



Castilleja linariifolia

Castilleja

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The expedition reaching the summit of Peak 10,952 with the Grand Teton pictured in the background.

Delmatier Botanical Expedition 2026: Peak 10,952, Grand Teton National Park

Charmaine Delmatier

It all began a few years back- nine to be exact. I was studying maps of the Teton Mountain Range. Having been on much of this majestic range and following in the footsteps of great explorers, Indigenous people, and previous scientists, I wanted to dive deeper into its unknown territories. One area stood out: a curious, long stretch of alpine tundra with a north-to-south orientation, which happens to sit atop a remote unnamed peak, Peak 10,952. Rising quickly out of the north reach of Moran Canyon, its summit sits west of Mt. Moran. Intrigued, I returned to the University of Wyoming and sat down with Ron Hartman (past Curator of the Rocky Mountain Herbarium for 38 years, mentor, and dear friend). Previous botanical work and floristics studies had been conducted

nearby, but Peak 10,952 itself had not been surveyed. Faced with this seemingly insurmountable challenge, I had to go!

I then checked with Grand Teton National Park (GTNP), which also had no records of backcountry ranger exploration to Peak 10,952, nor of previous research work. Standing on the shoulders of renowned botanists Erwin Evert, author of *Vascular Plants of the Greater Yellowstone Area*, and Richard Shaw, author of *Wildflowers of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks*,.....**cont. p. 5**

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WYNPS News

Call for Nominations: Help shape the future of WYNPS! We're seeking nominations for the 2027 Board. Get involved, connect with fellow plant enthusiasts, and help support Wyoming's native plants. Send nominations for yourself or a friend to wynps@wynps.org or contact the Secretary-Treasurer before **Nov 15**. The ballot will appear in the next issue.

Look out for scholarship applications in December!

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Bryo Curious?

Check out Bryophyte Beginnings on YouTube:

@BryophyteBeginnings

Interested in joining the regional group to learn more about bryology? Email

bryophyte.beginnings@gmail.com for info about monthly meetings, ID resources, and presentations.

Treasurer's Report: Balance as of 26 Sept:
Scholarship = \$2,020.00; General = \$12,160.00;
Total = \$14, 180.00

Next issue: Please send articles and announcements for the next newsletter by 15 November to the editor at swessel1@uwyo.edu

Looking for more plant related events in Wyoming? www.wynps.org/calendar

Email the editor @ swessel1@uwyo.edu if you have an event to feature.

New members: Please welcome the following new members to WYNPS: Lorie Cahn, Jackson; Anthropek Containers & Gardens, Pawling, NY; Anne Scott, Lander; Carolyn Toews, Casper

Message from the President: It might be a little ironic as a plant lover, but fall is my favorite time of year. I look forward to the crisp air and the beautiful fall colors. Some years in the Pinedale area, the leaves don't put on much of a display and just turn brown, but it's looking pretty good this year. We've had some lovely warm, sunny days and freezing nights, causing sugars to get trapped inside the aspen leaves.

These sugars allow the aspens to produce anthocyanins that create brilliant red and orange pigments. The golden yellows are from carotenoids that are in the leaf all year long and only become visible as the green from the chlorophyll fades. I had the pleasure of a long-time friend from Finland visit me recently. I learned that compared to the English language, Finnish has many more words for natural phenomena.

One such word being *ruska*, which specifically means the yellow, orange, and red color splendor that we only get to see in the fall. I hope everyone gets to witness an amazing *ruska* over the next month, and uses this as a little reminder to go on a *ruskaretki*, or a hike specifically for admiring the autumn foliage, before the leaves drop and winter sets in.

-Kelsey Smith



Above: Left: Dramatic landscapes explored by annual meeting attendees; Right: Thick-stem wild cabbage (*Caulanthus crassicaulis*).

Desert Rain- 2026 Annual Meeting Recap

Wyoming Native Plant Society members gathered May 29 – 31 for the annual meeting at Flaming Gorge. Despite persistent rain, field trips along the Scenic Byway and canyon rim showcased fiery red sandstone, dramatic rock pillars, and botanical highlights, including the alien-looking thick-stem wild cabbage (*Caulanthus crassicaulis*) and rare ricegrass (*Achnatherum contractum*).

