

Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name Middle La Plata River

Site Code S.USCOHP*24630

IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 2075 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 371409N
State Colorado Longitude 1080224W

Quad Code Quad Name

37108-B1 Kline
37108-C1 Hesperus

County

La Plata (CO)

Watershed Code Watershed Name

14080105 Middle San Juan

SITE DESCRIPTION

Minimum Elevation	7,200.00 Feet	2,194.56 Meters
Maximum Elevation	8,110.00 Feet	2,471.93 Meters

Site Description

The Middle La Plata River site is located south of the Town of Hesperus. The headwaters of the La Plata River are within the Cumberland Basin in the La Plata Mountains. The La Plata River flows through a moderately steep canyon that follows USFS Road 571/County Road 124 and then State Highway 140. The first large ditch on the La Plata River is just south of Mayday. Several other ditches are located along its course including the Big Stick Ditch and Hay Gulch Ditch. Due to the intensive irrigation demand, the La Plata River is an intermittent stream after Hesperus, and is completely dry by mid-summer. Several other anthropogenic forces threaten the viability of the La Plata River, e.g. residential development, gravel pits and improper grazing. Additionally, the southwestern portion of Colorado has experienced a severe drought over the past years and this cumulative lack of precipitation has exacerbated the problem of keeping a constant flow in the La Plata River. The element of concern, *Populus angustifolia*/*Betula occidentalis* plant community, is indicative of high groundwater levels or presence of springs. The fact that this plant community is still present, albeit degraded, does indicate a high groundwater table. Cottonwood regeneration and saplings were also observed during the field visit. The sparse (approximately 15% cover) tree canopy is dominated by narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*) with lanceleaf cottonwood (*Populus acuminata*). The shrub layer, approximately 50% cover, consists of river birch (*Betula occidentalis*), alder (*Alnus incana*), river hawthorn (*Crataegus rivularis*), Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*), and Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*). The forb layer is very sparse dominated by non-natives: mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), butter and eggs (*Linaria vulgaris*), Dalmatian toadflax (*Linaria dalmatica*), spotted knapweed (*Acosta maculosa*), and musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*). The graminoid layer is also sparse and dominated by hay grasses e.g., timothy (*Phleum pratense*), Kentucky blue grass (*Poa pratensis*), and orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*). The uplands are dominated Gambel's oak (*Quercus gambelii*) and big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) with cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*).

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 12/10/2003

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Designer Culver, D.R.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries incorporate an area that will allow for the natural hydrological processes from surrounding drainages. The boundaries encompass the occurrence with a 500 - 1,000 foot buffer that follows the stream channel from the Town of Hesperus to south of Breen. Highway 140 is used as a boundary as well as a natural topographic feature. It should be noted that the hydrological processes necessary to the element are not fully contained by the site boundaries.

Primary Area 1,207.45 Acres 488.64 Hectares

SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B5: General Biodiversity Interest

Biodiversity Significance Comments

This site drawn for a degraded (D-ranked) example of a globally vulnerable (G3/S2) narrowleaf cottonwood/river birch plant community (*Populus angustifolia*/*Betula occidentalis*). The narrowleaf cottonwood/river birch plant association is documented from Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. This riparian woodland is uncommon and occurs locally throughout much of its range (Carsey et al. 2003). Although this association appears globally stable, the condition of high quality occurrences is extremely threatened because of easy access to this relatively low elevation community.

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</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Driving</u>
<u>State ID</u>	<u>State Scientific Name</u>	<u>State Common Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Site Rank</u>
24884	<i>Populus angustifolia</i> / <i>Betula occidentalis</i> Woodland	Montane Riparian Forest	G3	S3	Yes

REFERENCES

<u>Reference ID</u>	<u>Full Citation</u>
159854	Carsey, K., G. Kittel, K. Decker, D. Cooper, and D. Culver. 2003. Field guide to the wetland and riparian plant associations of Colorado. Prepared for the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Denver, CO by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Fort Collins, CO.
184533	March, M. and D. Culver. 2003. Colorado Natural Heritage Program Field Survey for La Plata County Wetlands.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Additional Topics

No Data

VERSION

Version Date 12/10/2003

Version Author Culver, D.R.

Disclaimer

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