



NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS

# McInnis Canyons

National Conservation Area



Colorado

Annual Manager's Report—Fiscal Year 2020

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# Table of Contents

---

McInnis Canyons Fact Sheet.....	3
McInnis Canyons NCA Map .....	5
McInnis Canyons NCA Overview .....	6
Programs and Accomplishments.....	9
Science .....	24
Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors .....	28
Summary of Performance Measure.....	34
Manager's Letter .....	35



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# McInnis Canyons

National Conservation Area

## Designating Authority

Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-353), October 24, 2000, renamed through Public Law 108-400, October 30, 2004

**Date of Designation:** October 24, 2000

## Additional Designations

Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness  
Old Spanish National Historic Trail

## Site Description

McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (MCNCA) forms a part of the Uncompahgre Plateau, which rises like a giant rolling wave above the Grand Valley of Colorado. It encompasses 123,460 acres of rugged canyons that descend to the Colorado River and contain some of the most spectacular landforms found anywhere in the country.

Rattlesnake Canyon, Dinosaur Hill, Devil's Canyon, and Mee Canyon are just a few of the areas that contribute to the mystery, splendor, and diversity of this landscape. It is home to Bighorn sheep, elk, deer, coyotes, bald eagles, mountain lions, a variety of small mammals, and songbirds.

## NCA Offerings

McInnis Canyons NCA has vast recreational opportunities. The variety of recreational experiences include world-class mountain biking, river rafting, hiking, camping, hunting, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel, and wildlife viewing. Visitors can also enjoy a broad range of recreational settings, including remote wilderness, river corridors, and canyon rims and escarpments. The NCA provides scientists and the public access to riparian wetlands, and culturally or historically significant sites. The 142-mile Kokopelli Trail runs through MCNCA to Moab, Utah, and the Colorado River winds its way for 19 miles through the spectacular canyon country of MCNCA.

Communications sites in MCNCA host 17 towers and facilities. The first right-of-way (ROW) grants were issued in the mid-1950s to utility companies such as Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company, Public Service Company, and Grand Valley Transmission Company. The BLM granted the first ROW for a commercial broadcast

---

station to Jan-Di Broadcasting for KEKB in 1984. Since then, the BLM has issued additional ROWs for television and radio broadcasting facilities. These sites also provide public safety communications, such as the Grand Junction Regional Communications Center, responsible for answering 911 and non-emergency calls, the Western Colorado Amateur Radio Club, serving local volunteer organizations such as Mesa County Search and Rescue, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's SKYWARN volunteers.

### **Year Accomplishments**

- Nature Knowledge Days and educational videos in McInnis Canyons.
- Improved opportunities for April and October river trips by extending the fee calendar, which will improve management and discourage no-shows.
- Visual Resources Inventory.
- Planning for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the designation of McInnis Canyons NCA through community hikes, lectures, and other events.

### **Future Priorities and Opportunities**

- Improved camping facilities in Rabbit Valley.
- Cultural and Paleontological Resource Management Plan for Rabbit Valley.

## **McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area**

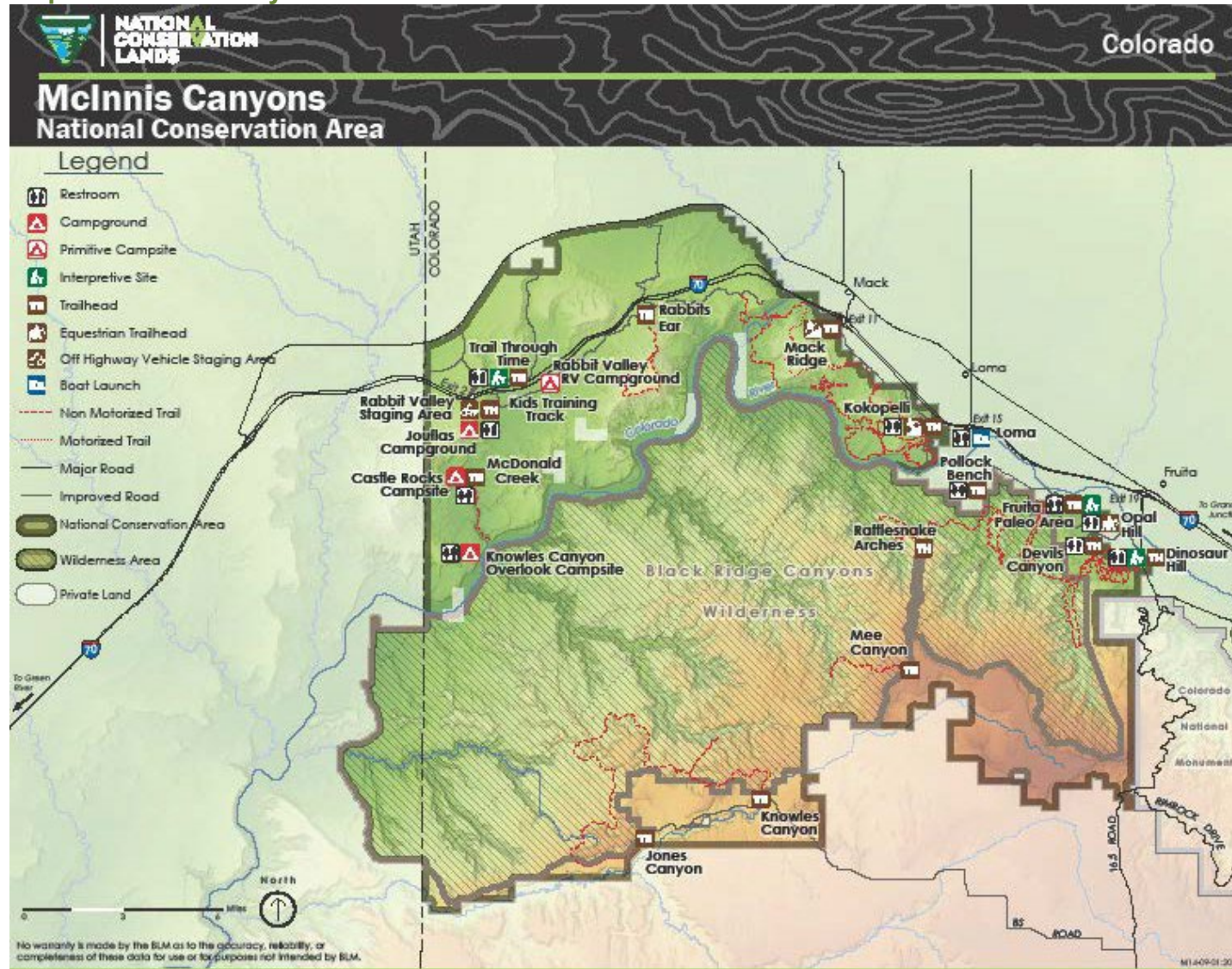
2815 H Road Grand Junction CO 81507 Phone: 970-244-3000

