



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

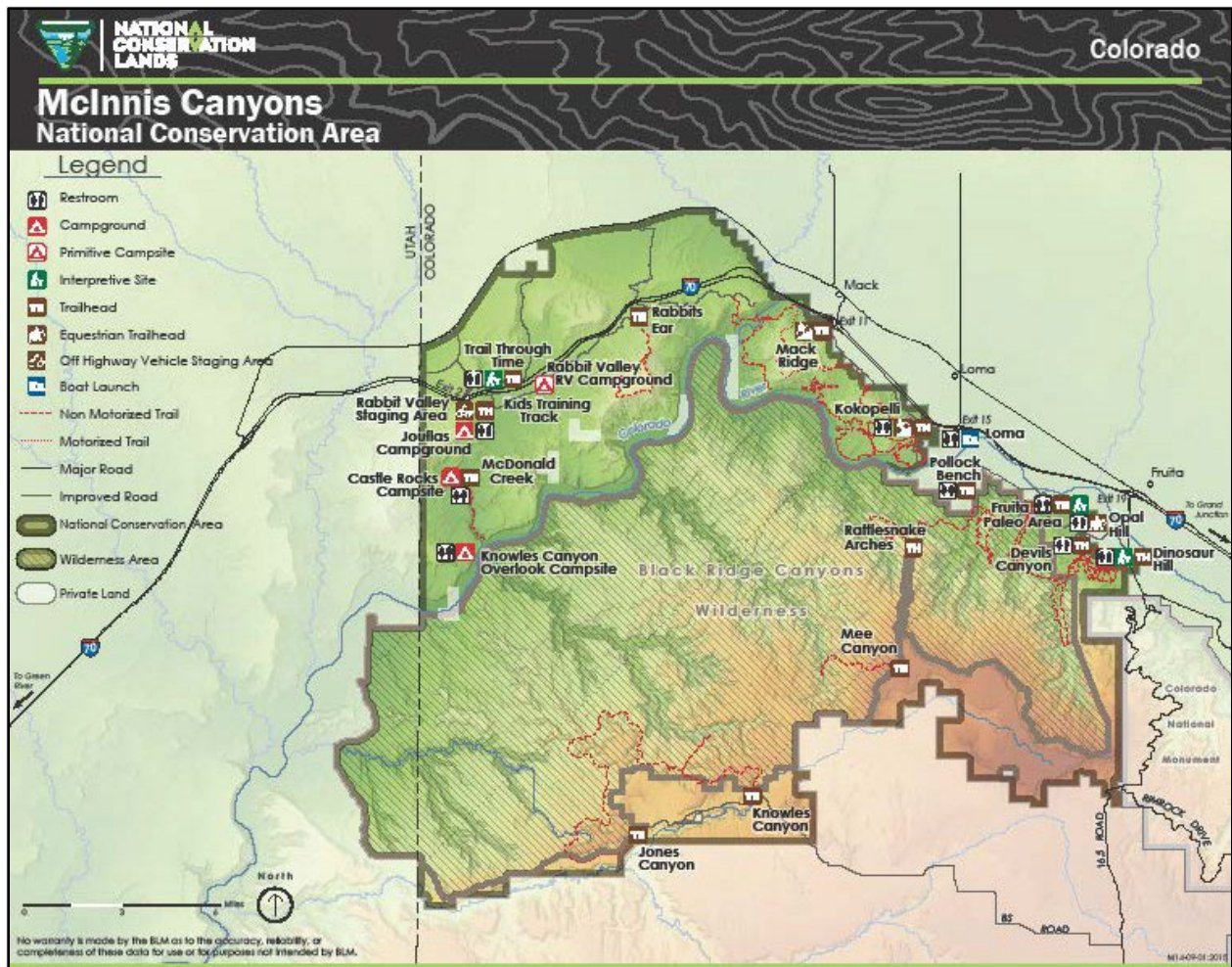
Colorado
2022: Annual Manager's Report

McInnis Canyons

National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

Rabbit Valley Campsite Improvements, and Permit/Reservation system outreach

Rabbit Valley is a popular recreation destination for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, four-wheel drive vehicles, all-terrain vehicles (ATV), dirt bikes, mountain biking, hiking, horseback riding, and camping. The area is also a point of access to the Utah Rims trail system (managed by BLM Moab Field Office). This year, a permit and future fee program system were implemented for overnight camping. Dispersed camping is no longer allowed in order to protect the area's unique resources, and free permits were required for overnight camping at designated sites. The most popular campground, Knowles Canyon Overlook, known for its beautiful scenery above the Colorado River canyons, underwent construction and upgrades. The number of designated campsites for the entire area was increased to 75. Other improvements included adding fire rings to all designated sites, increasing public contacts and education, and replacing signage throughout the valley.