The meeting brought together botanists, herbarium staff, naturalists, longtime enthusiasts, and newcomers. Attendees warmed up with coffee and hot cocoa while hearing about Ashley National Forest monitoring projects from Allen Huber and Sherel Goodrich, then gathered for a cozy, albeit soggy campfire and charcuterie dinner with lots of laughter. Generous silent-auction donations also raised funds for student scholarships.

Sunshine returned for the final day, with field trips featuring rare and uncommon calcareous associates, including the endemic Green River greenthread (*Thelesperma caespitosum*), Cleburne's beardtongue (*Penstemon eriantherus* var. *cleburnei*), and fullstem (*Chamaechaenactis scaposa*).

Discussions highlighted rare plant conservation and local engagement, especially raising awareness of

the Green River greenthread and its occurrence in town recreation areas.

Many thanks to the organizers and attendees whose flexibility, ingenuity, and good humor made the meeting a success despite the weather! Next year's meeting heads to the Bighorns – stay tuned for details.

Speaking of Specimens:
Slender spiderflower
(Cleomella multicaulis, a.k.a. Cleome multicaulis, Peritoma multicaulis)

Walter Fertig, Ph.D.
 Marion Ownbey Herbarium
 Washington State University
 (WSU)

Slender spiderflower is a skinny annual herb in the Cleomaceae (spiderflower family) with pink, 4-petaled flowers and stalkless leaves divided into 3 narrow leaflets. It occurs widely from central Wyoming to central Mexico, where it is restricted to semi-barren alkali-rich and saline soils surrounding playa ponds and old lake beds. These sites are often dominated by salt-hardy graminoids, including saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*), Baltic rush (*Juncus balticus*), and seaside arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritimum*), as well as billions of biting horseflies!

Despite its large geographic range, individual populations of Slender spiderflower are often isolated from each other by hundreds of miles, and the species is considered rare in most of the states in the southwestern US where it occurs. Disjunct populations, like these, can occur naturally through the contraction of a once more continuous range (called vicariance by biogeographers) or by rare, long-distance dispersal events (often facilitated by waterfowl with muddy, seed-encrusted feet). Humans can also enable dispersal through purposeful or inadvertent means. William Weber, a WSU graduate student in the 1940s and expert on the flora of Colorado, suggested that populations in his state were derived by Spaniards bringing seed to the San Luis Valley from Mexico during the Colonial era.

For conservation biologists, the origin of disjunct populations is important for setting conservation priorities. Isolated populations are of keen interest as they may become genetically distinct through founder effects or genetic drift – but only if the species arrived by their own means. Determining nativity of disjunct populations might be determined by genetic tests, or by assessing herbarium records to determine when populations were first documented.

Hugh Iltis in his 1952 doctoral dissertation on *Cleome* noted that Alexander Gordon collected a specimen of *C. multicaulis* from “Platte River” in 1843. Gordon was one of four botanists traveling with Scottish adventurer Sir William Drummond Stewart on a “pleasure excursion” up the Platte River of Wyoming and on to South Pass, which would have taken the travelers right through this population (this is the same route that became the Oregon Trail for half a million emigrants, starting after the 1849 California gold rush). While this discovery cannot completely disprove the human-introduction hypothesis, it does demonstrate that this species is not a recent arrival in Wyoming.

Cleome multicaulis has changed names twice in the past 20 years. In 2007, Hugh Iltis transferred it to the genus *Peritoma* for the Flora of North America. Just eight years later, Ownbey Herbarium director Eric Roalson and colleagues subsumed *Peritoma* and several other genera into the genus *Cleomella* based on modern molecular data. Similar studies have shown that *Cleomella* and friends also belong in their own family (Cleomaceae), separate from the tropical shrubs and trees of the Caper family (Capparaceae) where they were traditionally classified.

