

Plants of the Dolores Watershed

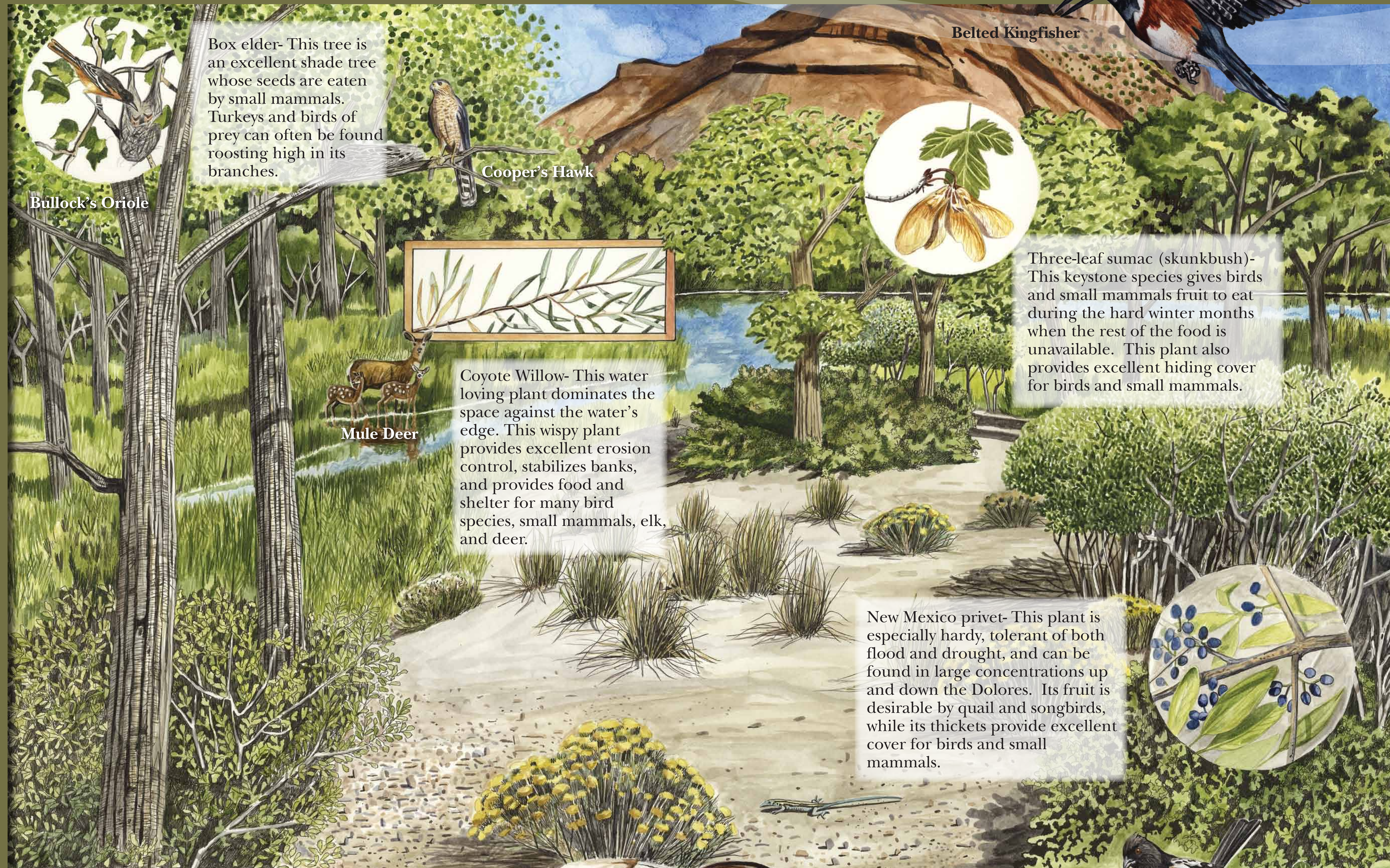
The collection of plants and animals that occur along the banks of the Dolores River make up its riparian ecosystem. Riparian ecosystems are typically higher in plant and animal diversity than the surrounding areas, especially in the desert southwest, due to the increased availability of water.