In 2023 improvements in Rabbit Valley will continue with a new Equestrian Campground and trail head near the Joufflas horse trail, as well as upgrading the group use area and facilities. Campsites in Rabbit Valley will go live on Recreation.gov and will be available for reservation, which will help to reduce resource damage and provide a better recreational experience for visitors.

Colorado River Management

The Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) maintains and manages 34 campsites along a 25-mile stretch on the Colorado River. This year, an additional Career-Seasonal River Ranger was brought on to continue to staff the boat ramps, answer crucial safety questions and concerns, perform patrols, maintain camp sites and facilities, and educate the public on proper boating etiquette and resource protection. The GJFO also kicked off the new Volunteer River Ranger program to better assist permit holders at the Loma Boat Launch and provide support to the Park Rangers during the busiest days. Other projects included Purple Looseleaf Strife removal, upgrading signage, and hazardous tree removal at camp sites.

Challenges

In recent years BLM has seen a drastic increase in visitor use within MCNCA. Keeping up with public outreach and education, maintenance of facilities, and resource protection has required the GJFO to bring on more staff to keep up with the high use during the busy seasons which are typically spring/fall. In 2022, two career seasonals were hired as well as an extra seasonal employee.

Visitors

Mojave Canyons National Conservation Area (MCNCA) has vast recreational opportunities. The City of Fruita has become an international destination for its outstanding recreational opportunities, most of which occur in MCNCA. In addition, local residents enjoy the close to home trails the NCA has to offer. The variety of recreational experiences include world-class mountain biking, river rafting, hiking, camping, hunting, fishing 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. BLM estimates over 300,000 people visited the NCA in 2022.



Partnerships

Colorado Canyons Association (CCA)

CCA is the Friends group to the local National Conservation Areas. In FY 2022, 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.



Colorado Mesa University

MCNCA 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, and visitor information services.

The Conservation Fund

The Conservation Fund (TCF) partnered with the BLM for the acquisition of the Crow Bottom parcel. This acquisition enabled the BLM to protect a key inholding and improve access to recreation opportunities along the Colorado River in McInnis Canyons NCA.

Mesa County

BLM has established an assistance agreement with the Mesa County Trails Program, and Mesa County also completes important road maintenance projects in MCNCA. In FY2022, Mesa County secured an easement for the road to Loma Boat Launch, securing access to this important site for NCA visitors.

City of Fruita and the Fruita Trails Initiative

BLM managers met frequently with City of Fruita and the Fruita Trails initiative to develop projects relating to BLM-managed and City of Fruita lands. The BLM-Fruita partnership projects include a new proposal for new mountain bike trails at Kokopelli as well as and the trash removal at the Devil's Canyon Trailhead.

More Great Partners

MCNCA benefitted from strong partnerships with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado State University, Rivers Edge West, Western Colorado Conservation Corps (WCCC), Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Grand Mesa Backcountry Horsemen, Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association, Motorcycle Trail Riders Association, Museums of Western Colorado, and School District 51.

Science

eDNA and Disease Studies of Amphibians

Since 2019, USGS, Colorado Mesa University, and McInnis Canyons NCA have partnered to collect water samples and test for traces of non-native bullfrogs and native sensitive amphibian species and diseases. The project continues to be ongoing.

Pollinator Studies

A Presidential memorandum dated June 20, 2014, creates a strategy to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators directing the BLM to research whether sagebrush restoration impacts pollinators and their habitats. The NLCS Management Studies Support Program funds research on public land activities effect pollinators and their habitats. The BLM created a strategy to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators and work continues in MCNCA.

Shrub Islands of Opportunity for Arid Rangelands Conservation

Colorado State University is performing important research in MCNCA to determine how sagebrush islands of opportunity can aid arid rangeland conservation. Restoration of salt desert and sage brush systems is difficult. Research in these systems builds off past research and provides land managers practical tools for success of these critical habitats. This is an ongoing project.

Citizen Science

BLM is also engaging the community in citizen science projects that allow for citizens to assist BLM with monitoring. These projects include:

- Greening STEM project: CCA, Palisade Insectary, and the BLM helped get Advanced Placement Environmental Science students on the Colorado River for our annual National Environmental Education Foundation's Greening STEM project. Students learned about invasive species monitoring and helped with the monitoring and release of biological controls.
- Chronolog Installations: BLM continues to monitor the three Chronolog sites in MCNCA. These installations allow citizens to provide monitoring photos that help BLM monitor changes in the landscape.



Climate Impacts

Drier, warmer conditions can affect restoration response, for example after fire, trail construction, or other disturbance. Water availability in canyons can also be affected by less snowpack, and warmer and drier periods, which may affect wildlife that depend on these areas.