View the duplicate specimen at the Rocky Mountain Herbarium here:
<https://rmh.uwyo.edu/images/imageviewer.php?Image=RM0627169&Show=1>

Editor’s Note: Reprinted with permission from the Marion Ownbey Herbarium Blog (Aug 2026); updated with current info from the Wyoming Natural Diversity Database.
<https://sbs.wsu.edu/ownbeyherbarium/news/>

Conservation Corner – Part 3

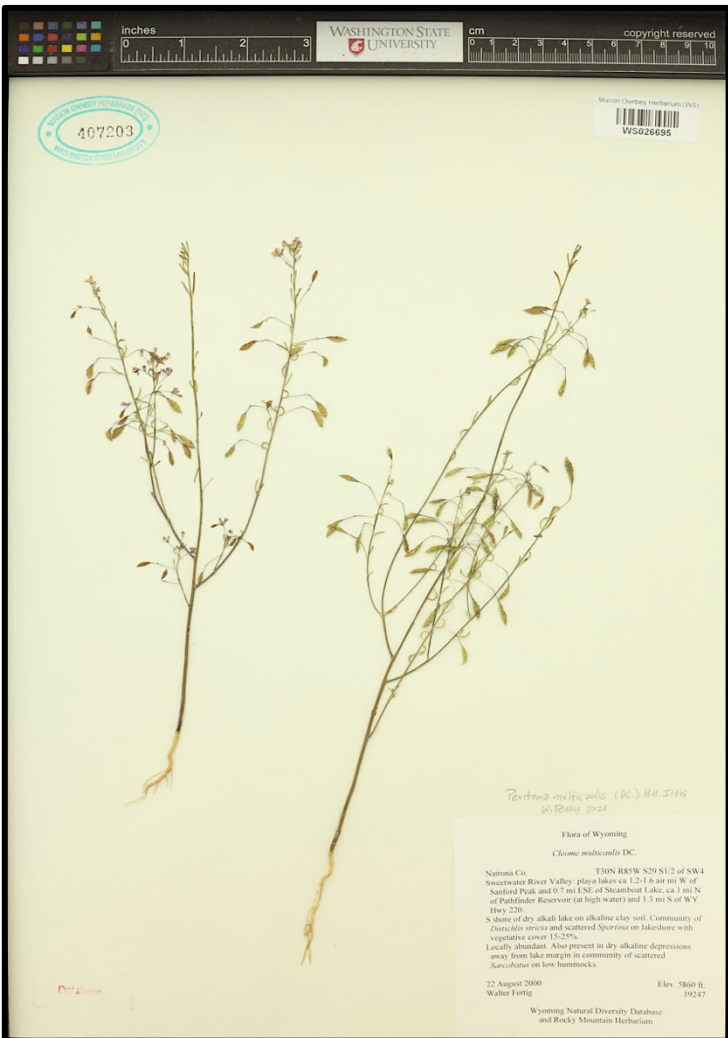
Conservation Comments Posted!!

Bonnie Heidel, Conservation Committee

Check out the WYNPS homepage for posted WYNPS Conservation Committee comments under the “**About Us**” tab, as submitted since the committee formed in June 2025.

We’ve been busy! Comments address state and federal actions potentially affecting Wyoming native plants and plant communities. Feel free to contact the Committee at:

WYNPSconservation@gmail.com – questions and comments are welcome!



Above: WSU specimen from the first documented Wyoming population of Slender spiderflower. The Wyoming Natural Diversity Database ranks this species S1 (State Critically Imperiled). Photo: Marion Ownbey Herbarium, WSU

The Wyoming population shown above is the first one known from the Cowboy State and is 320 miles (515 km) north of the nearest occurrence in southern Colorado. It was thought to have been first discovered in Wyoming in 1980 along alkali ponds at Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge near the (now inundated) confluence of the Sweetwater and North Platte rivers.



Above: State record of the rusty hair saxifrage (*Micranthes ferruginea*).

