



VERMEJO

ECOSYSTEMS



SHORTGRASS PRAIRIE

Higher elevation and drier Great Plains grasslands, warm season grasses dominate, home to black-tailed prairie dogs, grassland birds, road runner, scaled quail, burrowing owl, pronghorn, and the Ponil wetlands.



OAK SHRUBLANDS

Drier habitat that is often rocky and steep, commonly the first ecological successional shrub/tree in fire scars. Gambel oak (most common), wavy leaf oak, and gray oak provide acorn masts for wildlife including black bear, wild turkey and mule deer.



PINYON-JUNIPER WOODLANDS

Dominated by the two needle or Colorado pinyon and Rocky Mountain juniper, with some single seed or Utah juniper. Pinyon jay, wild turkey, black bear and other species rely on cyclical pine nut masts.



PONDEROSA PINE WOODLAND AND SAVANNA

Ponderosa pine is the largest forest type on Vermejo that has a frequent natural fire return interval. Low intensity fires clear out the savanna grasslands that provide elk and bison habitat. Predators include black bear, cougar, bobcat, coyote, gray fox, and American badger.



SUBALPINE

Subalpine, sometimes called spruce-fir, contains small wet meadows, aspen and bristlecone stands, and often has higher canopy density. A low fire return interval allows buildup of downed timber. High diversity of flowering forbs and fungi. Habitat for dusky grouse, golden mantel squirrel, gray jay, porcupine, and snowshoe hare.



ALPINE

Alpine (alpine tundra) is a fragile ecosystem above timberline, with tundra, cushion plants, fell fields, with geography/geology creating climate controlled micro-habitats. Snowpack covers the ecosystem for a good portion of the year. Home to marmots, pika and big-horned sheep.



RIPARIAN AND WETLANDS

Riparian areas have very high diversity but low percentage of land coverage. Wetted areas occur in all other ecosystems and are utilized by wildlife including beaver, birds, small mammals, ungulates, and predators.

Vermejo's landscape is a complex mosaic that creates habitat diversity and resiliency. The edges between heterogenous mosaic patches promote higher biodiversity. Two other important ecosystems that often occur in the edges are Montane Grasslands, and Mixed Conifer Forest. Vermejo's ecosystems could be broken out further to include bristlecone pine forest, aspen woodlands, headwater sloped wetlands, etc.

MONTANE GRASSLANDS

Includes the large parks of Castle Rock, Van Bremmer, Vermejo, and Costilla Vega. With a mix of warm and cool season grasses, the parks are important habitat for bison, pronghorn, grassland birds, raptors and Gunnison prairie dogs.

MIXED CONIFER FOREST

Are small patches of cool and damp forest patches amongst ponderosa ecosystems. Some warmer and drier patches occur in the higher and lower subalpine. A mix of species including Douglas fir, Englemann spruce, Colorado blue spruce, aspen, ponderosa, and Rocky Mountain juniper. MC provides good micro-habitat and patch edge diversity for songbirds.



FUN FACT: Fire is a natural and important component of most of the ecosystems on Vermejo. Natural fire intervals range from every 10 years in ponderosa pine to 200+ years in subalpine forests.

