

Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name Molas Pass

Site Code S.USCOHP*23986

IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 1269 Site Class PCA
Site Alias Andrews Lake
Site Alias Lime Creek
Site Alias Molas Pass

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 374400N
State Colorado Longitude 1074229W

<u>Quad Code</u>	<u>Quad Name</u>
37107-F6	Snowdon Peak
37107-G6	Silverton

County

San Juan (CO)

<u>Watershed Code</u>	<u>Watershed Name</u>
14080104	Animas

SITE DESCRIPTION

Minimum Elevation	10,000.00	Feet	3,048.00	Meters
Maximum Elevation	11,010.00	Feet	3,356.00	Meters

Site Description

This large site is a fairly level, park-like area at the divide between the headwaters of Molas Creek and Lime Creek. It contains a mosaic of lakes, wetlands, and small patches of subalpine forest just below timberline. The unusual karst geology of the area is striking, with limestone terraces forming a stair-step topography. This is the site of a large forest fire known as the Lime Creek burn, which occurred in 1879. The lodgepole pines found in this area were planted after the fire, and are not native to the area. Although originally intended as a temporary reforestation with the expectation that Engelmann spruce would replace them the trees have persisted throughout the area. The site is traversed by U. S. Highway 550. A campground at Molas Lake, owned by the City of Silverton, is a popular destination for fishing and camping. The area receives heavy recreational use year round, with snowmobilers and skiers enjoying the gentle terrain in the winter. The site contains two major lakes, Andrews Lake on the south side of the pass, and Molas Lake on the north. These and several smaller lakes are surrounded by sedge meadows dominated by *Carex utriculata* and *Carex aquatilis*, and willow dominated wetlands with *Salix planifolia* and *Salix brachycarpa*. Deep layers of *Sphagnum* moss form a soft, spongy carpet beneath the sedges. Small, highly acidic pools are scattered throughout the wetlands. Wetlands associated with both lakes support a rare sedge, *Carex viridula*, with the largest population of over 1,000 individuals occurring above Andrews Lake. This area also has patches of an unusual sedge community dominated by *Carex buxbaumii*, with *C. capillaris*, and *Bistorta vivipara*. Other species in the wetland include *Potentilla fruticosa*, *Pedicularis groenlandica*, *Swertia perrennis*, *Veratrum tenuipetalum* *Ligusticum porteri*, and *Antennaria luzuloides*. Small depressions in the wetland, where more moisture accumulates, support *Eriophorum angustifolium*. *Carex viridula* occurs on the margins of these wetter areas. Small ponds that dot the wetland are home to salamanders. Drier areas on gentle hills above the wetlands are the site of several species of *Botrychium*s. These tiny ferns have been observed over several years, but failed to appear in 2002, probably due to the extreme drought conditions. However, they are likely to be persisting underground, to reappear in a wetter year. Above Andrews Lake, along the trail to Crater Lake, wet meadows dominated by *Veratrum tenuipetalum* support *Draba spectabilis* var. *oxyloba* and *Besseyia ritteriana*. The *Draba* also occurs in moist forested areas with Engelmann spruce and *Vaccinium myrtilus* above 11,000 ft. Associated species in this site include *Polemonium pulcherrimum*, *Erigeron peregrinus*, *Calamagrostis canadensis*, *Pedicularis racemosa*, *Carex microglochin*, and *Noccaea montana*.

Key Environmental Factors

No Data

Climate Description

No Data

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Land Use History

No Data

Cultural Features

No Data

SITE DESIGN

Site Map Y - Yes

Mapped Date 12/13/2002

Designer Lyon, M.J.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to encompass occurrences of *Botrychium echo* and additional suitable habitat. Sedge wetlands, wet meadows, and patches of forest that support additional rare species and communities occur in a mosaic within the boundary.

Primary Area 2,813.30 Acres

1,138.51 Hectares

SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B3: High Biodiversity Significance

Biodiversity Significance Comments

The Molas Pass site supports numerous occurrences of rare plants and natural communities, all of which share dependence on the mosaic of habitats present in the area. The site rank is based on the fair (C-ranked) occurrence of a globally imperiled (G2) species, *Townsendia rothrockii*. The site also contains several good and fair (B or C-ranked) occurrences of *Botrychium* species which are globally vulnerable (G3) or imperiled in the state (S1). Suitable habitat for the *Botrychiums* surrounds the many wet meadows in the area that support *Draba spectabilis* var. *oxyloba* and *Asplenium trichomanes-ramosum*, as well as the rare sedge and the wetland plant communities. Although there is much that we do not understand about the interdependence of species and communities, it is likely that the same processes of rainfall and snowmelt are essential to all of these elements.

Other Values Rank No Data

Other Values Comments

Recreation, scenery.

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 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>
20475	<i>Botrychium echo</i>	reflected moonwort	G3	S3	Yes
23143	<i>Townsendia rothrockii</i>	Rothrock townsend-daisy	G2G3	S2S3	Yes
22785	<i>Botrychium hesperium</i>	western moonwort	G4	S2	No
23966	<i>Botrychium minganense</i>	Mingan's moonwort	G4	S2	No
21564	<i>Asplenium trichomanes-ramosum</i>	green spleenwort	G4	S1	No
20370	<i>Carex buxbaumii</i> Herbaceous Vegetation	Buxbaum's Sedge Wet Meadow	G3	SU	Yes
21103	<i>Carex viridula</i>	green sedge	G5	S1	No
21103	<i>Carex viridula</i>	green sedge	G5	S1	No
22785	<i>Botrychium hesperium</i>	western moonwort	G4	S2	No

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24806	<i>Salix brachycarpa</i> / Mesic Forbs Shrubland	Alpine Willow Scrub	G4	S4	No
19971	<i>Botrychium pallidum</i>	pale moonwort	G3	S2	No
20475	<i>Botrychium echo</i>	reflected moonwort	G3	S3	No

REFERENCES

<u>Reference ID</u>	<u>Full Citation</u>
-	No Data

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Additional Topics

No Data

VERSION

Version Date	12/13/2002
Version Author	Lyon, M.J.

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