Vegetation Management, and with a custom-designed alpine plant press, I started out with an incredible team of seven, including:

- Scott Matthews, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, Ski Patrol and Base Operations.
- Reed Finlay and son Kershaw, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, Ski Patrol and Base Operations.
- Cam Eddy, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, Ski Patrol and Base Operations.
- Mike Kintgen, Denver Botanical Garden, Curator of Alpine Collections.
- Emily Skiver, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort Lift Operator Supervisor and EMT.
- Office support and archiving: Kym Sutton and Jasmine Cutter, Grand Teton National Park.

Botanical Expedition – Continued from p. 1

.....the quest began, to ascend a peak not yet surveyed by botanists from Grand Teton National Park or the University of Wyoming. In 2017, with support from former GTNP Branch Chief of Natural Resources Dan Reinhardt and Bridger-Teton NF, I asked friends and colleagues to join me for our first expedition into the mouth of Moran Canyon, accessed only by boating across Jackson Lake. Guided by advice from another dear friend and Wyoming expert, Bob Dorn (author of Vascular Plants of Wyoming), who had made the same attempt years ago, I received pointers and precautions about the difficulty of that canyon.

After a few days, our first expedition was unfortunately turned back by an unforgiving landscape of fallen timber in dense conifer forests, large talus slopes, and tall thickets of mountain shrubs and willows. However, with good fortune, we did not come out empty-handed. Discovered was a small, delicate saxifrage not yet found in Wyoming at the time: rusty hair saxifrage (*Micranthes ferruginea*; Delmatier 10332).

Nine years later, and for the fourth attempt, a solid team of backcountry mountain experts began its final journey. Spirits ran high, we never looked back, and the best result to announce: we succeeded without injury! With our new, strong alliance, we had the confidence to make the ascent. With support from Laura Jones, GTNP Branch Chief of

This time, in 2026, we reached the top! Mike and Charmaine diligently logged the flora surrounding the peak, including trees and shrubs. A new stand of 225 whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) trees, now listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, was discovered at the summit. On a previous attempt, another unique find was a population of columbines that was entirely pink and white! While scattered pink individuals of Colorado blue columbine (*Aquilegia coerulea*) have been



Above: Isolated pink and white population of Colorado blue columbine (*Aquilegia coerulea*).

documented elsewhere, the population isolated on this remote, rocky, high-elevation mountain was strikingly uniform in its pink coloration, raising an intriguing question: is this simply a distinctive local morph, or might this population deserve taxonomic distinction? What is clear is that this

was an expedition for the books, adding a small but modest addition to the largest collection of Rocky Mountain plant specimens in the world, held at the Rocky Mountain Herbarium.

Silver Buffaloberry (*Shepherdia argentea*)

By Meredith Taylor, Certified Wyoming Naturalist



Photo: Saskatchewanian photographer <https://colinherb.com/>

Buffaloberry is a native, drought-tolerant bush in the Elaeagnaceae family that grows in riparian areas, moist bottomlands, and plains from 3,500–7,000 feet within the Wind River Indian Reservation and throughout Wyoming. It is one of two *Shepherdia* species in the state, with differing palatability and uses, though ethnobotanical accounts do not always distinguish between the two species. Silver buffaloberry has small, oblong, silvery leaves on scaled twigs with thorns and is dioecious, with male and female flowers on separate bushes. The plants tolerate poor, dry, alkaline soil and grow about 5–20 feet high in open, sunny landscapes. They also fix nitrogen in the soil, benefiting surrounding plants.

The plants bear tart orange-red berries in mid to late summer, which taste a bit like cranberries and are sweeter after a frost. Also known as bull berries, they are edible to people and wildlife alike, and the red berries were even used as a dye by native peoples. Although tart, the berries are delicious when dried and ground with wild game meat to make pemmican. This author gathered the delicious berries along the Wind River Valley and sweetened them with honey from her bees to make jam, syrup, and wine. The buffaloberries were a welcome addition to meals during the dearth of winter, when most fruits were not available. Lewis and Clark were known to enjoy buffaloberries as a tart sauce cooked with their meat.

Buffaloberries are also a strong astringent with high vitamin C content and have been used to treat constipation, infections, sores, scurvy, hemorrhoids, and wounds.

