

CONDOR CANYON -- A BIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL SUMMARY

prepared by

Susan Duff Koniak
Nevada Public Lands Coordinator
The Nature Conservancy

in cooperation with

Lynda Peck Nelson
Herbarium Manager
University of Nevada, Reno

September 7, 1988

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Project Description -----	1
General Site Description -----	1
Background Information	
Native American Activity -----	2
Early Settlements -----	3
Mining and the Railroads -----	4
Other Early Uses -----	5
Current Activities in Condor Canyon -----	6
The Nature Conservancy's Involvement in Condor Canyon -----	6
Geology of Condor Canyon -----	8
Plant Communities of Condor and Hamlight Canyons	
Condor Canyon -- Riparian Communities -----	9
Condor Canyon -- Upland Communities -----	10
Hamlight Canyon -----	10
T/E/S Plant Species -----	11
Current Status of the Big Spring Spinedace -----	11
Comments/Monitoring Needs -----	12
Literature Review -----	15
Maps 1-4	
Tables 1-4	
Appendix A	

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Condor Canyon is the only known location of the threatened Big Spring spinedace (Lepidomeda mollispinis pratensis, listed March 28, 1985). In order to better manage this area, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) was contracted by the Bureau of Land Management to conduct an intensive vegetative survey of the riparian zone in Condor Canyon. In addition, a cursory survey of upland communities for common and rare plant species was made in Condor and Hamlight Canyons. Two visits were made to Condor Canyon (May 9-13 and July 1-2) and one to Hamlight Canyon (May 12). After initial reconnaissance and determination of the basic plant communities, the Condor Canyon riparian zone was mapped on overlays to the aerial photographs. In addition, 27 specific sites were sampled on the canyon floor yielding species lists for each site and an ocular estimate of species cover. These site locations are indicated on the aerial photographs. 35 mm color slides were taken. 121 plant specimens were collected, which will be housed at the Caliente Resource Area office. Additional information was gathered about the history, geology, and TNC's involvement in the area.

GENERAL SITE DESCRIPTION

Condor Canyon is located at the north end of Meadow Valley Wash. The canyon is approximately 4 miles long. Shear 200-300 foot rock walls mark both the canyon's beginning and its end, giving it a robber's roost seclusion which makes it practically unnoticeable when looking at the canyon from afar. Vegetation ranges from willow, box elder, reeds, cattails, and grasses of the riparian zone to various sagebrush shrub communities in the upland zones.

Animal life in Condor Canyon includes rabbits, deer, bobcat, a variety of ducks and birds, and a number of fish species, including the Big Spring spinedace. The surrounding cliffs provide good raptor habitat. Condor Canyon was named for the vulture. An active golden eagle nest was spotted by a visitor to the canyon, David Schleser from Dallas, Texas, in 1982. The nest was high on the north wall of the canyon within the first quarter mile from the south entrance. Lynda Nelson also spotted a nest in Hamlight Canyon in May, 1988.

The springs southeast of the Delmue Ranch (NW 1/4, Section 18, T1S, R68E) provide the majority of water for the stream that flows through Condor Canyon. Very little water flows from the wash above this point and that which does is probably from irrigation discharge or minor seeps.

Mr. Lee and Mr. Frank Delmue have both said that, in the early days before the railroad was built (see Mining and the Railroads, page 3), the stream in Condor Canyon was small and meandering. Construction of the railroad grade diverted the water into a main channel causing rapid downcutting until, in