



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

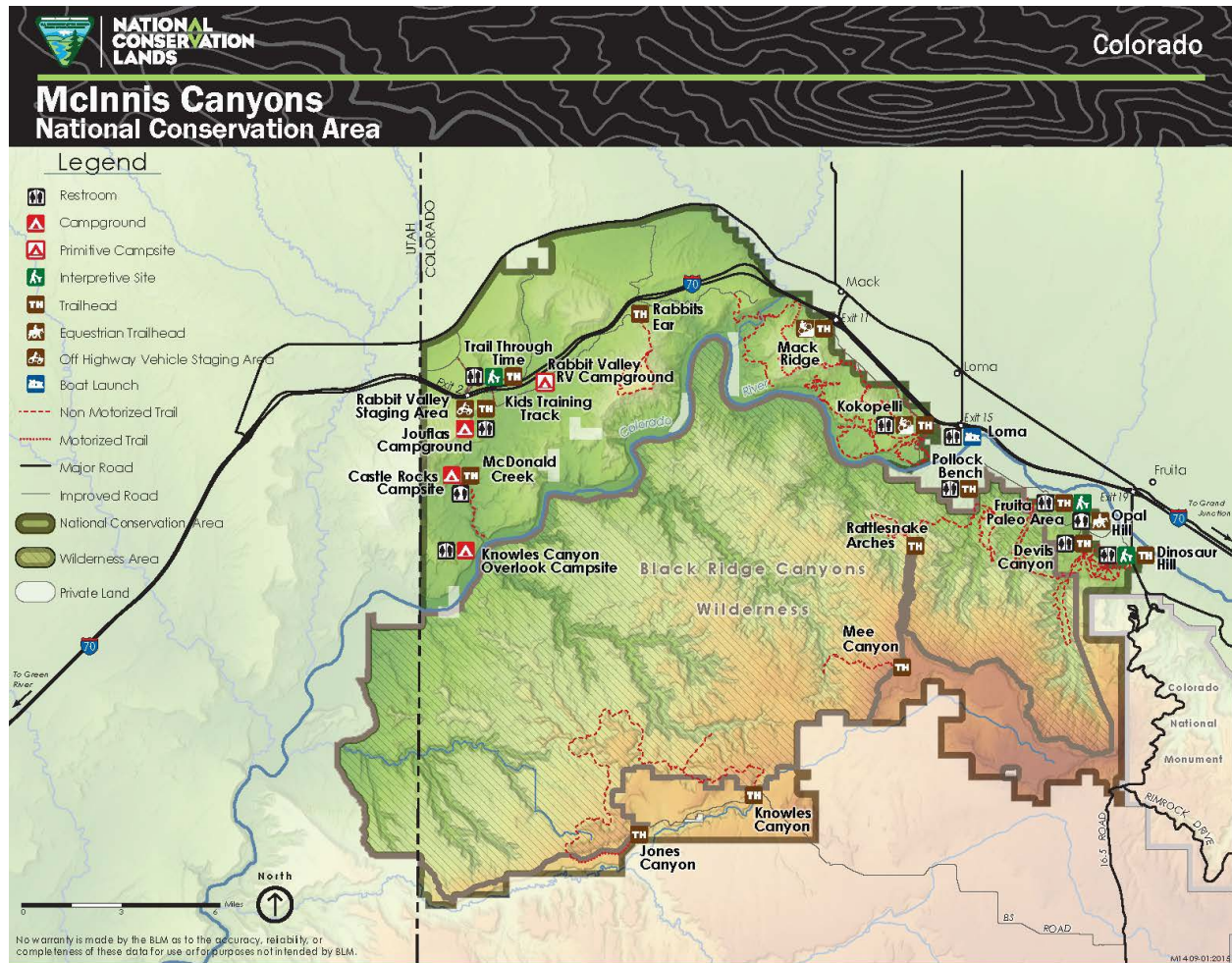
2024: Annual Manager's
Colorado

McInnis Canyons

National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

The Ruby-Horsethief section of the Colorado River is an exceptionally popular stretch of river in western Colorado. With its beginner friendly waters and awe-inspiring setting, easy access from several large population centers, and wonderful opportunities to explore impressive side canyons, it's a natural draw for many to McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (MCNCA). Given its popularity, camping has been permitted since 2012. Over time, the nature of the permit system has evolved to ensure an equitable opportunity to all who desire to experience the river, while preserving the best setting and experience possible. This past year, river rangers, permit specialists, and volunteers worked together to identify and mitigate abuses of the permit system which was contributing to fewer people being able to enjoy their public lands due to over-crowding and negative resource impacts associated with over-use in some areas. With the new mandatory launch requirements, such as a dedicated launch date, regular boat ramp patrols, and mandatory physical sign-in at the Loma boat launch, fewer campsites are experiencing overcrowding while other campsites are under-used now that fewer folks are "gaming the system" at the expense of their fellow boaters.