Climate Resiliency

Ongoing research is being conducted and used to improve climate resilience through better informed and improved management actions. Past internal research on restoration after fire has been used to improve post-fire restoration techniques and has been implemented in the burned area from the 2020 Sieber Fire.



Ongoing research in partnership with NASA and Colorado National Monument will consider past changes in sagebrush and pinyon juniper communities, and inform sage grouse habitat, fuels, and other treatments in these habitats. Ongoing research on amphibian use of canyons in partnership with US Geological Survey, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Colorado Mesa University will inform habitat, and population management, especially invasive bullfrog management.

Social and Environmental Justice

BLM works with CCA and our community partners to reach underserved youth in our communities. We have built partnerships with groups like the Riverside Education Center, Dual Immersion Academy, and Mesa County Partners to help remove barriers students may face when visiting and recreating on public lands. These partnerships provide the opportunity for the BLM to host students in an outdoor classroom setting and to provide a safe environment for students to feel supported while developing new skills and learning about the resources we manage. These partnerships provide hundreds of youth in our community with new experiences, such as place-based learning, hiking, rafting, and camping, on their public lands. While providing students with new knowledge, experiences, and skills we also teach them about potential careers in public land management. We are striving to build a workforce that reflects the face of the community we serve which will help us better reach underserved youth and help them understand that public lands are for all Americans and to see themselves in a career in conservation.



Events

Sieber Canyon Fire Restoration Wrap-up Event

On October 22nd, BLM and CCA volunteers wrapped up the Sieber Canyon Fire Restoration project. 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. Volunteers began helping by collecting seeds from the surrounding burned area. The seeds were sent to a plant center where they were grown into about 7,000 seedlings. We ended 2022 with a final seedling planting event where 13 volunteers together provided 104 hours of service to the BLM and CCA to plant 368 seedlings. This final event brought us to a total of 1,152 sagebrush seedlings planted within the Sieber fire burned area to restore the sagebrush ecosystem for the many obligate species, including Gunnison sage-grouse. A chronolog is located at the site and will be used to continue monitoring the progress of the area.



Rabbit Valley Highway Cleanup

In partnership with Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Colorado Canyons Association helped clean up their adopted 2-mile section of highway along the Rabbit Valley exit of McInnis Canyons NCA. There were 11 adults, and 1 youth volunteers present, totaling 36 volunteer hours. CDOT provided volunteers with trash bags and reflective safety vests, while BLM provided trash pickers to assist volunteers with the clean-up effort. This is an annual event hosted in October between these partners.

Kodel's Fence Removal Project

Thanks to the work of Janice Shepard, one of our long-term office volunteers, an old three strand barbed wire fence was identified in McInnis Canyons. It was determined the fence was no longer needed and was negatively affecting wildlife. With the partnership of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, CCA, and REI volunteers, we removed over a mile of fence over the span of 3 events, 32 volunteers totaling 166 hours. Tasks included removing fencing stays and staples, as well as cutting and coiling barbed wire to be carried out and recycled. One volunteer requested to repurpose some of the wire for a sculpture and provided the office a picture of his completed piece.



Ruby Horsethief River Clean-Up

The BLM partnered with both CCA and Odell Brewing Company for their annual "Make it Pretty!" campaign. Volunteers and staff floated the Colorado river from the Loma boat ramp to the Westwater take-out removing any trash spotted along the river corridor. This event took over the course of 2 days, 17 volunteers & 5 host staff (CCA, BLM, Odell), floated the 25 miles and removed a boat trailer's worth of trash, a total of 408 Volunteer hours.



National Public Lands Day 'Great Poop Scoop' & Trail Work at Devil's Canyon

CCA and BLM partners hosted their annual National Public Lands Day event at MCNCA's Devil's Canyon with 24 volunteers who worked in tandem to collect the overwhelming amount of dog waste along the main D1/D3 trail, while other volunteers helped naturalize stemming social trails along the D5 connector. Hopefully as these areas continue to be monitored, the work done will deter other visitors from worsening or trampling further—in hopes that in a few years the vegetation in the area can begin to grow and thrive again! (72 volunteer hours)

MCNCA Earth Day Clean-Up

CCA assisted BLM staff in cleaning up a dump site out at Mack Ridge in MCNCA—total of 2 volunteers spent 6 hours. Dumpster and resources provided by BLM—trash removed included heavy items such as mattresses, couches, other misc. Furniture, and more.

MCNCA Adopt-A-Trail

CCA's FY2022 Adopt-A-Trail Volunteer hours totaled 997 hours spent trail monitoring and picking up micro-trash along various trails in McInnis Canyons NCA.



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National Conservation Area

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