



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Utah

2022: Annual Manager's Report

Bears Ears

National Monument



Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2022 was a successful and busy year for Bears Ears National Monument (BENM). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) at BENM, in coordination with BLM leadership and Solicitors, set up a first of its kind cooperative agreement with the Pueblo of Zuni, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, and Northern Ute Tribe of the Bears Ears Commission (BEC) and United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDA FS) to manage BENM. The BLM also commenced a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for BENM in collaboration with the BEC and the USDA FS Manti-La Sal National Forest. The BLM planning and management team, as well as our specialists, are working diligently with co-managers to complete the plan and build relationships. Since the signing of the cooperative agreement with the BEC, the BENM team has held monthly in-person and bi-weekly virtual meetings with the BEC and the USDA FS to draft alternatives for the BENM RMP and coordinate on various implementation projects.



Figure 2: Bears Ears National Monument Inter-Governmental Cooperative Agreement Signing at White Mesa Community Center.

Challenges

Visitors and their inexperience visiting cultural sites continues to be a challenge in BENM. BENM staff is partnering with multiple organizations from the Utah Division of State History, Bears Ears Partnership, and Tribal Nations to better educate visitors on fragile cultural resource visitation. BENM is also experiencing increases in woodcutting across the southern portion of BENM. This is due in part to regional economic changes and the greater reliance of local communities on fuelwood for cooking and heating private homes. BENM is looking at options to augment Tribal member's ability to collect fuelwood while protecting BENM objects. The BLM and USDA FS have had some discussions with BEC about potential options for helping tribal members collect fuelwood. The State of Utah has initiated a new program, they are calling "Wood for Life", with the intent of improving cooperation of agencies, the public, and Tribal Nations to help provide fuelwood for community members. The Wood for Life program is looking to identify or create storage locations near tribal communities, work with agencies to identify fuelwood for this use, and develop plans for transportation of fuelwood from agency projects to communities and potential storage locations.

Visitors

In BENM in 2022, we had an estimated 445,937 visitor days. Over half of these visits were to the Newspaper Rock petroglyph panel in Indian Creek. Newspaper Rock is a popular spot for quick day trips, as it is on the way to both the Needles District of Canyonlands National Park and the world-class crack climbing opportunities present throughout Indian Creek.

To help better educate visitors about the importance of BENM and its landscapes to descendant communities and Tribal Nations, BENM has entered into an assistance agreement with CyArk to work with the BEC to create three dimensional online guided tours of three sites along Butler Wash and Comb Ridge. We have had the Hopi Cultural Resource Advisory Task Team out this year to the Butler Wash interpretive site and made progress on getting their input for this project. In 2021, CyArk and BENM released online tours for the popular House on Fire and Mule Canyon Village sites, which can be found at <https://www.cyark.org/projects/bears-ears/Guided-Tours>.



Figure 3: Hopi Cultural Resource Advisory Task Team at Butler Interpretive Site.

Partnerships

BENM partners with many local and national organizations to enhance visitor experience and protect resources. A longstanding partnership with the Bears Ears Partnership (BEP) has resulted in a variety of benefits, including hosted Site Ambassadors to provide visitor information at heavily visited cultural sites, a volunteer project during the Celebrate Cedar Mesa event, and printed materials such as maps and site etiquette signs at trailheads. We entered into new assistance agreements with BEP to support our ongoing partnership to involve Tribal Nations in our work, conserve BENM objects, and provide education to visitors. We also have partnerships with Access Fund, CyArk, and Crow Canyon Archaeological Center.

BENM also initiated new assistance agreements with the five Tribal Nations of the BEC last fall. These agreements will help the BEC to cooperate with BENM on a variety of projects such as tribal youth education, gathering information from tribal communities, and supporting the BEC Tribes in our cooperative management of BENM.

Science

BENM has attracted scientific researchers in multiple fields, from climate science to paleontology, for decades. However, the density of cultural materials found in the canyons, mesas, and mountains of this region have particularly lured those wishing to study the archeology and cultures of the American Southwest.