When a riparian area is healthy, the plants growing there can provide shade and hiding places for wildlife, and inviting landscapes for humans to recreate. When a riparian area is taken over by invasive plant species, it can result in poor wildlife habitat, difficult access to the river, reduced agricultural and recreational opportunities, and the potential for increased fire frequency and intensity.

Here are a few of the more common plant and animal species in the Gateway area.



Cottonwood- Look up at the largest trees around you. This quintessential riverside tree provides great feed for birds, deer, and rabbits while other animals use the tree to build high nests for their young or as lookouts. This tree acts to stabilize the banks of the river, improve water quality, and aid in flood control!



Bullock's Oriole

Box elder- This tree is an excellent shade tree whose seeds are eaten by small mammals. Turkeys and birds of prey can often be found roosting high in its branches.

Cooper's Hawk

Belted Kingfisher



Mule Deer

Coyote Willow- This water loving plant dominates the space against the water's edge. This wispy plant provides excellent erosion control, stabilizes banks, and provides food and shelter for many bird species, small mammals, elk, and deer.

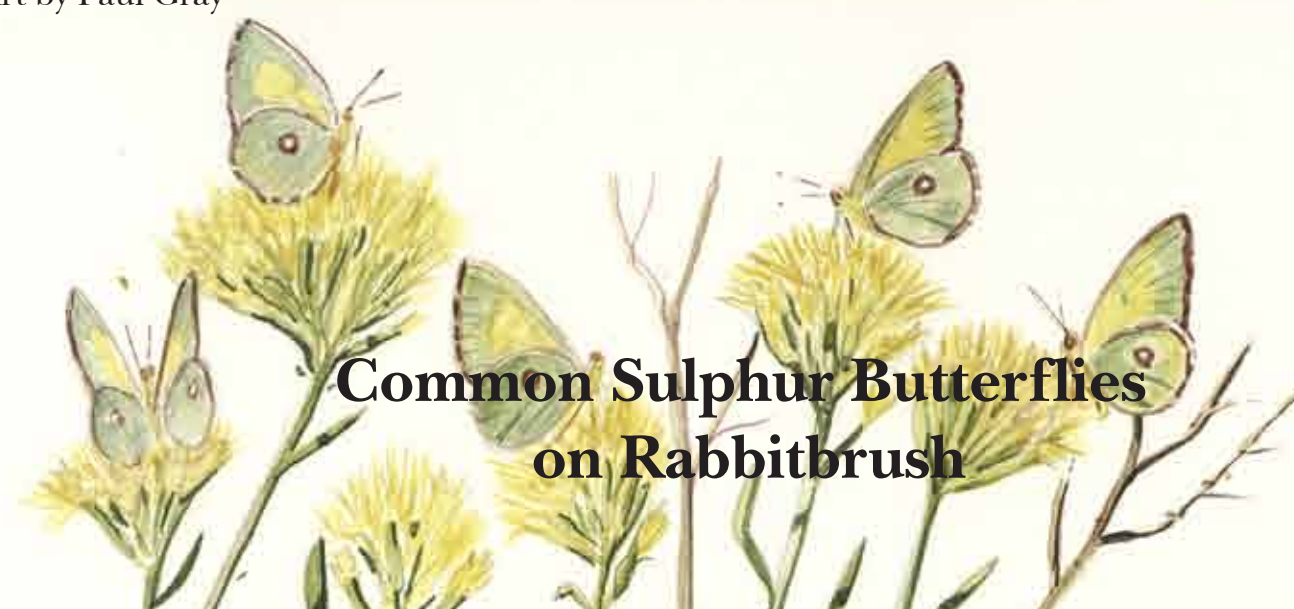


Three-leaf sumac (skunkbush)- This keystone species gives birds and small mammals fruit to eat during the hard winter months when the rest of the food is unavailable. This plant also provides excellent hiding cover for birds and small mammals.



New Mexico privet- This plant is especially hardy, tolerant of both flood and drought, and can be found in large concentrations up and down the Dolores. Its fruit is desirable by quail and songbirds, while its thickets provide excellent cover for birds and small mammals.

Art by Paul Gray



Common Sulphur Butterflies on Rabbitbrush



Beaver

Spotted Towhee