

Level 4 Potential Conservation Area (PCA) Report

Name South Fork White River

Site Code S.USCOHP*26894

IDENTIFIERS

Site ID 2435 Site Class PCA
 Site Alias Peltier Creek

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 395344N
 State Colorado Longitude 1073159W

<u>Quad Code</u>	<u>Quad Name</u>
39107-G5	Meadow Creek Lake
39107-H5	Buford

County

Rio Blanco (CO)

<u>Watershed Code</u>	<u>Watershed Name</u>
14050005	Upper White

SITE DESCRIPTION

Minimum Elevation	7,200.00 Feet	2,194.56 Meters
Maximum Elevation	8,000.00 Feet	2,438.40 Meters

Site Description

The South Fork of the White River (South Fork) begins in the Flat Top Wilderness Area. It flows northwest out of South Fork Canyon into the scenic Stillwater Valley flanked to the south and east by the Flat Tops. Several streams feed the South Fork of the White River: Swede Creek, White Creek, Wand Creek, Peltier Creek, Hazard Creek, Beckman Creek, Moose Creek, Cave Creek, Fowler Creek, and Hill Creek. The Valley is widest at northwest end near the Town of Buford and narrowest at the south where limestone outcrops are present. These limestone outcrops are suitable habitat for the globally rare hanging garden sullivania (*Sullivantia hapemanii* var. *purpusii*) where seeps are present. Spring Cave, Colorado's third largest cave, is located in this outcrop of Leadville limestone (Belden Formation). Spring Cave contains Colorado's largest cave stream that regularly floods in the spring, often completely filling the cave with water. It contains a lake several hundred meters inside as well as several caverns only accessible through underwater diving. The riparian area vegetation is dominated by Drummond's willow (*Salix drummondiana*), Bebb's willow (*Salix bebbiana*), strap-leaf willow (*Salix eriocephala* var. *ligulifolia*), coyote willow (*Salix exigua*), Rocky Mountain willow (*Salix monticola*), hawthorn (*Crataegus rivularis*), alder (*Alnus incana*), and narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*) with an understory consisting of beaked sedge (*Carex utriculata*), reed canarygrass (*Phalaroides arundinacea*) and hay grasses. The South Fork of the White River is allowed to meander across the floodplain and thus supports several sloughs and abandoned oxbows. The South Fork of the White River does not have any major hydrological alterations so is allowed to seasonally flood. The benches above the riparian area consist of big basin sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *tridentata*) with snowberry (*Symphoricarpos rotundifolius*) with several bunchgrasses e.g., *Festuca* spp., *Muhlenbergia* spp., and *Stipa* spp. Located at the base of Cave Creek is a very prolific spring that creates an oasis for songbirds. The vegetation surrounding the spring is lush and consists of the following: narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*), cottonwood hybrid (*Populus x acuminata*), box elder (*Acer negundo*), chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), cow parsnip (*Heracleum sphondylium* subsp. *montanum*), wood rose (*Rosa woodsii*), nettle (*Urtica gracilis*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos rotundifolius*), and serviceberry (*Amelanchier utahensis*). The pH of the spring water is slightly basic (8.2) which is to be expected due to the limestone parent material. The foothills and lower hillsides are dominated by Gambel's oak (*Quercus gambelii*) and snowberry. The upper hillsides are dominated by Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), and Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*). The White River National Forest and Flat Tops Wilderness border the site. This area provides an important wildlife corridor for elk (*Cervus elaphus*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), and black bear (*Ursus americanus*), as well as many smaller mammals e.g., badger (*Taxidea taxus*), squirrels, chipmunks, etc.

Key Environmental Factors

Gravels and alluviums from the Quaternary Age dominate the riparian area of the site. Leadville limestone is

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found above the South Fork and particularly at Spring Cave. Soils range from stony loam of Delson-Perma complex to deep, poorly drained soils of the Redrob Variant loam.

Climate Description

In the County, summers are warm or hot in most valleys but are much cooler in the mountains. Winters are cold in the mountains. Summer thunderstorms are prevalent; of the total precipitation, 55% usually falls between April and September. Average seasonal snowfall is 74.4 inches, average day time temperature is 45 degrees and average precipitation is 16.5 inches for Meeker between 1948 -2007 (Western Regional Climate Center 2008).

Land Use History

No Data

Cultural Features

No Data

SITE DESIGN

Site Map Y - Yes

Mapped Date 01/11/2008

Designer Culver, D.R.

Boundary Justification

Boundary is delineated to encompass the known occurrences of the riparian plant communities and potential habitat along the floodplain, as well as the seeps and springs and Spring Cave. The boundary encompasses both public and private property, however, only public lands were surveyed.

Primary Area 2,394.14 Acres

968.88 Hectares

SITE SIGNIFICANCE

Biodiversity Significance Rank B3: High Biodiversity Significance

Biodiversity Significance Comments

The site supports excellent (A-ranked) examples of several globally rare (G3) riparian wetlands. The floodplain is relatively intact with few hydrological alterations (few irrigation ditches present) with well-vegetated banks thus stabilized shores and overhanging vegetation for a healthy fishery. There was no recent evidence of cattle grazing and little impact was observed due to horse pasturing. It is unusual to encounter a riparian wetland in the intermountain west, let alone in Colorado, that has not experienced improper grazing from domestic animals. There is also a fair (C-ranked) occurrence of the state rare (G4T4/S2) Townsend's big-eared bat subspecies (*Plecotus townsendii pallescens*) and an extant occurrence of the state rare (G5/S1B,S3N) Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). An occurrence of hanging garden sullivania (*Sullivantia hapemanii* var. *purpusii*), a globally vulnerable (G3T3/S3) plant, was observed in 1997. This species was searched for and not found in 2007; however, appropriate habitat still exists. Future surveys could locate this occurrence.

Other Values Rank V1 - Outstanding values

Other Values Comments

Excellent wildlife and bird habitat exists.

LAND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Land Use Comments

No Data

Natural Hazard Comments

No Data

Exotics Comments

Noxious weeds such as hounds tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*) and mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) are adjacent to the riparian area.

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>

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22992	<i>Cornus sericea</i> Shrubland	Foothills Riparian Shrubland	G4Q	S3	No
22992	<i>Cornus sericea</i> Shrubland	Foothills Riparian Shrubland	G4Q	S3	No
24518	<i>Picea pungens</i> / <i>Alnus incana</i> Woodland	Montane Riparian Forests	G3	S3	Yes
24823	<i>Populus angustifolia</i> - <i>Picea pungens</i> / <i>Alnus incana</i> Woodland	Montane Riparian Forests	G3	S3	Yes
24823	<i>Populus angustifolia</i> - <i>Picea pungens</i> / <i>Alnus incana</i> Woodland	Montane Riparian Forests	G3	S3	Yes
21654	<i>Plecotus townsendii pallescens</i>	Townsend's Big-eared Bat Subsp	G4T4	S2	No
21249	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Bald Eagle	G5	S1B,S3N	No

REFERENCES

Reference ID	Full Citation
195026	Culver, D., J. Huggins and P. Lyon. 2008. Final Report: Significant Biological Resources in Rio Blanco County, CO. Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Fort Collins, CO.
195034	WRCC. 2008. Western Regional Climate Center. Division of Atmospheric Sciences, Desert Research Institute. Reno, Nevada. < http://www.wrcc.dri.edu >.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Additional Topics

No Data

VERSION

Version Date	01/11/2008
Version Author	Culver, D.R.

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