Unit Manager: Collin Ewing

Site Web Address:

<https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/colorado/mcinnis-canyons>

# Map of McInnis Canyons NCA



# 1 McInnis Canyons NCA Overview

## Acreage

<b>Total Acres in Unit</b>	123,460 Acres
<b>BLM Acres</b>	123,460 Acres
<b>Other Federal Acres</b>	25 Acres (FAA)
<b>State Acres*</b>	0
<b>Private Acres*</b>	814 Acres

\*State and Private acres are not part of the total unit acres

## Budget

Budget Title	Code	Funding
Monuments & Conservation Areas	1711	\$596,000
Soils and Rangeland Management	1020	\$27,000
Cultural and Paleo Resources	1050	\$64,000
Water, Fisheries and Riparian Management	1160	\$24,000
Wildlife and Threatened & Endangered Species	1170 & 11705	\$29,000
Wilderness Management	1210	\$66,000
Recreation & Visitor Services	1220	\$92,000
Ruby-Horsethief camping fees	1232	\$152,000
Total Budget		\$1,050,000

McInnis Canyons NCA receives benefits from partnerships such as the one with the NCAs' Friends group, Colorado Canyons Association (CCA). CCA holds fundraisers, applies for grants, receives donations, and collects membership dues, which they use to further community stewardship, education, and restoration programs in the NCA.



## Current Areas of Focus

### Rabbit Valley Campground Project

In FY2020, implementation of the Rabbit Valley camping project began. The BLM installed metal fire grates and signs to delineate designated campsites. The BLM will begin installation of picnic tables in FY21. Engineering design work began for the Knowles Overlook campground. BLM expects to award a contract in FY21 to complete construction at the Knowles Overlook. Upon publication of the Federal Register Notice, the BLM will implement new fees and the individual camping permit program.



## Planning and NEPA

### Special Recreation Permits

In FY20, the Grand Junction Field Office renewed or issued new Special Recreation Permits for a variety of guided services and special events. Most of these permits were issued as joint permits, under a CX authorization, allowing use in the field office and in the NCAs.

Authorizations for use in the MCNCA included:

- seven for mountain biking tours on Mack Ridge and Rabbit Valley
- one for a trail running festival on Mack Ridge
- one for equestrian tours in Devils Canyon
- three for guided river trips on the Colorado River
- one for guided Stand Up Paddle Board trips on the Colorado
- three for guided OHV trips in Rabbit Valley
- one for shuttle services at Loma and Mack Ridge
- one for guided hikes in Devils Canyon
- two for geology and paleontology tours in Rabbit Valley, Rattlesnake Arches
- one for guided lion hunting
- two for guided big game hunting

### Status of the Resource Management Plan

The BLM completed the Colorado (McInnis) Canyons NCA Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision in October 2004.

### Status of Activity Plans

The detailed 2004 RMP included many of the components of an activity level plan. The RMP includes travel management route designations, identify new routes to be constructed, identify gate placements, day use areas, parking areas, direction for

posting visitor use information, outcomes, setting prescriptions, management and marketing actions, administrative and monitoring actions for each management zone.

Most of these actions have been completed, and additional needs have been identified in areas of high recreation use such as Ruby-Horsethief Canyons, Rabbit Valley, and the Fruita Front Country. As a result, the BLM completed these two activity level planning efforts in 2011-2012 for Ruby-Horsethief Canyons and the Fruita Front Country and are now being implemented. The BLM has recently completed an activity level plan for Rabbit Valley.

### **Status of the RMP Implementation Strategy**

In 2018, the BLM Colorado State Office came to Grand Junction to conduct an evaluation of the 2004 Resource Management Plan. They gathered an evaluation team, reviewed the RMP documents, provided an RMP evaluation questionnaire to the field staff and managers, conducted interviews of field staff and managers, and developed a draft evaluation report, making recommendations on needed maintenance, implementation planning, and amendments, to keep the RMP relevant. The evaluation team completed the final report in 2019, and the BLM developed a strategy for implementing their recommendations in 2020.

### **Staffing**

The permanent staff of the McInnis Canyons NCA is shared with Dominguez-Escalante NCA and consists of an NCA manager, an ecologist/science coordinator, a law enforcement officer, an archaeologist, a National Conservation Lands Specialist, a career seasonal OHV Ranger, a Supervisory Park Ranger, and a River Ranger. In FY 2020, seasonal staff included an archaeological technician, an Old Spanish Trail Intern shared with Dominguez-Escalante NCA, three Off Highway Vehicle Trail Crew members, and two Park Rangers.

The NCA receives Special Recreation Permit administration, facilities maintenance, and other program support from the Grand Junction Field Office. This support contributes to the areas of visitor services and contact; geology and paleontology, archaeology, realty, range management, wildlife biology, ecology, weed management, geographic information systems (GIS), and soil, water, and air quality.

The BLM partners with Colorado Canyons Association (CCA) to hire an NCA Lands Program Coordinator and an NCA River Program Coordinator, a volunteer coordinator, as well as an AmeriCorps VISTA to plan volunteer stewardship and youth education programs for McInnis Canyons and Dominguez- Escalante NCAs.



# 2 Programs and Accomplishments

## General Accomplishments

Calendar Year 2020 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of McInnis Canyons NCA. Several projects in MCNCA were made possible with the hard work of the NCA staff and the NCA’s many partners. Included in this report are the details of the projects, NEPA work, outreach, and education events that happened over FY 2020. The NCA’s biggest accomplishments in 2020 include:

- Nature Knowledge Days and Educational Videos
- Planning for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- Implemented new fee calendar for Ruby-Horsethief River permits
- Camping Improvements in Rabbit Valley

## General Accomplishments Table

	Number of Visitors	Education Participants	Interpretative Participants	Visitor Center/ Contact Station Visits	Hours of Volunteers	SRP Events
<b>TOTALS</b>	287,405	1,392	258,719	275	5	

