



Capulin Volcano National Monument

Capulin Goldenrod

Capulin Volcano National Monument is located within a vegetative transitional zone between the Rocky Mountains and shortgrass prairie, supporting a relatively high diversity of habitats for wildlife and plants not found elsewhere in the surrounding grasslands. Capulin goldenrod (*Solidago capulinensis*), is a rare plant found at the monument, and was first described and collected in 1936 by Cockerell and Andrews. It has not been included in any subsequent account of the New Mexico or United States flora. Capulin goldenrod was rediscovered at the Pueblo Colorado Nature Center, Pueblo, Colorado, which prompted a new survey within the monument in September 2010 by Dr. Tim Lowrey of the Museum of Southwestern Biology at University of New Mexico. Dr. Lowrey found Capulin goldenrod growing throughout the monument and re-identified it as a rare endemic plant. It is the only known rare vascular plant species found to occur within the monument.

Status and Trends

Only two floristic surveys exist for the monument; Parmenter et al. (2000) conducted a rare-species inventory and Johnson et al. (2003) completed a comprehensive floristic survey. Results from both surveys reported no rare plants found within the monument.

Between 2005 and 2009, Natural Heritage New Mexico completed a vegetation classification and mapping project for the monument. Plant species were recorded from within vegetation plots but did not include Capulin goldenrod. The intention of the Natural Heritage study was to detect dominant plant species versus a detailed floristic survey, detecting rare species.

To date, two informal surveys have been conducted to specifically document the presence of Capulin goldenrod in the monument, however, its abundance and distribution are not well known at this time.

Discussion

Rare plants have a mystique about them that perhaps more abundant plants don't possess. It's most likely due to the fact that they are in fact different from all those other surrounding plants and that the rare plants have evolved in a certain unique way, responding to environmental influences unlike any other. Typically, rare plants have a narrow geographic range, restricted habitat, and small populations. These factors can



Capulin goldenrod (*Solidago capulinensis*) is a rare plant found at Capulin Volcano National Monument.

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sometimes limit the knowledge base regarding its ecology and potential threats, creating a difficult management situation. With a species like Capulin goldenrod, local planning and conservation efforts become more important to furthering the understanding of such a rare species, as well as its continued survival.