References:

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- Dorn, Robert. 1988. Vascular Plants of Wyoming, Cheyenne, WY, Mountain West Publishing.
- Esser, Lora L. 1995. *Shepherdia argentea*, silver buffaloberry. In: Fire Effects Information System. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory.
- Harrington, H.D. 1967. Edible Native Plants of the Rocky Mountains. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico.
- Phillips, H. Wayne. 2003. Plants of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Lone Pine Publishing Co, MT.

This article is for educational purposes and does not condone collecting plants that readers cannot identify with certainty or safely consume. When collecting wild plants, tread lightly through their habitat and limit harvests to protect plant populations. Check directly with the managing agency about its policies before harvesting on public land.

Alpine Plant Conservation in Wyoming

Mike Kintgen, Denver Botanic Gardens

Guided by the North American Botanic Strategy for Alpine Plant Conservation (the Alpine Strategy), some exciting alpine conservation work is occurring in Wyoming. Published by Betty Ford Alpine Gardens and Denver Botanic Gardens (the Gardens) in 2020, the strategy was developed to help safeguard alpine plants and their habitats. It is modeled after the North American Botanic Garden Strategy for Plant Conservation but recognizes the need for a dedicated strategy to address the threats climate change poses to alpine ecosystems and the organisms found there.

The Alpine Strategy has four main objectives and twelve nested targets. Targets are noted as they relate to activities discussed in the article. To read the complete strategy and list of targets and learn more, visit <https://alpinestrategy.org/>

Objective 1- Understand and document alpine plant diversity.

Objective 2- Conserve alpine plants and their habitats

Objective 3- Promote awareness of the alpine

ecosystem and plant diversity through education and outreach.

Objective 4- Build capacity for the conservation of alpine plant species and associated habitats.

Thanks to partnerships between the Gardens, the U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Herbarium, Wyoming Natural Diversity Database (WYNDD), and Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, Wyoming's alpine plant species are being seed banked for conservation, and additional alpine conservation work is well underway to meet the targets of the Alpine Strategy.

In 2023, Denver Botanic Gardens partnered with Shoshone National Forest to begin banking seeds from both plant Species of Concern (as designated by WYNDD) and common alpine plant species. Betty Ford Alpine Gardens joined the project that year with staff and interns to help kick off the work. Every summer since then, the Gardens have continued collecting in the Absaroka and Beartooth Mountain Ranges. In 2025, the project expanded to Bridger-Teton National Forest, collecting seeds from Forest Service Sensitive Species and other common and uncommon taxa in the Teton, Gros Ventre, and Wind River Ranges.

When possible, staff make two trips each summer, one in July and one in August. During the July trip, they locate target taxa, collect herbarium vouchers, and assess whether populations can support sustainable



Above: Denver Botanic Gardens staff examine tiny alpine plants for seed collection.

seed collection in August. Gardens staff follow Center for Plant Conservation guidelines (CPC 2019), aiming to collect at least 3,000 seeds from 50 or more individuals when population size allows. No more than 10 percent of ripe seed is collected during the site visit to ensure that populations can naturally regenerate.

Each summer, interns from Denver Botanic Gardens and/or Betty Ford Alpine Gardens have worked alongside staff in the field, learning about vouchering and seed conservation work in Wyoming. This opportunity exposes a new generation to the importance of alpine plant communities and conservation (Target 11).

After collection, seeds are dried, cleaned, and X-rayed to determine viability. If a high percentage is not viable, the seed lot is not banked but may be used for living collections at the Gardens if germination is successful. After X-raying, the seeds are counted and prepared for seed banking by Gardens staff. Seeds are primarily stored at the Gardens, while a small percentage of rare taxa are also sent to the Fort Collins seed bank for redundancy. Periodically, collections at the Gardens are tested for viability, and some taxa have been used in germination studies. Otherwise, the seeds are stored for long-term genetic preservation and are generally available only in extreme situations. Living plants from germination studies have also been added to the Gardens' living plant collections for their educational value.