## Education, Outreach, and Interpretation

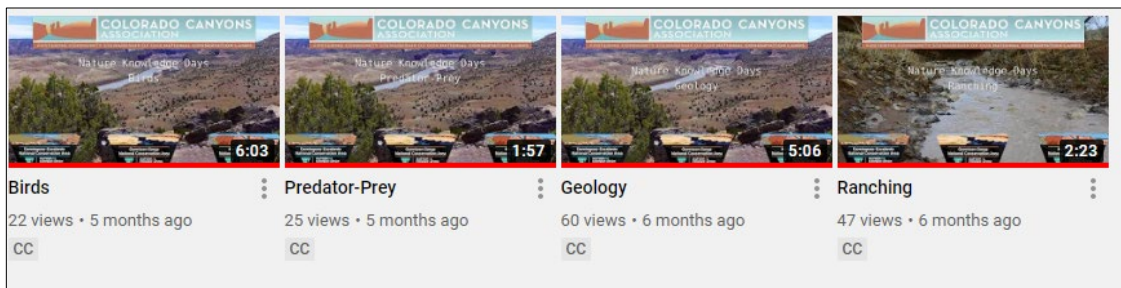
### Nature Knowledge Days in McInnis Canyons

In October 2019, nearly 600 third graders paid a visit to Devil's Canyon within McInnis Canyons NCA through a partnership with CCA. Students rotated between eight different stations where they explored topics ranging from geology and biological soil crust to archaeology and historic ranching. Following standards-based educational programming, students took part in outdoor learning experiences that complement and reinforce the classroom experience, increase understanding of the cultural and natural resources within our NCAs, gaining knowledge of the skills and ethics that will ensure a sustainable future for our NCAs. Students learned from dozens of expert volunteers while documenting their experiences in individual passport booklets. Last year, NCA staff made Nature Knowledge Days available to students in both the spring and the fall. While this year’s fall event was a huge success, the spring event was unfortunately cancelled due to the pandemic. We hope the events can continue again in the spring of 2021.



### Educational Videos

When COVID-19 changed the needs of school programming and cancelled spring education events, which typically engages over 1,000 students out on the land, BLM staff took the opportunity to provide online education content. To provide a virtual field trip, BLM staff partnered with staff at Colorado Canyons Association, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and others to film short videos that could be shown in classrooms. Totalling over 839 views and counting, these videos cover a range of topics that would be typically be part of the field trips. The videos filmed in MCNCA cover information about local birds, predator-prey dynamics, local geology, ranching, archaeology, cottonwood trees, tamarisk trees and control, biological soil crust, and leave no trace ethics. Colorado Canyons Association uploaded the series of videos to YouTube, reaching a global audience. BLM staff translated the video subtitles to Spanish, so the videos could be viewed by Spanish speaking community. They can be found [here](#).




### Hilltop Discovery Residential Youth Services Hikes

Throughout FY2020, BLM and CCA led guided hikes for students from Residential Youth Services. Educational opportunities were available on the Leave No Trace principle of “leave what you find” while interacting with the fossils on the trail, why leaving artifacts and fossils in place is important as well as how to differentiate between fossils, archaeological remains, and rocks through direct field identifications. Lesson

plans included how the environment of Colorado was different in the past and how ancient earth forces have shaped the Grand Valley as they see it today. Students also learned about government and non-government careers in the outdoors on our shared public lands. Students studied and explored their environment through illustrations and journaling. Additionally, hikes focused on map reading and students assuming leadership roles in navigation of routes.

### Jr. Ranger Program Development

Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, the AmeriCorps VISTA staff who is employed through an assistance agreement with CCA, developed a Jr. Ranger program for McInnis Canyons NCA. Participants must complete a variety of activities and submit their responses to receive a Jr. Ranger patch. Funding for the patches came from a Leave No Trace grant. The program went through evaluation by area specialists to be as relevant and factual for students as possible. The program will release the online and print versions in FY2021.



### McInnis Canyons NCA Junior Ranger Program

Use this printable guide to take notes while you're out exploring! Then, submit your answers online.

**Instructions**

**Materials:**

- Writing utensil
- Colored pens/pencils or crayons
- Phone/camera

**To get a badge:** The number of questions you will need to complete depends on how old you are. For anyone under 10 years old, that number is your age. For example, if you are 8 years old, you will need to answer 8 questions. If you are 10 or over, you must complete 10 questions total. There are 7 questions which can be completed anywhere within MCNCA. There are also suggested trails and recreation sites, which each have 3-4 questions specific to that location. You can decide which locations look best for you!

Since you might not have service in some of these locations, you can use this document to see all the questions and for taking notes. When you have your answers ready, you can enter them on the Google Form. You should plan to submit your answers in **one sitting** so that nothing gets lost!

Once you submit the form, you will receive a **certificate** by email. You can bring this certificate to the Public Lands Center visitor center in Montrose or the Delta Public Library to get a **badge**.

→ **FILL THIS IN:** I am \_\_\_\_ years old, so I need to complete \_\_\_\_ questions.



### Tabling Outreach

During the COVID-19 pandemic, BLM and CCA encouraged users to recreate responsibly at popular trailheads within MCNCA. Staff relayed proper guidance for recreation during the pandemic, including social distancing when trailheads are crowded. Additionally, with the increased visitor-use of outdoor spaces, BLM staff provided knowledge of regulations to follow while on the trail and in the wilderness.

## Earth Science Knowledge Day

Following the layout of Nature Knowledge Days, this event held in Devil's Canyon in early March was structured so students learned throughout five different stations during the day. This event was only a single day but engaged 90 fourth-grade students from Mesa County. Unlike Nature Knowledge Days, this event focused solely on geology, paleontology, and archaeology. The stations students rotated through were titled as follows: Uplift and Erosion, Fossils and What They Tell Us, Visiting Geological and Paleontological Sites with Respect, Geology as an Ongoing Process, and The Importance of Communicating Science to the Public. With help from partners like Museums of Western Colorado and Colorado Canyons Association, the event was a success and students learned more about the lands that surround them.



## Sieber Fire Volunteer Training

With wildfires scorching Colorado, the Grand Junction Field Office was not spared. However, volunteers were willing to rally and help restore the land. The Sieber fire burned 1,094 acres in McInnis Canyons NCA in June 2020. After the fire was fully controlled, people from around the community stepped up and offered their time to BLM to get to work in its aftermath. A volunteer training was held so volunteers

went to work knowing what needed to be done and how to most effectively, and safely, do their work.

### **Plein Air River Trip**

The 2019 Monuments and Canyons Plein Air Invitational occurred October 2019. In its third year, the event raised money for the Colorado National Monument Association as well as CCA.

CCA was able to provide six artists a two-day plein air float trip down the Colorado River in Ruby Horsethief Canyon. Artists traveled 25 miles and painted as they went.