Current scientific research in these fields includes research done in partnership with BENM and research done under permits issued by the BLM. An ethnographic study with Living Heritage Research Council focuses on interviewing tribal religious and cultural leaders to better understand descendant community connections to BENM. This research will inform management and interpretation throughout the monument. An ethnographic study and virtual documentation of the Moon House cliff dwelling with the University of Arizona uses laser scanning, high resolution photography, and computer generation to create a highly realistic three-dimensional model of Moon House. The researchers plan to then gather data from tribal and cultural leaders on the importance of Moon House and the adjoining landscape to descendant communities. The BLM is working with Woods Canyon Archeological Consultants to collect samples of live old growth pinion and juniper trees within BENM to analyze paleoenvironmental conditions and to date the trees. The BLM approved research and is assisting in funding a scientific article on a prehistoric jewelry piece made from iridescent insect legs which is housed at Edge of Cedars State Park and Museum. This article was published in the journal *American Antiquity* recently, and there have been some recent news articles such as a [KJZZ article](#) and [KNAU article](#). Finally, the BLM is continuing work with highly regarded researchers, including Bill Lipe, Winston Hurst, Tom Wines, and Jim Allison, on a range of topics. These include conducting laser scanning and LIDAR to record archeological sites, intensive study of prehistoric Chacoan Roads on Cedar Mesa, and dendrochronological dating of sites.

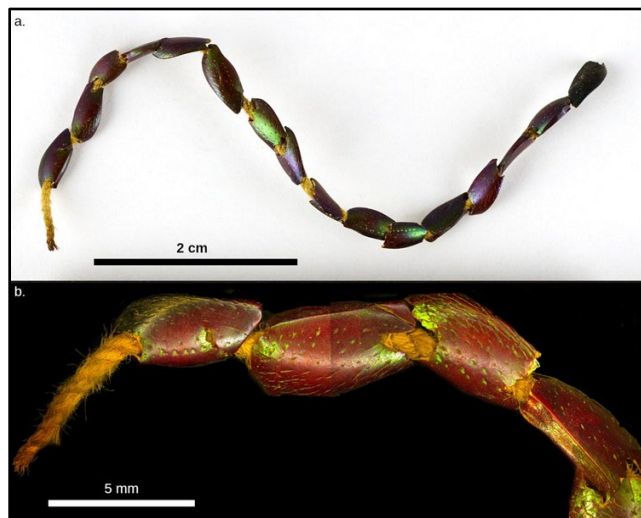


Figure 4: Beetle jewelry from Bears Ears NM.

Climate Impacts and Resiliency

The BENM region has felt the impacts of extreme and exceptional drought in 2022, with unusual snow and rainfall patterns creating vegetation changes and more frequent wildfires in the surrounding areas. In particular, land managers have noted large-scale pinyon juniper mortality and juniper crown dieback across the Four Corners region in the last several years. A multi-agency Forest Health Protection Assessment conducted in 2018 and 2019 used sampling sites within BENM to assess causes of the dieback. The researchers concluded that the dieback is an event associated with drought, which can amplify other causes of tree mortality such as insect pressure.

Among visitors to BENM, backpackers have felt the effects of the drought most acutely because they have had to carry more water against the potential for dry springs, which has affected trip itineraries. However, sight-seeing visitors have also noticed the pinyon juniper mortality, which is apparent along State Route 95 under the Bears Ears Buttes.

Future planning and management decisions within Bears Ears NM and implementation level actions will take climate resiliency into account as part of the National Environmental Policy Act and land use planning processes.



Figure 5: Drought-stressed Utah juniper tree.

Social and Environmental Justice

BENM is funding or partnering on a variety of projects to bring youth and elders from descendant communities back to BENM to help guide the BLM on the best ways to manage this culturally important landscape.

An agreement with the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe provided funding for field trips which would bring Ute elders and youth to BENM. The elders would re-familiarize themselves with the landscape of BENM and have an opportunity to teach Ute youth about their cultural connections to this place while on the field trips. A trained ethnographer from Living Heritage Research Council would conduct interviews during the field trips, and after reviewing those with the interviewees and representatives from the Tribal Cultural Preservation Office, would share appropriate information with BENM. Woods Canyon Archaeological Consultants also assists and gives youth a short lesson on archaeology as part of a field trip. The team is planning on a field trip in June 2023 with youth and elders. BENM is also hoping to work with BEP and the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps on future preservation projects like the one at River House, pictured below.



Figure 6: An Ancestral Lands Corp crew works to stabilize the River House in Bears Ears NM.

Events

In the summer of 2022, BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning and Deputy Director of Policy and Programs Nada Wolff-Culver visited BENM for the signing of the inter-governmental cooperative agreement and a short field trip. The Director and Deputy Director had the opportunity to visit some important cultural sites within the monument during their trip with Outdoor Recreation Planner Misti Haines, and our Resource Manager, Tina Marian.



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Bears Ears National Monument

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