



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

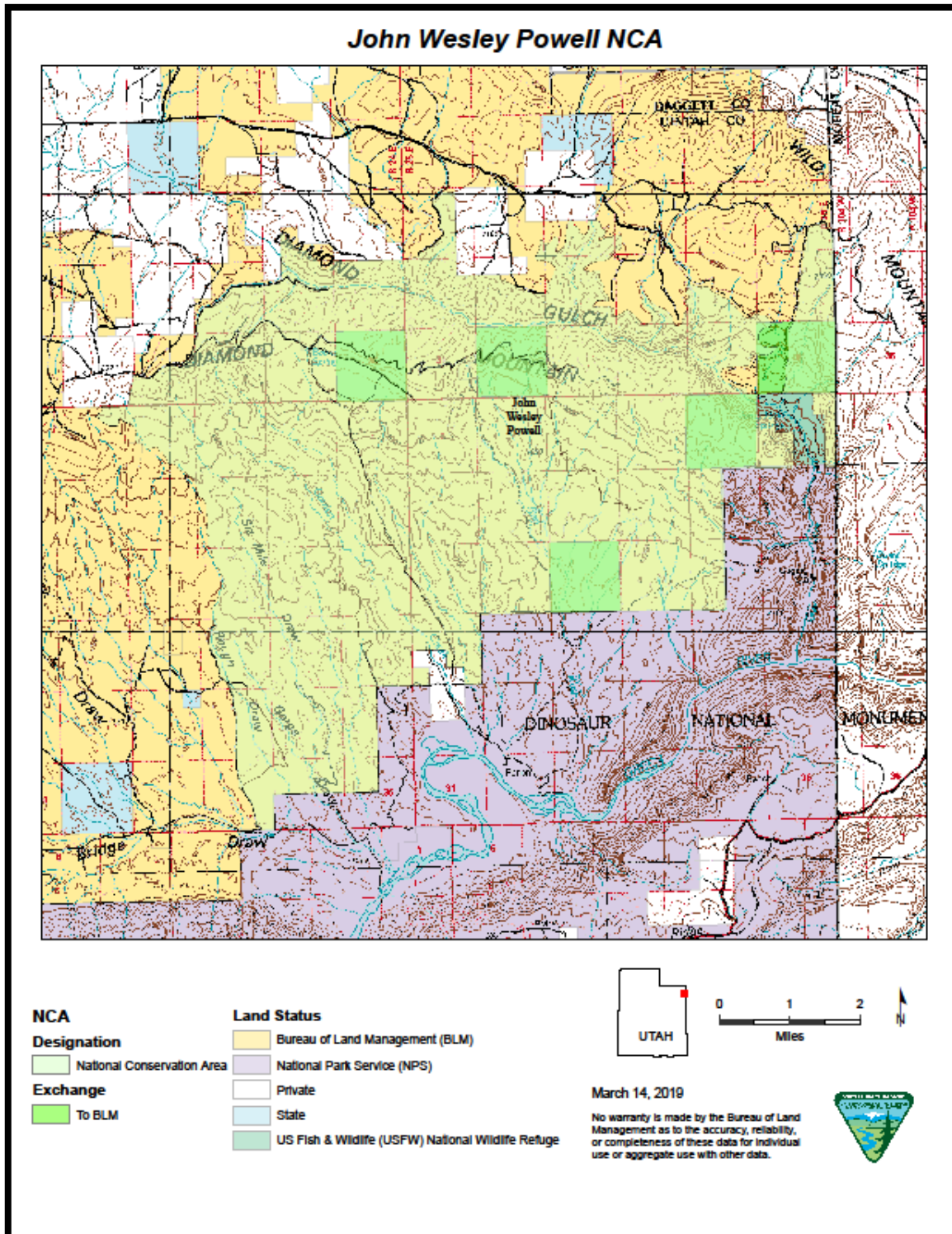
Utah
2021: Annual Manager's Report

John Wesley Powell

National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

The John Wesley Powell National Conservation Area (NCA) saw several accomplishments in 2021, the majority pertaining to the initial and ongoing data collection and planning of the new NCA. Some of these accomplishments include inventorying baseline data through monitoring, contracts, and on-the-ground actions that will be used to inform the creation of a management plan for the NCA. A virtual public scoping meeting was held to introduce the Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment process. The purpose of this meeting was to share with interested parties the steps to submit a formal comment as part of the planning process. New visitor use tracking measures have been put in place to provide visitation information to the NCA which will be used to track and analyze trends and other indicators associated with visitation and access. Efforts have continued to work with key grazing permit holders for the purposes of developing a grazing facilities inventory within the NCA. These efforts have proven to be informative, and a final report of all grazing facilities within the NCA is in its final draft stages. An interpretive plan and materials contract was completed providing the Vernal Field Office with a draft interpretive plan, preliminary designs of stationary interpretive information panels, wayside exhibits as well as traveling banners that will be used in the future to effectively interface with the public and tell the story of the NCA. This contract also produced a short narrated informational video about the John Wesley Powell NCA that showcases the scenic landscape, ecological diversity, and recreation opportunities within the NCA. Other contract-related accomplishments include the completion of the first phase of a special status plant and noxious weed inventory that has already provided key data for the future management and botanical health of the NCA; the second and final phase of the contract is scheduled to be completed in FY2022. Other contracts pertaining to the NCA have progressed and are in various stages of completion, including an Ethnographic study and a Class II predictive model cultural survey of the NCA. As mentioned above, many of the accomplishments pertain to the data collection needs for the ongoing management planning and RMP revision process.

Challenges

The need to gather baseline data specific to the NCA in order to make management decisions has continued to be a challenge. As mentioned above, several efforts are being made to establish and acquire the data needed to make meaningful, responsible, and sustainable decisions that would establish the future management of the NCA. The remote location and relative low visitation of the NCA mean that there are currently no developed recreation sites and designated trails for the public to utilize. Visitor use facilities will also be addressed through the planning process. Overall, good progress is being made with the data collection and planning process. Once these planning documents are in place, activity level planning and implementation of the management plan will follow.

Visitors

The NCA offers remote, rugged, and primitive recreation opportunities such as hiking, hunting, sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, camping, backpacking, off-road vehicle use on existing roads, and equestrian use. Although current visitation to the NCA is relatively low, it is anticipated that with the new designation of the NCA and future outcomes-based planning, visitation will increase. Visitation has been and will continue to be considered, tracked, analyzed, and planned for in future implementation level activities.