The artists had two group paint-outs, with one of them occurring at the Devil's Canyon Trail in McInnis Canyons NCA. The consensus from the artists was that this part of Colorado is one of the most beautiful they had ever seen, and that many did not know about it.

The three-day exhibition was hosted in downtown Grand Junction, Colorado. Artists were able to relax after their busy week of painting and sample wines as well as meet the public and talk about the lands in which they painted.



### **Eureka! Science Museum River Trip**

Students rafted 25 miles down through the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater, Utah. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, and leadership while floating through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. Students spent one night camping at Mee Corner and one night camping at the Catalpa property.



### **Mesa County Partners River Trip**

Students rafted 25 miles down through the Colorado River from Loma, Colorado to Westwater, Utah. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, and leadership while floating through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. Students spent a night camping at Mee Corner and a night camping at the Catalpa property.

### **Riverside Educational Center River Trip**

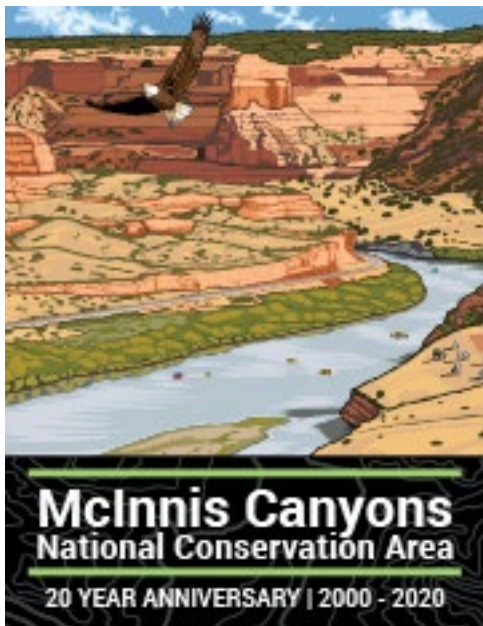
Twice in FY2020, students from Riverside Educational Center rafted 25 miles down through the Colorado River from Loma, Colorado to Westwater, Utah. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, and leadership while floating through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. Students spent a night camping at Mee Canyon and a night camping at Black Rocks.

### **Geology and paleontology River Trip**

A river trip with a focus on local paleontology and geology was provided to members of the community in partnership with Colorado Canyons Association. The trip was led by a local scientist and lasted three days in September. The group size was maxed out at ten participants, to maintain appropriate social distancing and meet local public health guidelines.

### **Classroom Pre-Trip Visits**

Before Nature Knowledge Days and river trips in the fall of 2019, a BLM representative went to classrooms and taught students the 7 principles of Leave No Trace. This was beneficial to set expectations for students and teachers before field trips. Students learned what to pack, and not pack, for their outdoor excursions, as well as how to behave when outdoors. These talks prevented students from wearing inappropriate attire, reduced waste, and made students more aware of what items they brought and whether they could be packed out.



### **Twentieth Anniversary Commemoration Events**

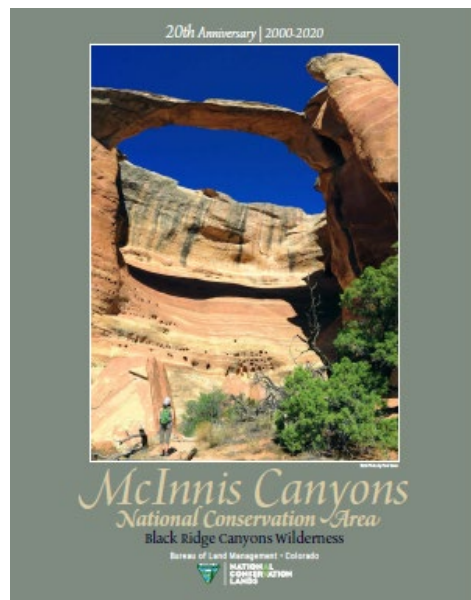
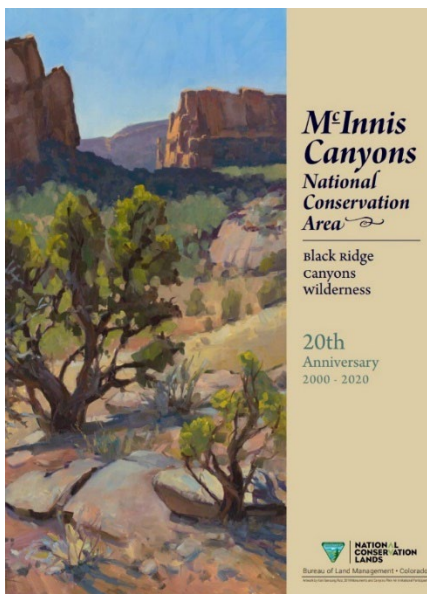
On October 24, 2020, McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area turned 20. To celebrate the value the NCA has brought to the community, multiple events were held in the month leading up to the anniversary. Though they had to be altered from what typical celebration events might look like in order to fit public health needs – masks, social distancing, limited participants – they were overall successful and received positive feedback. The events took a lot of planning to ensure they were both safe and honored MCNCA. The planning of the events happened in FY20. The events that were organized and coordinated within the year were four guided hikes discussing different topics within the NCA, a community horseback ride, a community bike ride, and a river trip focusing on paleontology, the life science lecture series, a Jr. Ranger use

demo, and the National Public Lands Day events. This all culminated to a larger event featuring many speakers including the NCA namesake Scott McInnis and BLM Deputy Director William Perry Pendley. Most of these events were executed at the beginning of FY 21.



### 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary posters

To celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MCNCA, BLM released two new posters. One poster features an oil painting from the Monuments & Canyons Plein Air event by Kari Ganoung Ruiz. The second poster features a photo by MCNCA Outdoor Recreation planner Paul Sever, who accepted a promotion at the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument in Montana and will be leaving MCNCA in FY2021.



## **Life Science Lecture Series**

Colorado Canyons Association and the Museums of Western Colorado hosted four virtual lectures on different topics within McInnis Canyons. Local scientist provided the virtual lectures, viewed over 360 times. Dr. Stephen Stern, professor of botany at Colorado Mesa University, spoke of his research within MCNCA. Julia McHugh, Curator of Paleontology, who told of discoveries she made at a “dinosaur graveyard” within MCNCA. Dr. Aparna Palmer discussed the mighty yet magnificent creatures that live in Colorado's canyons - water bears! Then Dr. Nikki Grant-Hoffman, BLM Grand Junction Ecologist, discussed recent fire restoration methods used on the Sieber Fire in McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area.

