

Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name Cow Creek/Oben Creek

Site Code S.USCOHP*18345

IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 493 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 380648N
State Colorado Longitude 1073719W

Quad Code Quad Name

38107-A5 Wetterhorn Peak
38107-B6 Dallas
38107-A6 Ouray

County

Ouray (CO)

Watershed Code Watershed Name

14020006 Uncompahange

SITE DESCRIPTION

Minimum Elevation	7,560.00	Feet	2,304.00	Meters
Maximum Elevation	10,400.00	Feet	3,170.00	Meters

Site Description

Cow Creek is a major tributary of the Uncompahgre River, with its headwaters in the Big Blue Wilderness, high in the San Juans. From the wilderness, it passes through the Uncompahgre National Forest, BLM and finally, private land. Oben Creek joins Cow Creek at the beginning of a large roadless area. It has several waterfalls, one of which was the site of the Black Swift nest. Both Cow Creek and Oben Creek support excellent examples of both riparian and upland forest types. The riparian zone is dominated by narrowleaf cottonwood and scattered blue spruce, with thinleaf alder, red osier dogwood and willows in the understory. Uplands are forested with spruce, fir and aspen in the upstream section, and Gambel's oak and aspen in the lower section. In the vicinity of Oben Creek, the hillsides are covered with a moist forest of Douglas-fir, white fir, and blue spruce, and occasional white pine. Beneath this canopy is a rich understory of shade-tolerant plants such as sweet cicely, mountain lover, Oregon grape, Canadian violet, elk sedge, Rocky Mountain maple, twinflower, rattlesnake plantain, meadowrue, one-sided wintergreen, dwarf blueberry, russet buffaloberry, and mosses. The pictureleaf wintergreen, with its striking white veins contrasting with its dark green leaves grows in the shadiest places, in the thick duff of the conifers. This montane forest is an excellent example of a widespread community in Ouray County. There are almost no exotic species present. Although none have yet been documented here, the area provides potential Boreal Owl habitat. The upstream 2 of miles Cow Creek are within the Big Blue Wilderness Area. Along the creek are large cottonwoods, with good regeneration, large blue spruces, and thinleaf alder. Dense thickets of red-osier dogwood grow under the alders and slightly away from creek. Where the canyon narrows, the cottonwoods drop out, and in wider places Rocky Mountain and Drummond willows dominate the floodplain. Here also, there are almost no exotic species present. Other common plants in the site include Rocky Mountain maple, currants, and twinberry honeysuckle. One small section has seeping cliffs with monkeyflower, and New Mexican cliff ferns. Most disturbance in the site is natural, from flooding and natural landslides. There are some impacts from grazing, hunting and mining in the downstream section, mostly in clearings in the forest, away from the riparian area, but in general, the condition of the entire site is excellent.

Key Environmental Factors

No Data

Climate Description

No Data

Land Use History

No Data

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Cultural Features

No Data

SITE DESIGN

Site Map Y - Yes

Mapped Date 08/19/1998

Designer Lyon, M.J.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to include the good condition riparian areas of Cow Creek and Oben Creek, to the confluence of Difficulty Creek. The site could be continued upstream but was not visited.

Primary Area 747.36 Acres

302.45 Hectares

SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B2: Very High Biodiversity Significance

Biodiversity Significance Comments

This site contains an excellent (A-ranked) occurrence of the globally imperiled (G2G3/S2S3) *Pseudotsuga menziesii* / *Paxistima myrsinites* lower montane forest and excellent (A-ranked) occurrences of the globally vulnerable (G3/S3) *Populus angustifolia* - *Picea pungens* / *Alnus incana* montane riparian forest. In addition, there are excellent occurrences of common riparian communities, a fair (C-ranked) occurrence of the state rare (G4?/S2) New Mexico cliff fern (*Woodsia neomexicana*) and a fair (C-ranked) occurrence of Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*).

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

Element	State Scientific Name	State Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Driving Site Rank
24480	<i>Abies lasiocarpa</i> / <i>Mertensia ciliata</i> Forest	Montane Riparian Forests	G5	S5	No
24823	<i>Populus angustifolia</i> - <i>Picea pungens</i> / <i>Alnus incana</i> Woodland	Montane Riparian Forests	G3	S3	No
24823	<i>Populus angustifolia</i> - <i>Picea pungens</i> / <i>Alnus incana</i> Woodland	Montane Riparian Forests	G3	S3	No
23518	<i>Cypseloides niger</i>	Black Swift	G4	S3B	No
24684	<i>Abies lasiocarpa</i> / <i>Alnus incana</i> Forest	Montane Riparian Forests	G5	S5	No
24778	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i> / <i>Paxistima myrsinites</i> Forest	Lower Montane Forests	G2G3	S2S3	Yes
23381	<i>Woodsia neomexicana</i>	New Mexico cliff fern	G4?	S2	No

REFERENCES

Reference ID

Full Citation

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No Data

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Additional Topics

No Data

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VERSION

Version Date 05/12/1999

Version Author Lyon, M.J.

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