

The Nature Conservancy's Flowers Penstemon Preserve **Patricia Holmgren**

One of the highlights of our field trips on 3--5 June 2017 will be seeing *Penstemon flowersii* at The Nature Conservancy's Flowers Penstemon Preserve. This rare species was named by Elizabeth Neese and Stan Welsh in honor of Seville Flowers (1900-1968), a bryologist at the University of Utah from 1936 to 1968.

Joan Degiorgio, Northern Mountains Regional Director of The Nature Conservancy, played the key role in acquiring the property that now preserves *P. flowersii*. We are honored to have Joan join us at our annual meeting and at the TNC Flowers Penstemon Preserve. Joan has been working in the field of Natural Resources Planning for over 35 years. These years have included planning positions with the State of Utah, U.S. Forest Service, private consulting, and the Utah Mitigation Commission. For the past 13 years, she has been working for The Nature Conservancy, responsible for identifying and managing projects in northern Utah that preserve sensitive landscapes and species. These include the Uinta Basin where Joan has assembled a team of public and private partners to develop and implement a science-driven landscape plan.

We asked Joan to describe how TNC became involved with preserving *Penstemon flowersii*. Her story follows. Additional information on the background of the TNC acquisition and preservation can be found at: http://www.ubmedia.biz/vernal/news/article_a90d1bb4-4732-5a66-a398-266ee5bb60eb.html

The Nature Conservancy's Flowers Penstemon Preserve **by Joan Degiorgio**

Background on Acquisition of the Property:

The Nature Conservancy purchased the 29 acres that became the TNC Flowers Penstemon Preserve in 2011. The acquisition was driven by several interconnected planning efforts as well as a fun story. At the largest scale, the Wyoming Basin's Ecoregional Plan (developed by The Nature Conservancy and covering five states) identified Flowers Beardtongue (*Penstemon flowersii*) as a target. The Plan set a goal to protect at least five occurrences of the plant. At a more site specific scale, the Uinta Basin Rare Plant Forum (of Utah) also identified Flowers Beardtongue as one of their conservation targets.

At this juncture is the fun story. I got a call, as I often do, from a landowner who thought she might have something rare. At that point, I solicited Jim Spencer to visit the property for me. He did and found Flowers Penstemon. The other part of the story is that Sue Collier, the owner, was even aware she might have something rare because she would walk the property with a co-worker of Jim – who knew about rare plants because of Jim – and she was the one who directed Sue to call me!

Current Status of *Penstemon flowersii*:

Penstemon flowersii is only found in the Uinta Basin near Roosevelt, Utah, occurring across an area approximately 20 miles by 4 miles from Bridgeview to Randlett, Utah in seven element occurrences. The estimated number of plants is between 2,798 and 14,756. The exact number is not known as most plants are on private or tribal lands and the population numbers fluctuate widely from year to year. Seventy-nine percent of the entire population is on private land. The plants were historically distributed in low-lying areas that have been converted to agriculture, which lowered population numbers and contributed to habitat fragmentation. The plant was considered for listing as being a rare endemic, but was found as not warranted shortly before a significant increase in oil and gas development, which is a serious threat. Because it is found on private lands and not listed as an endangered or BLM sensitive species, it can easily be overlooked by developers. While the TNC property is small – it is the only formally protected population.

TNC has fenced and surveyed the property and developed a monitoring plan. We are also working through the Uinta Basin Rare Plant Forum to develop a plan for the species that is taking action to better understand the species and protect additional areas.



Foreground left, Pat Holmgren and right, Joan Degiorgio