## **Grazing**

The BLM manages 10 grazing permits on 21 allotments for a total of 7,570 Animal Unit Months within McInnis Canyons NCA.

The BLM authorized a 10-year grazing permit for the Upper Bench, Lower Bench, and Battleship allotments which Western Watersheds Project. The BLM Has responded to the appeal and is awaiting a ruling by the Office of Hearings and Appeals.

## **Paleontology**

### **Permits**

There are three active excavation permits in McInnis Canyons NCA, including Mygatt Moore, Tom's Place, and the Callison Quarry.

### **Paleontology Law Enforcement**

BLM Law Enforcement received a report of someone camping beyond the 14-day limit near the Trail Trough Time. Upon contact, Law Enforcement discovered the individual was in possession of possible dinosaur bones. The local paleontologist confirmed the items were dinosaur bones collected from the area – estimated around 20 pounds and resulted in a violation of the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act of 2009.

### **New Locations with Paleontological Resources Recorded**

In 2020, the office paleontologist discovered maps marked with paleo designations during an office remodel. Later, some notebook copies corresponding to the marks on the map were found, and it was found to be fossil discoveries not in the database. The notebooks and maps had enough information to create basic fossil locality forms, which include coordinates and rough details for type of fossil. The BLM captured and entered into the data into the database, which contributed to adding 100+ localities, or locations found with paleontological resources, especially in the Black Ridge section of McInnis Canyons NCA.



## Partnerships

### Colorado Canyons Association

CCA is the Friends group to the local National Conservation Areas. In FY 2020, they helped BLM staff host river cleanups, trail monitoring classes, and educational trips for area youth. CCA provided crucial assistance in visitor services for the NCAs at the BLM office, organizing volunteer projects, and creating awareness in the community surrounding the stewardship and management of MCNCA.



### AmeriCorps VISTA

In 2020, the BLM and CCA proudly hosted an AmeriCorps VISTA intern for McInnis Canyons NCA. In September of FY 2020, Alice Corcoran renewed her AmeriCorps service. During her term, Alice engaged multiple communities on education of public lands while assisting in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math programming. Other projects included hosting and assisting with community outreach events, developing online educational content and creating the MCNCA Jr. Ranger program. Alice completed these projects, among many others, to help build the ability and reach of CCA and the BLM.



### Colorado Mesa University

McInnis Canyons NCA staff partnered with Colorado Mesa University (CMU) for a variety of projects. McInnis Canyons NCA hosted several student interns from CMU's Environmental Science Program. The CMU interns completed Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring studies, while conducting plant inventory, rare plant monitoring, visitor information services, wilderness monitoring, and assistance with archaeological inventory and data recovery. The CMU interns also staffed the BLM office's front desk while assisting with visitor services.



### The Conservation Fund

The Conservation Fund (TCF) is partnering with the BLM for the acquisition of the Crow Bottom parcel. This acquisition enables the BLM to protect a key inholding and improve access to recreation opportunities along the Colorado River in McInnis Canyons NCA. Over the past year, TCF initiated discussions with the private landowner, contracted the appraisal, and conducted preliminary due diligence for the acquisition. The private landowner has expressed desire to sell the property to TCF for later conveyance to the BLM, subject to the federal appraisal process, valuation, other due diligence, and availability of funding.



### Grand Valley Trails Alliance (GVTA)

BLM Recreation staff engages in monthly GVTA roundtable meetings that address trail development and maintenance projects or issues throughout the Grand Junction Field Office, including McInnis Canyons NCA.



## Mesa County Trails Program

In 2019, Mesa County, hired a new trails coordinator focused on non-motorized trails within Mesa County. The BLM participates as an advisor to support the county's determination of projects. In 2020, the BLM awarded Mesa County an assistance agreement to help fund projects and trail maintenance on BLM-managed public lands, including MCNCA.



## City of Fruita Coordination Meetings

BLM managers met frequently with City of Fruita to develop projects relating to BLM-managed and City of Fruita lands. The BLM-Fruita partnership projects include Mack Ridge Trail planning and construction, planning for and development of a paved bike path from Fruita to the Loma boat ramp and Kokopelli Trailhead, and the trash removal at the Devil's Canyon Trailhead.



## Other Partnerships

McInnis Canyons NCA staff closely collaborated with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado State University, Rivers Edge West, Western Colorado Conservation Corps (WCCC), Grand Valley Trails Alliance, Grand Mesa Backcountry Horsemen, Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Association, Motorcycle Trail Riders Association, Museums of Western Colorado, Hilltop Trail Crew, and School District 51.

## Recreation and Visitor Services

### Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliant Skinner Cabin Trail



The BLM designed the Skinner Cabin Trail specifically to meet the standards set by the ADA - giving those with disabilities more access to the outdoors and public lands. In the fall of 2019, the BLM hosted a ribbon cutting with Mesa County, CCA, District 51, and local students with disabilities. The BLM obtained special funding to design and build this ADA

accessible trail. The one-mile round-trip trail begins at the Fruita Paleo area in McInnis Canyons and leads to the historical Skinner Cabin. Between 2016 and 2017, the BLM restored the site to help preserve the history of the cabin for future generations to enjoy. The project was a collaborative effort between the BLM, Museums of Western Colorado, and School District 51. In FY20, improvements to the area parking lot enhancing wheelchair access, creating a paved loading and unloading area near the

restrooms. Additionally, the BLM added a compacted route accessible by wheelchairs from the bathroom to the trailhead. An employee of Museums of Western Colorado added an artistic flair to the concrete by adding painted dinosaur tracks. .

### **Steve's Reroute Work**

During the summer of 2019, Singletrack Trail contractor, extended and completed three new trails in the Mack Ridge area - Steve's, Wrangler, and Lower Moore fun trails. Steve's trail was a reroute of an old fall line trail to improve the maintenance requirements. Once complete, the BLM restored the old alignment, allowing it to recover to its natural state. Western Colorado Conservation Corps (WCCC) supported the restoration with eight crew members to complete the finish work.



### **Ruby-Horsethief Permit Fees**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ruby-Horsethief was one of the few river accesses in the region that remained open to the public. Consequently, Ruby-Horsethief received a record number of visitors. During the river season, the BLM sold 3,250 permits and the river had 27,769 visitors. In a typical season, this section of river is only at capacity of use on the weekends. During 2020, the river was at capacity almost every day. The increase in visitor-use presented challenges in encouraging visitors to participate in following local, state, and federal guidance regarding the pandemic. To help slow the spread of COVID-19 and maintain social distancing, the BLM reduced the maximum group size from 25 to ten. Additionally, the BLM extended the fee season to include April and October. The extended seasons had increased use even with the addition of new fees for this time period.

