### Watershed Code Watershed Name

13010003 San Luis

## SITE DESCRIPTION

Minimum Elevation	8,950.00 Feet	2,728.00 Meters
Maximum Elevation	12,750.00 Feet	3,886.00 Meters

### Site Description

The Cotton Creek site includes Cotton Creek from the alpine lakes of Cotton and Teacup to the mouth of the canyon. The alpine lakes are surrounded by willows (*Salix* spp.) and sedges (*Carex* spp.) with mixed conifer forest on the uplands. Cotton Creek retains a low gradient stream in the glaciated terrain at the head of the watershed, for a short distance before becoming a fast moving stream. After it makes a nearly 90 degree bend, the creek becomes very steep and the streamside vegetation is dominated by Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*) and Drummond's willow (*Salix drummondiana*), changing to aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) along the lower reaches. South-facing slopes of the valley are precipitous, and are dominated by oceanspray (*Holodiscus dumosus*) and mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*) shrublands or pinon pine (*Pinus edulis*) woodlands. The wetter, north-facing slopes are forested with Engelmann spruce at the upper elevations and Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) at lower elevations. The streamside community along the lower sections of Cotton Creek is very diverse and includes aspen, river birch (*Betula occidentalis*), Rocky Mountain maple (*Acer glabrum*), Drummond's willow, and Woods rose (*Rosa woodsii*). Cotton Creek is a clear water creek flowing over a cobble substrate, approximately 15 to 20 feet wide in the lower stretches and narrows to three to five feet in places, which creates stronger currents and oxidizes the water. This provides excellent habitat for trout, including the native cutthroat and non-native brook trout. Past stocking records and conversations with the Colorado Division of Wildlife indicate the cutthroat population is unpure and mixed with other subspecies of cutthroat trout. The primary use within the Cotton Creek site is recreation, with access from a U. S. Forest Service trail that parallels the stream. The area affords good wildlife habitat for common large mammals including mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), American elk (*Cervus canadensis*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*), and mountain lion (*Felis concolor*). The scenic views are an added attraction. This site is approximately 2,100 acres with an elevation range from 8,950 to 12,750 feet (2,040-2,730 meters).

### Key Environmental Factors

No Data

### Climate Description

No Data

### Land Use History

No Data

### Cultural Features

No Data

## SITE DESIGN

Site Map P - Partial Mapped Date 02/14/1998  
Designer Rondeau, R.J.

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## Boundary Justification

This boundary is drawn to 1) protect the occurrences from direct impacts such as trampling or other surface disturbances; 2) provide suitable habitat where additional individuals and plant communities can become established over time; and 3) include the alpine lakes which may be important for the cutthroat trout as a refugia. The boundary was delineated using 1988 and 1990 NAPP 1:40,000 infrared aerial photographs.

Primary Area 2,107.93 Acres 853.05 Hectares

## SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B3: High Biodiversity Significance

## Biodiversity Significance Comments

The Cotton Creek site contains an excellent occurrence of a montane riparian forest and an excellent occurrence of a foothills riparian shrubland, a rare plant, and a mixed population of cutthroat trout. It is unusual to find healthy and large stands of river birch (*Betula occidentalis*). When river birch is dominant it may denote a perennial spring or subsurface water adjacent to the creek. We found several of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain streams to have river birch present at the lower elevations. In addition to the riparian plant communities the area supports populations of the state rare Altai chickweed, and a mix of native, introduced, and reintroduced cutthroat trout.

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

The site is virtually free from weeds, although small patches of the non-native species such as Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale*), and smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*) were found near the creek at the trailhead.

## Offsite

No Data

## Information Needs

No Data

## ASSOCIATED ELEMENTS OF BIODIVERSITY

<u>Element</u>			<u>Global Rank</u>	<u>State Rank</u>	<u>Driving Site Rank</u>
<u>State ID</u>	<u>State Scientific Name</u>	<u>State Common Name</u>			
40632	<i>Cercocarpus montanus</i> / <i>Muhlenbergia montana</i> Shrubland	Mixed Mountain Shrublands	GU	S2	No
24905	<i>Abies lasiocarpa</i> / <i>Salix drummondiana</i> Forest	Montane Riparian Forest	G5	S4	No
17150	<i>Stellaria irrigua</i>	Altai chickweed	G4?	S2	No
20205	<i>Oncorhynchus clarkii virginalis</i>	Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout	G4T3	S3	Yes

## REFERENCES

<u>Reference ID</u>	<u>Full Citation</u>
-	No Data

## ADDITIONAL TOPICS

## Additional Topics

No Data

## VERSION

Version Date 02/14/1998  
Version Author Rondeau, R.J.

## Disclaimer

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