

Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name Gunnison River at Neversink

Site Code S.USCOHP*23636

IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 541 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 383101N
 State Colorado Longitude 1065928W

<u>Quad Code</u>	<u>Quad Name</u>
38107-E1	McIntosh Mountain
38106-E8	Gunnison

County

Gunnison (CO)

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

SITE DESCRIPTION

Minimum Elevation	7,500.00	Feet	2,286.00	Meters
Maximum Elevation	7,900.00	Feet	2,408.00	Meters

Site Description

This site sits in an alluviated, broad, lowland floodplain surrounded by sagebrush-dominated hills. Aerial photographs indicate that the Gunnison River has actively meandered throughout this broad floodplain leaving numerous old sloughs. Most of the floodplain has been cleared and channelized to maximize use for hay meadows, sewage treatment plants, trailer parks, etc. while a two-mile stretch has an intact canopy of narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*) extending on one or both sides of the river about 200 meters. Within this stretch (managed by the National Park Service), beaver dams and sloughs are scattered throughout the area. Beaked sedge (*Carex utriculata*), common spikerush (*Eleocharis palustris*), and meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) are common near the beaver ponds. Wetland and riparian vegetation is dense and the diversity of vegetation volume and structure is excellent. Various willows (*Salix* sp.), Woods' rose (*Rosa woodsii*), alder (*Alnus incana* ssp. *tenuifolia*), twinberry honeysuckle (*Lonicera involucrata*), and river hawthorn (*Crataegus rivularis*) comprise the shrub understory. False-Solomon's seal (*Maianthemum stellata*) is abundant in places. Numerous non-native species such as smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), redtop (*Agrostis gigantea*), orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), white and yellow sweetclover (*Melilotus alba* and *M. officinale*), Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), and wild chamomile (*Matricaria perforata*) are prevalent throughout the site. This stand of cottonwoods is one of the largest remaining stands in Gunnison Basin. 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 its dense and diverse understory add to the biological importance of this site. Regeneration of willows and cottonwoods is occurring within the protected portion of the PCA, otherwise they seem to be discouraged to maximize hay production. Hydrology has been altered by upstream diversions and the downstream presence of Blue Mesa Reservoir. The reservoir acts as a local base level causing the channel gradient upstream to decrease via sediment deposition (Wohl and Hammack, unknown date). This caused a decrease in sinuosity in the lateral migration of the channel and ultimately caused the river to move from the lower gradient northern channel to the higher gradient southern channel ((Wohl and Hammack, unknown date). Over the course of a few decades, the river should adjust to the new channel and lateral migration will occur again. 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).

Key Environmental Factors

No Data

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Climate Description

No Data

Land Use History

No Data

Cultural Features

No Data

SITE DESIGN

Site Map Y - Yes

Mapped Date 12/20/2002

Designer Rocchio, F.J.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes a portion of the Gunnison River and the surrounding floodplain. The boundaries incorporate an area that will allow natural hydrological processes such as seasonal flooding, sediment deposition, and new channel formation to maintain viable populations of the element. The boundaries also provide a small buffer from nearby agriculture fields, roads, and houses where surface runoff may contribute excess nutrients, sediment, and herbicides/pesticides. The site contains areas where old oxbows, sloughs, and ponds could provide a source of recruitment for native wetland and riparian plant species and provide fish habitat. It should be noted that the hydrological processes necessary to the elements are not fully contained by the site boundaries. Given that the elements are dependent on natural hydrological processes associated with the Gunnison River, Tomichi Creek and their tributaries upstream activities such as water diversions, impoundments, improper livestock grazing, and development are detrimental to the hydrology of the riparian area. This boundary indicates the minimum area that should be considered for any conservation management plan.

Primary Area 3,293.49 Acres

1,332.84 Hectares

SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B3: High Biodiversity Significance

Biodiversity Significance Comments

High biodiversity significance. This site supports a fair (C-ranked) occurrence of the globally imperiled (G2?/S2?) narrowleaf cottonwood/river hawthorn (*Populus angustifolia*/*Crataegus rivularis*) woodland community. This type is only known from Colorado on the lower slopes of the San Juan Mountains, in the Gunnison Basin, and along tributaries of the San Miguel River, Colorado. The understory is typically very dense and consists of river hawthorn and other shrub species including red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) and various tall willow species. Graminoid and forb cover is minimal. This association generally occurs away from the immediate stream bank in moderately wide valleys. It also occurs along dry back channels or ephemeral streams.

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>
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24727 Populus angustifolia / Crataegus rivularis Narrowleaf Cottonwood Riparian G2? S2 Yes
Woodland Forests

REFERENCES

<u>Reference ID</u>	<u>Full Citation</u>
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.
173182	Rocchio, J. 2002. Colorado Natural Heritage Program Field Survey of Critical Wetlands in Gunnison County.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Additional Topics

No Data

VERSION

Version Date 12/20/2002
Version Author Rocchio, F.J.

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