## Kokopelli Trail Signs

The BLM and CCA installed new interpretive panels at the Kokopelli trailhead which provides guidance on mountain biking ethics, leave no trace, and an updated trail map.



## Hawkeye Trailhead Kiosk

The BLM installed a new kiosk interpretive panel at the Hawkeye trailhead supplying the public with information to help understand the trail.

## Devils Canyon Kiosk Maps

The BLM GIS staff worked with Colorado Canyons Association to develop updates maps to show new trail developments at the Devils Canyon and Pollock Bench Trailheads.

## Devil's Canyon Kiosk Poster

In FY2020, the BLM and CCA designed and installed new interpretive panels with updated trail information and Leave No Trace principles. This effort was due to the old signs being outdated and weather damage.



## New Fence at Trail Through Time

BLM staff, in partnership with Colorado Canyons Association and Museums of Western Colorado, worked hard to repair vandalized fences in Rabbit Valley. The team followed pandemic guidance by wearing masks and socially distancing while installing an ADA compliant fence at the beginning of the trail.



## OHV Crew Grant

Through the CPW Trails grant program, the BLM hired a three-person OHV crew for both McInnis Canyons NCA and Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The crew worked for eight months of 2020, accomplishing several projects that include trail, staging area, and infrastructure maintenance, as well as the construction of 33 new motorized recreation camp sites. The OHV crew maintained and installed approximately 195 signs within Rabbit Valley, installed and maintained 5000+ feet of post and cable, installed 33 new fire rings, completed trail work on trails 3/4/8, updated and maintained kiosks, and removed weeds via mechanical means and herbicide application at trail heads, staging areas, and camp sites. The crew worked with volunteer groups on 3 separate occasions constructing new trail and conducting clean ups. The OHV staff made approximately 1500 public contacts with visitors in Rabbit Valley while encouraging Leave No Trace and Stay the Trail ethics, as well as OHV etiquette and regulations. The staff often received unsolicited positive feedback.



## Volunteers

### Spring Trail Cleanups

The BLM and CCA organized additional trash cleanups due to increased public use over the course of the pandemic. The BLM conducted three cleanups in the spring. Due to COVID-19, cleanups were self-guided to follow public health guidance. The BLM provided volunteers the required materials and collected the trash at the end of the event for proper disposal.

### Nature Knowledge Days

Nature Knowledge days event was not possible without the help of our volunteers! In the fall of 2019, Nature Knowledge Days hosted 16 volunteers to come out and educate children in their expertise.

### Earth Science Knowledge Day

Two volunteers were able to make Earth Science Knowledge Day possible. For more information on Earth Science Knowledge Day, see the 'Education, Outreach, and Interpretation' portion of this document.

### Volunteer Orientation and Training

This year, the BLM and CCA hosted volunteer training to help volunteers better understand what goes into the annual education events. Volunteers learned about teaching methods, how to prepare to run an education station, and what is expected of them.



### **National Public Lands Day Events**

In celebration of National Public Lands Day in McInnis Canyons NCA, around 12 Western Slope All-Terrain Vehicles Association (WSATVA) members helped clean up trash in Rabbit Valley by ATVs and side-by-sides. Additionally, approximately nine volunteers hosted a highway cleanup near Rabbit Valley.

### **Sieber Fire Restoration Project**

Volunteers conducted a sage monitoring, seed collection and transplanting project after the May 2020 lightning caused wildfire. This volunteer project, held in and outside the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness, was an effort to restore the landscape.

### **Odell Make it Pretty Campaign River Cleanup**

Community volunteers, CCA staff, and Odell Brewing staff travelled over 25 miles along the Colorado River in efforts to remove trash and debris from Ruby-Horsethief Canyons. Volunteers used their own personal watercrafts and spent a night camping in the Black Rocks camping area.



# 3 Science

---

## Science

### Plant Inventory

Since 2014, the BLM and Colorado Mesa University partner on plant inventory. The field portion of this project is complete and final reports are expected in 2021.

### eDNA and Disease Studies of Amphibians

Since 2019, USGS and CMU, MCNCA and D-E NCA partner to collect water samples, testing for traces of non-native bullfrogs and native sensitive amphibian species along with disease. This is an ongoing project.

### CMU Student Research

CMU student, Michael Fael, has started research on geophysical signature of magnetics along Devils Canyon. Students will continue Fael's research this year, looking at remote sensing methods of determining and verifying underlying fault zones and related geologic alteration.

### Pollinator Studies

Presidential Memorandum – Creating a strategy to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators directs the BLM to research if sagebrush restoration impacts pollinators and their habitats. The NLCS Management Studies Support Program funds the research of if public land activities effect pollinators and their habitats. This is an ongoing project.

### Shrub Islands of Opportunity for Arid Rangelands Conservation

Restoration to salt desert and sage brush systems are difficult. Research in these systems build off past research and provides land managers practical tools for success of these critical habitats.



### Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring Crew

BLM collected baseline Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring data. Staff are incorporating Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring into NEPA documents and field office level decisions. The Grand Junction Field Office Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) crew surveyed eight AIM plots in the MCNCA this summer. The AIM crew's data informs the BLM of the overall condition of the land which the BLM will use in Land Health Assessments.



## **Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health (IIRH)/ Land Health Assessments (LHA)**

An interdisciplinary team began the Land Health Assessment (LHA) process in MCNCA. The Team used AIM data in conjunction with field visits to complete IIRH, which the BLM will use to complete Land Health Assessments for grazing permit renewals. The interdisciplinary team was composed of the GJFO and MCNCA resource specialists, representing range, wildlife, hydrology, and vegetation. The team completed IIRH on three grazing allotments. Work will continue in FY21.

## **Salt Creek Passive Native Fish Sampling**

Over the past several years, the BLM in partnership with Colorado Parks & Wildlife, has been deploying portable Passive Integrative Transponder tag (PIT tag) detection arrays into Salt Creek. These passive arrays collect data on the use of the stream by tagged fish that “ping” the array when fish swim within the detection range of the unit. Over the past several years, the collected PIT tag array data has revealed use of the stream by 3 endangered fish species – Colorado Pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*), Razorback Sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*), and Bonytail (*Gila elegans*). This data demonstrates the importance of tributary streams to endangered and other native fish species in the Upper Colorado River basin.



