

-State Species Abstract-
-Wyoming Natural Diversity Database-

ERIOGONUM BREVICAULE VAR. *CANUM*
RABBIT BUCKWHEAT
Family: Polygonaceae

Status:

US Fish & Wildlife Service: None; Formerly
a C2 candidate for listing under the
Endangered Species Act.

Agency Status: None.

Heritage Rank:

Global: G3 State: S2

WYNDD Plant List: Regional endemic
(Medium conservation priority)

Description: Rabbit buckwheat is a woody-based perennial with white-woolly stems 15-30 cm high surmounting a highly branched taproot. The leaves are linear-oblongate, densely white tomentose, and distinctly petioled. The yellow flowers are 1-2.5 mm long, hairy, lack a narrow, stipe-like base, and are arranged in an open, branched, woolly, umbel-like inflorescence (Clark and Dorn 1979; Fertig et al 1994; Heidel and Fertig 2000).

Synonyms: *Eriogonum x lagopus*

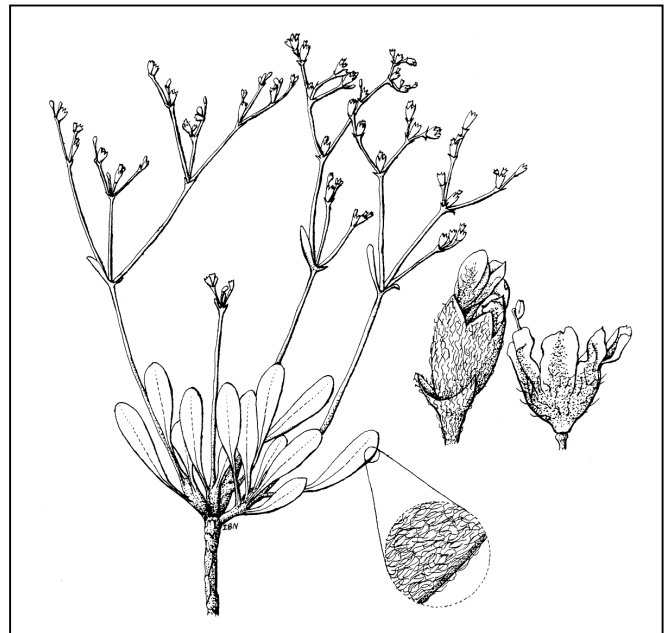
Similar Species: Other varieties of *Eriogonum brevicaule* differ in having glabrous stems and flowers or congested, head-like inflorescences. *E. pauciflorum* has pinkish-white flowers in a head-like inflorescence and matted stems. *E. jamesii* has large, leaf-like bracts at the base of the umbel of flowers and a stipe-like base above the true pedicel. Vegetative specimens of *Senecio canus* have a more matted growth form.

Flowering/Fruiting Period: June-September.

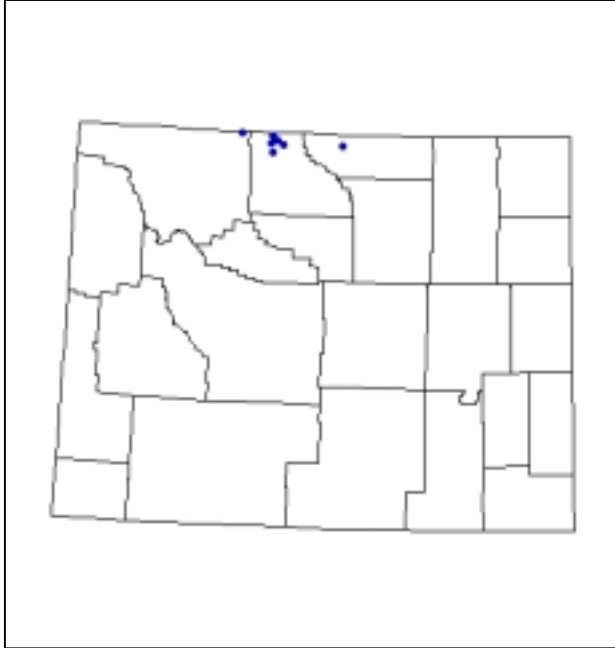


Above: *Eriogonum brevicaule* var. *canum* from Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. Photo by Walter Fertig.

Below: *E. brevicaule* var. *canum* by Isobel Nichols (from Wyoming Rare Plant Field Guide).



Distribution: Regional endemic of southern Montana and north-central Wyoming. In Wyoming, this species is known from the northern Bighorn Basin and east and west flanks of the Bighorn Range in Big Horn, Park, and Sheridan counties.



Wyoming distribution of *Eriogonum brevicaule* var. *canum*.

Habitat: Occurs commonly on barren to sparsely vegetated redbed clay or sandy soils in cushion plant, juniper woodland, and sagebrush steppe communities (Lesica and Achuff 1992; Fertig et al. 1994). Populations may also occur on dolomite, sandstone, and siltstone outcrops and rims. In Wyoming, this species is found primarily on barren slopes, terraces, and flats of Chugwater redbed clays, or reddish clay and dolomite gravel of the Goose Egg Formation at 3700-5500 feet (Heidel and Fertig 2000). It commonly occurs with cushion plant and bunchgrass species such as *Haplopappus nuttallii*, *Arenaria hookeri*, *Hymenoxys acaulis*, *Astragalus hyalinus*, and *Elymus spicatus* or in openings amid sparse *Chrysothamnus nauseosus*/*Artemisia tridentata* var. *wyomingensis* communities (total vegetative cover typically under 20%). In some areas, *E. brevicaule* var. *canum* can be locally dominant, and has been recognized as a co-dominant in the *Chrysothamnus nauseosus*/*Eriogonum brevicaule* var. *canum* plant association in the

Pryor Mountains of Montana (DeVelice and Lesica 1993).

Occurrences in Wyoming: Known from 6 extant populations (last observed in 1999) and 1 historical record in Wyoming.

Abundance: Populations surveyed in Bighorn Canyon by Fertig and Welp in 1998-99 numbered in the hundreds of thousands and covered extensive areas (often as one of the primary forb species). Large population sizes have also been reported in Montana (Lesica and Achuff 1992).

Trends: Probably stable in Wyoming.

Protection status: Two extensive Wyoming populations are protected within Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area (one of which may extend into the BLM Little Mountain ACEC). Other populations are on state or public lands managed for multiple use.

Threats: Threats low at most sites.



Above: Habitat of *Eriogonum brevicaule* var. *canum* on terraces and slopes of Chugwater redbed clays along the east shore of Yellowtail Reservoir, Bighorn Canyon NRA. Photo by Walter Fertig.



Above: Habitat of *Eriogonum brevicaulum* var. *canum* on terraces of gravelly dolomite and clay (derived from the Goose Egg Formation) along the east shore of Yellowtail Reservoir, Bighorn Canyon NRA. Photo by Walter Fertig.

Managed Areas: Occurs in Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area and the BLM Cody Field Office.

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