

### Plant ID 1.1.

While we wait for spring, observe the winter (April 6) appearance of ten trees and shrubs along River walk, Ridgway, from parking lot next to San Miguel Power to Riversage Road, Dennis Weaver Park. The plant community is classified as Narrowleaf cottonwood/Skunkbrush (*Populus angustifolia*/*Rhus trilobata*), and is ranked G3, or globally vulnerable by NatureServe (<http://explorer.natureserve.org>)

Distances from the parking lot are given for some examples. You will continue to see the same species for the rest of the walk. This can also serve as a GPS exercise: Take a waypoint at the parking lot, then a “go to” to that waypoint, to see the distance. (This is straight line distance, so may be a little off due to curves in the trail.)

### Species observed:

1--First large shrub on right, about 15 ft from start: **Skunkbrush, or three-leaf sumac: *Rhus trilobata*** (aka *Rhus aromatic* ssp. *trilobata*). In the family Anacardiaceae, along with poison ivy, although *Rhus* isn't poisonous. The leaves are three-lobed. It has small orange berries, a few of which from last year can still be seen. They can be sucked and taste lemony, but don't over-do it, as the tiny hairs on the fruits can irritate your mouth.



**Rhus trilobata in winter**



**Leaves and fruit of Rhus trilobata**

2—on left of trail: **Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *wyomingensis*)**. Family Asteraceae.



**Artemisia tridentata ssp. wyomingensis**



**close-up of sagebrush leaves**

3—0.14 mi. from start: **Silver buffaloberry** (*Shepherdia argentea*). Similar in appearance of silvery gray leaves to Russian olive, an invasive non-native species, but this is a desirable native. You can tell the difference by the ways the branches are arranged on the stems: opposite for buffaloberry, alternate for Russian olive. Berries were used by Indians with buffalo meat to make pemmican.



**Shepherdia in winter**



**Leaves and berries of silver buffaloberry.  
Note opposite branching.**

4—0.16 mi. **River hawthorn** (*Crataegus rivularis*). Rose family. Note reddish bark and thorns about 1 inch long.



**River hawthorn in winter**



**Leaves and fruit of river hawthorn.**

5—**Narrowleaf cottonwood** (*Populus angustifolia*). Willow family. All but one of the large deciduous trees along this trail are cottonwoods. In winter, look for eagles perched on them.



**Narrowleaf cottonwood in winter**



**Cottonwood leaves and catkins in summer**

(You will also see the broad-leaved plains cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) planted and fenced across from the BLM park. These are not native at this elevation.)

6—0.18 miles, on left. **Box elder** (*Acer negundo*, or *Negundo aceroides*). Only large deciduous tree on this walk that's not a cottonwood. Maple family. Note magpie nest.



**Box elder in winter**



**Leaves of box elder**

7—0.21mi. **Ponderosa pine** (*Pinus ponderosa*) On hill to left, the lone pine is a ponderosa. Needles are in bundles of 3, unlike the pinyons, which are in bundles of 2.



**Ponderosa pine**



**Ponderosa pine needles**

8—**Coyote willow** (*Salix exigua*). The straight, narrow-stemmed reddish willow is the most common willow along river banks. It has the narrowest leaves of our willows.



**Coyote willow in winter**



**leaves of coyote willow**

9—**Rocky Mountain juniper** (*Juniperus scopulorum*) Sometime called cedar, this is one of two junipers in the area, and prefers more moist habitats than the Utah juniper which usually occurs on rocky dry sites with pinyon pine. This one tends to have a more triangular shape, like a Christmas tree, and finer branchlets. Leaves are scale-like. The blue Juniper berries are used to flavor gin (crush and smell them.)



**Rocky Mountain juniper. This one is at the end of the railroad bridge**



**Twigs and berries of juniper**

10—**Wild rose** (*Rosa woodsii*) In the Rose family, believe it or not! Red stems, pinnate leaves and rose hips. Note short spines on upper branches, and dense bristles on the lower, older stems.



**Wild rose. Note spines and bristles.**



**A rose is a rose....**

*Populus angustifolia*. Narrowleaf cottonwood. (All the large deciduous trees)

*Pinus ponderosa*. Ponderosa pine. Large evergreen, needles in bundles of 3.

*Juniperus scopulorum*. Rocky Mountain juniper. Cedar-like, fairly large trees.

*Rhus aromatic ssp. trilobata*. Skunkbrush sumac, three-leaf sumac, lemonadeberry...dark grey bark, fairly thick, chunky twigs, alternate branching. Some dried berries from last year still present.

*Artemisia tridentata ssp. wyomingensis*: Wyoming sagebrush. Note leaves shorter and wider at tip than big sage (*ssp. tridentata*).

*Rosa woodsii*. Wild rose. Spines on branches short, about 1-2 mm. bark reddish in winter.

*Crataegus rivularis*. River hawthorn. Reddish bark, stiff spines about 1 inch long.

*Shepherdia argentea*. Silver buffaloberry. Just starting to bloom early April. Light gray silvery bark, opposite branching, tiny yellow flowers.

*Salix exigua*. Coyote willow. Straight narrow stemmed, little branching. Buds with scales with no slit, like a cap.