

Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name La Sal Creek

Site Code S.USCOHP*255

IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 140 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 381852N
State Colorado Longitude 1085718W

Quad Code Quad Name

38108-C8 Paradox

County

Montrose (CO)

Watershed Code Watershed Name

14030002 Upper Dolores

SITE DESCRIPTION

Minimum Elevation	5,000.00	Feet	1,524.00	Meters
Maximum Elevation	6,200.00	Feet	1,889.76	Meters

Site Description

This site circumscribes the canyon of La Sal Creek, a tributary that enters the Dolores River just upstream from Bedrock, Colorado, and includes part of the canyonsides of Spring Creek, a tributary of La Sal Creek. La Sal Creek cuts a narrow sandstone canyon that drops as much as 100 feet in places, and separates Nyswonger Mesa to the east from Ray Mesa to the west. Dramatic Navajo sandstone cliffs striped with desert varnish form the sides of the canyon. The soil consists of the Zyme composition characterized by mesic, clayey, ustic torriorthents. A dirt road follows the stream several miles, ending at the Cashen uranium mine. A critically imperiled plant association consisting of box elder and river birch was first documented here during CNHP's riparian survey of 1991 (Kittel 1993). Since then, the same association has been looked for in many similar canyons, to no avail. In the narrow band of riparian vegetation, box elder accounts for as much as 70% cover, with river birch providing 25 to 60% cover. New Mexico privet, coyote willow, red-osier dogwood, giant reed, and wild rose are also common. Although there are some introduced pasture grasses, including Kentucky bluegrass, there is no tamarisk along the upper part of the creek. Upland vegetation consists of pinon - juniper woodland with both true and dwarf mountain mahogany, cliffrose, Gambel's oak, yucca, cacti, and rabbitbrush. A good sized population of the Paradox breadroot, with several hundred plants, was found on a dry bench overlooking La Sal Creek. Although there is a specimen of the Payson lupine from this location at Brigham Young University herbarium, this species was not found here during this survey. An excellent quality relic occurrence of native bunchgrasses typical of Western Slope grasslands was documented in the lower end of the site by BLM in 1980. This association was formerly called "Stipa comata West", although it is not necessarily dominated by needle-and-thread grass. At this site it consisted of a mixture of 22% galleta, 11% needle-and-thread, 3% Indian ricegrass and 7% blue grama. Animals of note include the tree lizard and the plateau striped whiptail, which this survey has found to be common in western Montrose and San Miguel counties. Trends are not documented for these reptiles, but there are no suggestions of declines and many occurrences are on protected public lands.

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 02/07/2000

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Designer Lyon, M.J.

Boundary Justification

The boundary was drawn to encompass the canyon of La Sal Creek, including the riparian and upland vegetation communities, from the intersection of County Road X4 to just above the confluence with the Dolores River. Also included is the canyon side west of Spring Creek, a tributary of La Sal Creek that parallels Highway 90 between Paradox and La Sal Creek. This hillside contains a good representation of the typical canyon rim plant community found in this area. The lowest part of La Sal Creek, at the confluence, is in very poor condition, with heavy tamarisk invasion, and is therefore not included in the site.

Primary Area 2,430.94 Acres 983.77 Hectares

SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B2: Very High Biodiversity Significance

Biodiversity Significance Comments

The biodiversity rank is based on the good (B-ranked) occurrence of a globally critically imperiled plant community (G1G2/S1), *Acer negundo* / *Betula occidentalis*. Only a few other small occurrences of this community are known. The site also includes an excellent (A-ranked) occurrence of a *Hesperostipa comata* grassland community that is state rare (G2G4/S2) and an excellent (A-ranked) occurrence of a xeric pinon - juniper woodland plant community whose global imperilment rank is unknown at this time. In addition, there are historical occurrences of the globally imperiled (G2/S2) Payson lupine (*Lupinus crassus*) and the globally vulnerable (G3/S2) Paradox breadroot (*Pediomelum aromaticum*).

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

Upper canyon needs to be searched for hanging gardens. Search for rare plants.

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>
24887	<i>Acer negundo</i> / <i>Betula occidentalis</i> Woodland	Boxelder/River Birch	G1G2	S1	Yes
18115	<i>Pediomelum aromaticum</i>	Paradox breadroot	G3	S2	No
24857	<i>Hesperostipa comata</i> Great Basin Herbaceous Vegetation	Western Slope Grasslands	G2G4	S2	No
18466	<i>Lupinus crassus</i>	Payson lupine	G2	S2	No
18584	<i>Aspidoscelis velox</i>	Plateau Striped Whiptail	G5	S4	No
18319	<i>Urosaurus ornatus</i>	Tree Lizard	G5	S4	No
24789	<i>Juniperus osteosperma</i> / <i>Cercocarpus intricatus</i> Woodland	Juniperus Osteosperma Woodland	GNR	SNR	No

REFERENCES

<u>Reference ID</u>	<u>Full Citation</u>
171269	Kittel, G.M. and N.D. Lederer. 1993. Final Report: A Preliminary Classification of the Riparian Vegetation of the Yampa and San Miguel/Dolores River Basins. Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Fort Collins, CO.
192792	Lyon, P. and J. Sovell. 2000. Final Report: A Natural Heritage Assessment, San Miguel and Western Montrose Counties, Colorado. Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Fort Collins, CO.

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ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Additional Topics

Original site design by Pague, C.A. 1994-09-05.

VERSION

Version Date 02/07/2000

Version Author Lyon, M.J.

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