

84. *Quercus gambelii* / *Symphoricarpos oreophilus* Shrubland Association

Gambel oak / Mountain snowberry Shrubland Association

This community is characterized by a lower canopy (2–5 m) solely dominated (10–20% cover) by regenerating Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*), with a variable understory most commonly dominated by mountain snowberry (*Symphoricarpos oreophilus*) or western brackenfern (*Pteridium aquilinum*). In the lower canopy, Gambel oak (*Q. gambelii*) is present as short (3–5 m), narrow-canopied regenerating trees with cover ranging from 10% to 20% across the community. The subcanopy stratum (0.5–2 m) presents as two distinct variations, one dominated by mountain snowberry (*S. oreophilus*) and one by western brackenfern (*P. aquilinum*). When dominant, mountain snowberry (*S. oreophilus*) provides cover of 5–10%, usually as small (0.5–1 m) shrubs often spanning the field (<0.5 m) and subcanopy strata. In the other variation, western brackenfern (*P. aquilinum*) provides variable cover of 15–40%, also spanning the field and subcanopy strata. Beyond the shorter versions of the species documented in the subcanopy, the field stratum (<0.5 m) is a sparse (5% cover) mix of subshrubs, forbs, and grasses, without any consistent dominants or associates.

This community covers 0.1% (37 ha/92 ac) of the Rincon Mountain District and is scattered along the north slopes of Mica Mountain, with the largest examples located on the slopes northeast of the secondary fire lookout. It is typically found on moderately steep (30%), north-facing, upper backslopes from 2,250 to 2,500 meters (7,381–8,200 ft). The surface cover is characterized by a mix of well-drained skeletal loam ranging from very shallow to moderately deep, underlying a dominant layer of bare soil and fine gravel with patches of dense litter. All examples of this community showed evidence of historic fire disturbance and occur within the boundaries of the Helen's 2 (2003), Rincon (1994), and/or Manning Camp (1953) fires.

Common species

- *Quercus gambelii*
- *Symphoricarpos oreophilus*
- *Pteridium aquilinum*



Rincon Mountain District, Saguaro National Park