## **Rangeland Monitoring**

Rangeland monitoring evaluates what impacts the management strategies of grazing operations have on the rangeland. Pasture and rangeland monitoring are a systematic, structured approach to tracking changes in plant communities over time. Monitoring collects data by using various scientific monitoring protocols. These methods include compliance checks, utilization studies, and nested frequency. Rangeland monitoring is important in evaluating the effects of grazing and browsing on public lands. In FY 2020, utilization was monitored five times and compliance checks were performed three times.

## **McInnis Canyon NCA Visual Resources Inventory**

This past summer, MCNCA staff and contractors from Espinoza Cultural Services, began work on a Visual Resource Inventory (VRI) for MCNCA. VRIs describe existing

conditions and public land scenic values consistent with national data sets. The VRI is used to provide a basis for future management of the visual resources, establish balanced management of visual resources across a planning area, and analyze impacts of proposed projects or activities that could affect visual resources. During the fall, staff traveled throughout the entire NCA, documenting conditions. The BLM expects the completed inventory document early winter 2021.



### **Photogrammetry Documentation**

In 2020, McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area continued a 2019 project of photogrammetry documentation of rock art sites. Photogrammetry provides a unique and cost-effective way to fully document and preserve rock art visually. Photogrammetry produces three-dimensional products and provides opportunity for tribal members, who are unable to visit the sacred sites, to experience in a digital format. These images can be used in interpretation and in classroom, museum, and online settings to providing

education and outreach opportunities. NCA cultural resource staff collaborated with people outside the program to complete the photogrammetry process at several sites. Attendees included the BLM Grand Junction Field Office paleontologist and Visitor Services staff members. NCA staff hosted a photogrammetry training day with members from the Colorado National Monument's cultural resource program, local landowners, and BLM livestock permittees who were interested in the project. BLM National Operation Center and Colorado State Office staff contributed by processing the photos into final products.



# 4 Resources, Objects, Values and Stressors

## Cultural Resources

Cultural resources are among the primary purposes of establishing McInnis Canyons NCA. MCNCA enjoys an extraordinary abundance of these resources, including an array of prehistoric and historic sites and artifacts.

The BLM is committed to conserving, protecting, and restoring the unique values of MCNCA and furthering the goals of the BLM's National Conservation Lands, of which MCNCA is a part. The NCA's cultural resource management staff focuses on clearly communicating the importance of conserving and protecting NCA values and expanding the BLM's understanding of NCA resources through assessment, inventory, and monitoring.

### Cultural Resources (includes archeological and historical) Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Stable

### Cultural Resources Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 2020
123,000	22,808	1,243	15

## Stressors Affecting Cultural Resources

Stresses on cultural resources and values include anthropogenic wildland fire, recreational use, livestock grazing, right-of-way proximity, air pollution, theft, surface disturbance, vandalism, and increased access.

## Natural Resources, including Biological and Environmental Values

Natural resources are among the purposes of McInnis Canyons NCA. MCNCA enjoys an extraordinary abundance of these resources, including an array of rare and common plant and animal species.

### Natural Resources Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Vegetation	Good	Stable
Biological	Good	Stable

### Natural Resources Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 2020
Vegetation	123,000	123,000	123,000	400
Biological	123,000	123,000	123,000	200

**Stressors Affecting Natural Resources** Stresses on natural and cultural resources and values include anthropogenic wildland fire, invasive plants, recreational use, livestock grazing, domestic livestock diseases, loss of habitat, right-of-way proximity, air pollution, non-native plants and animals, water pollution, theft, surface disturbance, vandalism, and increased access.

### Water Resources, including Natural and Environmental Values

Nineteen miles of the Colorado River flow through McInnis Canyons NCA along with



seasonal tributaries feeding from snowmelt and summer rainstorms to the river. These aquatic resources are important to fish and wildlife, and popular recreation to visitors who boat and camp. BLM staff members work to expand understanding of these resources through assessment, inventory, and monitoring.

### Water Resources Status and Trend Table

Resources, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Water Resources	Good overall	Stable and Improving

### Water Resources Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Table

Resources, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 2020
Water Resources	123,000 acres	123,000acres	1,000	6

## Stressors Affecting Water Resources

Invasive aquatic plants, recreational use, and improper livestock grazing can threaten air, soil, and water resources.

## Recreational Resources, including Wilderness and Scenic Values

Congress designated the 75,479-acre Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness in 2000 as part of the Colorado Canyons NCA and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000. The entirety of the Wilderness is located within McInnis Canyons NCA. The BLM is committed to protect the Wilderness in such a manner as to preserve its wilderness character, as well as effectively manage recreational, scenic, scientific, education, conservation, and historic uses permitted under Section 4(c) and 4(d) of the Wilderness Act of 1964.



Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness is recognized as one of Colorado's premier wildlands, with sandstone arches, alcoves, monoliths, hoodoos, and spires scattered throughout. The Wilderness, natural in character with negligible human imprints, is characterized by a high east-west ridgeline draining north to the Colorado River through the canyon network. Human imprints on the upland mesas include fence lines, stock

reservoirs, and trails that minimally impact the naturalness of the area due to unobtrusive locations and natural screening.

The Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness provides outstanding opportunities for solitude due to the area's size, configuration, topographic variety, and vegetative screening, and it is greatly accentuated by the area's ability to disperse visitors horizontally and vertically through the landscape.

The Wilderness provides outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation based on outstanding scenery, landscape variety, geologic features, and cultural and paleontological resources. The area's topographic diversity, unusual geologic features, and intermittent streams appeal to hikers, while regionally unique phenomena, such as the arches in Rattlesnake Canyon and the alcove in Mee Canyon, enhance the wilderness experience. Other popular activities in Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness include horseback riding, climbing, hunting, nature study, photography, wildlife viewing, and backpacking. The Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness has a number of outstanding geological, paleontological, archaeological, and ecological values, and

has outstanding opportunities for education and scientific research.

The Colorado Canyons Resource Management Plan establishes four management goals for Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness:

- To provide for the long-term protection and preservation of the area’s Wilderness character under a principle of non-degradation. The area’s natural condition, outstanding opportunities for solitude, outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation, and any ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value present will be managed so that they will remain unimpaired.
- To manage the Wilderness area for the use and enjoyment of visitors in a manner that will leave the area unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as Wilderness.
- To manage the area using the minimum tool, equipment or structure necessary to successfully, safely, and economically accomplish the objective.
- To manage non-conforming but accepted use permitted by the Wilderness Act and subsequent laws in a manner that will prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the area’s Wilderness character.

The practice of Visual Resource Management in BLM land-use planning inventories the character of a landscape according to the four basic visual elements of form, line, color and texture. The open spaces, natural aesthetics, and scenic vistas within McInnis Canyons NCA are considered a social, economic, and environmental benefit. All actions proposed in MCNCA will be planned and implemented to meet the objectives for the Visual Resource Management classes of the area.