Above: Species of Concern collected and seed banked by the Denver Botanic Gardens. Left: Rydberg's parrya (*Parrya rydbergii*); Right: Woolly fleabane (*Erigeron lanatus*)

As of August 2026, seeds from about twenty Species of Concern have been collected for seed banking. The Gardens have not been able to reach the target of 3,000 seeds from 50 individuals in some cases due to seed predation, population size, or poor seed set. Other taxa have proved extremely easy to collect in sufficient numbers for banking. These collections directly support seed banking of rare and threatened alpine species ([Target 9](#)). More common alpine plant species are important as well, and an additional ten common taxa have been collected for seed banking ([Target 8](#)). These species often make up much of the biomass in alpine areas or are keystone species in the ecosystem.

Since 2023, Gardens staff have also vouchered unrecorded populations of uncommon and previously unvouchered common alpine plants at the sites they visit. These efforts continue to improve understanding of the diversity and distribution of alpine plants in the Cowboy State. Staff are also re-vouchering some historical populations of Species of Concern that have not been revisited in the past 30 to 60 years to confirm they are still present. Vouchers are deposited at the Kathryn Kalmbach Herbarium at the Gardens, which is also part of SEINet, the same herbarium database used by the Rocky Mountain Herbarium for online access to specimens and data.

Additionally, over the past few seasons, Gardens staff have helped with two alpine transect surveys, one at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort and one in the Snowy Mountains of southern Wyoming. Staff have also helped identify specimens collected by Forest Service staff in Wyoming. These activities would not be possible without the collaboration and support of Shoshone and Bridger-Teton National Forests and Region 4 of the U.S. Forest Service. These partnerships, along with those developed with other organizations working on alpine conservation in Wyoming, help build and strengthen the networks needed for long-term alpine conservation ([Target 12](#)).

The Alpine Strategy work may also support the Wyoming Seed Strategy, published in 2025, by helping supply or source seed and providing information on seed storage and germination for future projects. Potential large-scale alpine restoration projects in Wyoming could benefit from the resources and information developed through the Alpine Strategy. Additionally, location and population data collected

during the 2023–2026 field work could help inform decisions affecting specific alpine plant populations.

The Gardens' work in Wyoming advances key objectives of the Alpine Strategy, helping conserve some of the West's most threatened habitats and plants. We are grateful to our partners in Wyoming and beyond and also recognize the Rocky Mountain Herbarium's important and ongoing contributions to our understanding of regional alpine plants.

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- Center for Plant Conservation. 2019. CPC Best Plant Conservation Practices to Support Species Survival in the Wild. Center for Plant Conservation, Escondido, CA.

To Be, Or Not To Be, *Phlox pungens*

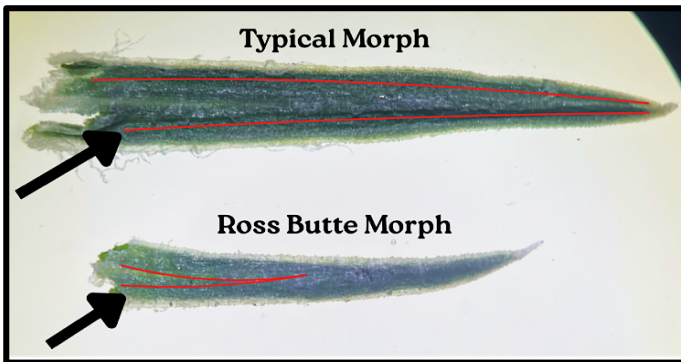
Andy Cabrera; M.S. student, Fresno State University



Above: Side profile of the Ross Butte morph.

Wyoming is home to many remarkable endemic plants, including the species central to my thesis work- *Phlox pungens* (Beaver Rim Phlox), a perennial that forms loose mats 5 cm or less in height with blankets of white funnel-shaped flowers (WYNDD 2026). Its leaves are stiff and pungent (*pungens* is Latin for prickly), with glandular or ciliate hairs. That prickly characteristic can be a useful field identification clue. When I first began working with this species, if I was uncertain which species of *Phlox* I was looking at, a touch of the leaves could set me on the right track!

