

Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name East Elk Creek at Blue Mesa Reservoir

Site Code S.USCOHP*23627

IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 1516 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 383056N
State Colorado Longitude 1071016W

<u>Quad Code</u>	<u>Quad Name</u>
38107-D2	Carpenter Ridge
38107-E2	West Elk Peak SW

County

Gunnison (CO)

<u>Watershed Code</u>	<u>Watershed Name</u>
14020002	Upper Gunnison

SITE DESCRIPTION

Minimum Elevation	7,600.00 Feet	2,316.00 Meters
Maximum Elevation	9,200.00 Feet	2,804.00 Meters

Site Description

East Elk Creek flows through a U-shaped valley between rolling hills of sagebrush uplands. The creek supports a narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*)/alder (*Alnus incana* ssp. *tenuifolia*) riparian forest with a dense and diverse understory. Shrubs in the understory include Bebb willow (*Salix bebbiana*), Geyer willow (*S. geyeriana*), whiplash willow (*S. lucida* var. *caudata*), and Woods' rose (*Rosa woodsii*). Beaver activity creates a series of ponds. Songbirds are abundant in the trees and shrubs. The predominant grass in the understory is smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*). The creek was flowing during August 2002 when many other creeks had dried up due to extended drought conditions. The southernmost two miles of the site is within the overall habitat range for the globally critically imperiled Gunnison Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*). Wet meadows and riparian areas are important habitat for the Gunnison Sage Grouse as they use these areas for brood rearing (Colorado Sage Grouse Working Group 1997). Livestock grazing occurs within the watershed. No major roads occur within the watershed. A dirt road follows the creek upstream but is subject to flooding by beaver ponds. Johnston et al. (2001) state the following: "In the Upper Gunnison River basin most cottonwood stands lack tall or medium shrubs, and have been reduced to cottonwood-Kentucky bluegrass or cottonwood-tree juniper gullies, which have considerably reduced forage, wildlife habitat, and watershed values." The globally imperiled riparian community and the dense and diverse understory in the East Elk Creek site add to the biological importance of this site.

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 12/19/2002
Designer Doyle, G.A.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes a portion of East Elk Creek and the surrounding watershed. Downstream from the site the creek is submerged by Blue Mesa Reservoir. The boundary represents a preliminary estimate of the area needed to maintain local hydrological conditions. Any activities within the watershed such as water

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diversions, impoundments, improper livestock grazing, development, and mining could potentially be detrimental to the hydrology of riparian area. The boundary represents the minimum area that should be considered for any conservation management plan.

Primary Area 1,227.47 Acres 496.74 Hectares

SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B3: High Biodiversity Significance

Biodiversity Significance Comments

High biodiversity significance. This site supports a good (B-ranked) example of a globally vulnerable (G3/S3) narrowleaf cottonwood/alder riparian forest (*Populus angustifolia*/*Alnus incana* ssp. *tenuifolia*). This association is known from New Mexico and Colorado. Although not well documented from other states, it is expected to occur throughout the range of *Populus angustifolia* in the Rocky Mountains. In Colorado, this is a common community along montane streams, but few high quality examples exist. This association is highly threatened by improper livestock grazing, development and stream flow alterations.

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>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>			
24541	<i>Populus angustifolia</i> / <i>Alnus incana</i> Woodland	Montane Riparian Forest	G3	S3	Yes

REFERENCES

<u>Reference ID</u>	<u>Full Citation</u>
164036	Doyle, G.A. 2002. Colorado Natural Heritage Program Field Survey of Critical Wetlands in Gunnison County.
173839	Rocchio J., G Doyle, and R. Rondeau. 2003. Final Report: Survey of Critical Wetlands and Riparian Areas in Gunnison County, Colorado. Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Fort Collins, CO.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Additional Topics

No Data

VERSION

Version Date 12/19/2002

Version Author Doyle, G.A.

Disclaimer

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