**Recreation Status and Trend Table**

<b>Resource, Object, and Value</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Trend</b>
Recreation	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable

**Recreation Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Table**

<b>Resource, Object, and Value</b>	<b>Acres in Unit</b>	<b>Acres Inventoried</b>	<b>Acres Possessing Object</b>	<b>Acres Monitored in FY 2020</b>
Recreation	123,000	123,000	123,000	123,000
Wilderness	123,000	123,000	75,550	75,550
Scenic	123,000	123,000	123,000	123,000

## Stressors Affecting Recreational Resources

Recreational resources and values may be adversely affected by any of the stressors that affect natural and cultural resources, because recreational visitors to MCNCA often go there expecting to see pristine habitat, healthy wildlife, or undamaged rock art. Recreational use itself can damage recreational resources, especially with increased use due to local and regional population growth. With increased use of public lands, user interactions can influence recreation experiences. Interactions can be positive which would enhance an experience, while some can be negative, degrading an experience. Right-of-way proximity and air pollution may also threaten the integrity of the recreational experience. Wilderness resources and scenic values may be adversely affected by any of the stressors that affect other resources within MCNCA, with visitor use causing the greatest negative effects on wilderness character. Visitor-use itself can damage the resource, especially with increased use due to local and regional population growth. Other stressors that affect wilderness character include livestock grazing and invasive weeds.

## Scientific, Geological, and Paleontological Resources

The scientific resources of McInnis Canyons NCA are cited in its enabling legislation as one of the purposes for its designation, as are the geological, cultural, paleontological, biological, and wildlife resources, all of which are suitable for scientific study and abundant in MCNCA. Scientific studies of these resources benefit the scientific community as a whole and effectively informs the BLM's management of MCNCA. The NCA staff work to identify research needs, encourage science partnerships and citizen science, and incorporate scientific results into management, decision-making, and outreach.

BLM staff promote MCNCA to universities and research institutions as an outdoor research and educational laboratory and potential demonstration center for emerging technology and innovative management practices. In turn, academic institutions, aware of the unique and valuable resources in MCNCA and seek partnerships with the BLM to conduct scientific research and education in MCNCA.

### Scientific, Geological, and Paleontological Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Scientific	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary Rocks)	Good	Stable
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good Overall	Some vandalism, but stable overall.



**Scientific, Geological, and Paleontological Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Table**

<b>Resource, Object, or Value</b>	<b>Acres in Unit</b>	<b>Acres Inventoried</b>	<b>Acres Possessing Object</b>	<b>Acres Monitored in FY 2020</b>
Scientific	123,000	123,000	123,000	100
Geological	123,000	123,000	123,000	5
Paleontological	123,000	150	123,000	75

**Stressors Affecting Scientific, Geological and Paleontological Resources**

Scientific resources are affected by any impacts to geological, cultural, paleontological, biological, or wildlife resources. Theft and vandalism are the primary sources effecting geological and paleontological resources.

**Wildlife Education**

Wildlife education is one of the purposes of MCNCA listed in its enabling legislation. The BLM strives to provide youth with opportunities to engage in recreation and practice stewardship on NCA lands while learning about NCA resources and land management. BLM staff members look for partnerships with local schools and educators to help interpret National Conservation Lands and NCA values and provide interpretive and educational materials to NCA users through the Grand Junction Field Office and MCNCA.

**Wildlife Education Status and Trend Table**

<b>Status of Resource, Object, or Value</b>	<b>Trend</b>
Good	Stable

**Wildlife Education Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table**

<b>Acres in Unit</b>	<b>Acres Inventoried</b>	<b>Possessing Object</b>	<b>Acres Monitored in FY 2020</b>
123,000	123,000	123,000	100

**Stressors Affecting Wildlife Education**

Risk factors for wildlife (and thus wildlife education) include loss of habitat, right-of-way proximity, non-native animals, and increased access.

# 5 Summary of Performance Measure

<b>Resources, Objects, and Values Status Summary Table</b>		
Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	Good	Stable
Natural	Good	Stable
Biological	Good	Stable
Environmental	Good	Stable
Water Resources	Good overall	Stable
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable
Scientific	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good overall	Stable
Wildlife Education	Good	Stable

# 6 Manager's Letter

---



The year 2020 will go down in history, and the reviews won't be favorable, however it was a relatively good year for McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. This year the NCA benefitted greatly, yet again, from the vibrant community that surrounds us. The community celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of McInnis Canyons NCA this year. While the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary date and the date of BLM's big event, October 24, 2020 technically falls within fiscal year 2021, much of the planning and celebrating took place in FY2020.

The community hosted a series of socially distanced events in FY2020 to celebrate the NCA. Colorado Canyons Association hosted a series of lectures on Zoom by local experts on the plants, dinosaurs, water bears, and fire restoration studies of the NCA. CCA also hosted a stewardship event, partnering with Western

Slope ATV Association and various volunteers to clean up trash in Rabbit Valley and along I-70. CCA hosted a series of 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary rides and hikes including a horseback ride with board member Carol Todd, a paleo hike, a wilderness hike, two archaeology hikes, and a retro mountain bike ride on the Moore Fun trail, which is also 20 years old this year. In addition, Colorado National Monument Association celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NCA with its Monuments and Canyons Plein Air Invitational, featuring many beautiful paintings completed "en plein air" in McInnis Canyons NCA.

These events provided a well-deserved forum to recount the achievements of this community. I am truly amazed by the vision and foresight of the people of Western Colorado. This community collaborated to craft legislation and compelled their elected leaders to designate this special piece of public land in a way that preserves important plant and wildlife habitat, provides outstanding recreation opportunities, protects world class paleontological resources, provides for scientific exploration and educational opportunities; all while protecting traditional uses such as hunting, motorized recreation, and livestock grazing.

As we look forward to the end of 2020, we should all take one last glance back in time to celebrate the shared achievements of the protection and stewardship of this special place over the past 20 years. As the land managers responsible for the stewardship of the NCA, we take great pride in our quest to fulfill the community's vision, and we are honored that you have entrusted us with the management of your treasured landscape.

- NCA Manager Collin Ewing



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

## **McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area**

Southwest District Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
Grand Junction Field Office 2815  
H Rd.  
Grand Junction, CO 81506  
Phone: 970-244-3000

12/22/2020

The mention of company names, trade names, or commercial products does not constitute endorsement or recommendation for use by the federal government.