The study I am working on focuses on the genetic differences between two distinct morphs (or appearances) of *Phlox pungens*, known as the typical morph and the Ross Butte morph. Distinguishing them in the field required a hand lens. I found it easiest to look at the leaves, as the Ross Butte morph lacks the distinct, thickened midrib of the typical morph and has much thinner leaves. Other differences exist, but this was the most noticeable to me as a new botanist.



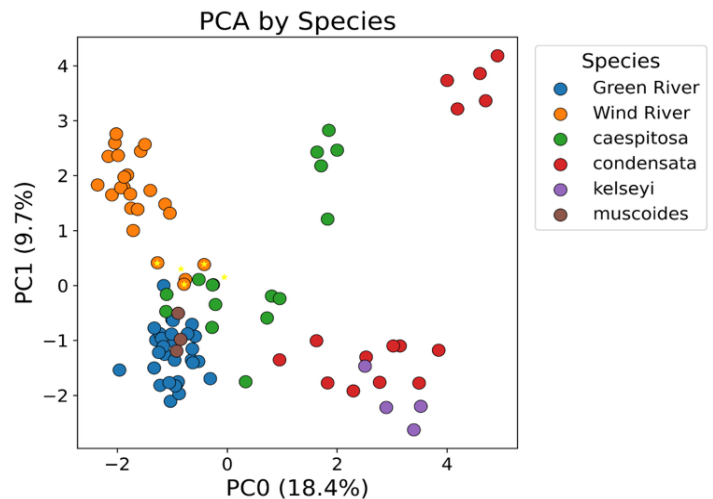
Above: The typical morph midrib appears within the red outline, whereas the Ross Butte morph midrib is much less pronounced.

The morphs are geographically separated by the Wind River Range, with the typical morph in the Wind River Basin and the Ross Butte morph in the Green River Basin. Limestone occurs across all known habitats, but the Ross Butte morph is more associated with silty clay and shale, while typical morph substrates are more variable (e.g. barren limestone).

Our research builds upon a study by Waselkov et al. (2020) that found moderate genetic differentiation across the morphs. We are now leveraging newer advanced genetic sequencing techniques and technology to further investigate the evolutionary relationship between them. Our team converged from California, Kansas, and Wyoming to collect leaf tissue and herbarium specimens from six populations in the Green River Basin and five in the Wind River Basin from the original study. Collections were made at peak flowering (May 26–30, 2025), shortly after the snow melts each year. At each population, we collected 2.5 grams of leaf material from 20 individuals. We also collected related *Phlox* species for broader evolutionary context.

I extracted DNA from these samples and sent them to the UC Davis Genomics Lab for next-generation sequencing. Then, I processed the raw DNA sequences

through a custom bioinformatics pipeline derived from Goulet-Scott et al. (2021) to examine relationships among *Phlox* populations and taxa with a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Our preliminary results show that the Wind River Basin populations (typical morph) and the Green River Basin populations (Ross Butte morph) are genetically distinct, with each forming its own genetic cluster. These data suggest the two morphs may represent distinct taxa rather than the same species.



Above: PCA of the two *Phlox pungens* morphs in relation to broader sampling of related *Phlox* species.

This distinction has important conservation implications for *Phlox pungens*. Our results suggest the Wind River Basin populations may represent *Phlox pungens*, while the Green River populations may represent a distinct taxon. This could drastically reduce the known range and number of populations attributed to this endemic species. The Ross Butte morph may (1) represent a previously undescribed *Phlox* taxon, or (2) correspond to a previously described taxon. This is a vital point in species conservation because if the Ross Butte morph is determined to be a previously undescribed taxon, it could meet criteria for recognition as a new endemic and possibly qualify as a Wyoming Species of Concern through the Wyoming Natural Diversity Database (WYNDD). If it is previously described, the Ross Butte populations would no longer be included in the distribution of *Phlox pungens*, which is one of only two *Phlox* species currently listed as a Species of Concern in Wyoming. This research will further inform our understanding of taxonomy and conservation of glandular, mat-forming (caespitose) *Phlox* species in western North America.

References:

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