Figure 1: Visitors enjoying John Wesley Powell NCA

Partnerships

Currently, the BLM has cooperative agreements with educational institutions for the purpose of providing on-the-ground assistance pertaining to data gathering, monitoring, and surveying within the NCA. The BLM anticipates that with the growing awareness of the new NCA, friends' groups or other dedicated user groups and/or organizations may be interested in pursuing formalized partnerships within the NCA.

Science

Several science-based management support efforts are currently underway that include ongoing contracts such as the ethnographic study, class II predictive model cultural inventory, special status plants survey, and noxious weeds inventory. Other ongoing in-house data collection efforts made possible by cooperative agreements with educational institutions include: 40 miles of raptor survey routes where 12 additional nests were found, the identification of 13,000 acres of Aspen groves on the south side of the NCA, surveys of previously identified white-tailed prairie dog populations, installation of fence markers on five miles of fence in Greater sage-grouse habitat, three proper functioning condition surveys, monarch butterfly and bumble bee surveys completed in previously identified populations of milkweed, one bat survey, 900 camera trap days on 20 sites, and small mammal trapping surveys. One significant finding has been the identification of a new population of *Frasera Ackermanae* or Ackerman Green Gentian (photo below). This rare endemic plant species was previously only found in an isolated part of Uintah County, Utah, and was discovered within the NCA through Phase I of the Special Status Plant and Noxious Weed Inventory contract. This new discovery is an example of the ecologic diversity and value within the NCA.



Figure 2: Frasera Ackermanae or Ackerman Green Gentian

Climate Impacts

The John Wesley Powell NCA continues to be affected by persistent severe drought, as is the rest of Utah and the Intermountain West. Pertaining to air quality, the majority of the NCA occurs within the Uinta Basin Non-Attainment Area for ozone. As part of the planning process, general conformity will be assessed for all implementation-level projects by analyzing probable emissions as needed in order to stay within the non-attainment threshold.

Climate Resiliency

Management decisions regarding actions within the NCA and future implementation level actions will take climate resiliency into account as part of the National Environmental Policy Act and land use planning processes.

Social and Environmental Justice

Social and environmental justice considerations for under-represented groups and tribal consultation will be considered and analyzed as part of the land use planning process.



Figure 3: Sandstone cliff bands in Diamond Gulch, John Wesley Powell NCA.

Events

A John Wesley Powell River Week Festival was held in late July 2021 to celebrate Powell's historic exploratory expedition through this area. The event was held in the local community. The Vernal Field Office helped support this event by providing the public with information about the NCA. This was an effective way to educate and inform interested members of the public about the newly designated NCA.



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

John Wesley Powell

National Conservation Area

Green River District Office
Bureau of Land Management
Vernal Field Office
170 South 500 East
Vernal Utah, 84078
Phone: 435-781-4501

Report compiled by: Roger Bankert, Vernal Field Office Manager

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