Challenges

One of the most pernicious challenges within McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (MCNCA) is the proliferation and dominance of cheatgrass which accelerates fire-return intervals. The 1,500-acre Rabbit Valley Fire in June 2024 brings this perennial struggle front and center. In response to the fire, Resource Advisors developed an Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation plan which included aerial herbicide application on the burn scar to prevent the emergence and dominance of cheatgrass. Based on past research in the area which showed the first 2 mm of soil consist of a seedbank dominated by invasive annuals such as cheatgrass, and the 3 mm of soil beneath that containing a seedbank representative of a native diverse mix of annuals and perennials. This treatment may allow greater reemergence and establishment of desirable native species instead of cheatgrass.



Visitors

McInnis Canyons hosted 336,000 visitors in FY24. The most popular place in the NCA is the Mack Ridge (Kokopelli Loops) mountain bike area, with nearly 100,000 visitors this past year. Second to Mack Ridge, with 60,000 visits, is the Wilderness Urban Interface (Fruita Front country) where Devil's Canyon, Opal Hill, Fruita Paleo Area, and Pollock Bench trailheads provide quick and easy access to non-motorized, non-mechanized trails for outings.



Partnerships

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado hosted Trail Crew Leadership Training in 2004. Two members of the local running club, Mesa Monument Striders, attended this training and, upon their return, conducted a robust day of trail (trailhead?) maintenance in the popular Fruita Front country area along the F1 trail.

Also in 2024, the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Association (COPMOBA) continued regular “Monday Night Maintenance” of the trail system in the Mack Ridge Area.

Colorado Canyons Association (CCA), BLM-Colorado’s friends’ group for the three NCAs in the state – Dominguez-Escalante, Gunnison Gorge, and McInnis Canyons NCAs – continued their excellent work providing stewardship work and interpretive and educational programming for youth that visit the NCA. In FY24, CCA continued expanding the scope and number of offerings of their river programs along the Ruby-Horsethief section of the Colorado River. CCA reported a 70% increase in the number of youth participants and a 44% increase in contact hours via 35 trips totaling 61 days on the water – an outstanding accomplishment.



Science

Pollinator Studies

A Presidential memorandum dated June 20, 2014, created a strategy to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators, directing the BLM to research whether sagebrush restoration efforts impact pollinators and their habitats. This effort was funded through the National Landscape Conservation System Management Studies Support Program. This program funds research on public land activities which may affect pollinators and their habitats. The BLM created a strategy to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators, and work continues in MCNCA.

Citizen Science

BLM actively engages communities through citizen science projects, enabling public participation in the scientific process. Through these programs, community members help formulate research questions, conduct experiments, collect and analyze data, interpret results, develop new technologies, and address complex environmental challenges. In 2024, BLM hosted four citizen science projects:

- **Greening STEM Initiative:** BLM collaborated with CCA and the Palisade Insectary to provide Advanced Placement Environmental Science students with hands-on learning experiences along the Colorado River. As part of the National Environmental Education Foundation's Greening STEM project, students participated in invasive species monitoring and assisted with the release of biological control agents, monitoring, and restoration efforts.
- **Chronolog Environmental Monitoring:** BLM implemented Chronolog, a global platform that creates crowd-sourced time-lapse imagery to monitor environmental changes and engage communities in scientific observation. Currently, three Chronolog stations are actively maintained throughout MCNCA, providing valuable temporal data on landscape changes.
- **Sensitive Plant Species Monitoring:** BLM, in collaboration with CCA, worked with community volunteers to collect data on sensitive plant species during optimal identification periods. This program significantly enhances BLM's capacity to gather critical ecological data throughout MCNCA.
- **Important Bird Area Research:** BLM partnered with a dedicated long-term volunteer to monitor the State-designated Important Bird Area within MCNCA. This ongoing program generates valuable data on bird populations and habitat conditions, supporting evidence-based conservation efforts.



Outreach and Special Events

Colorado Canyons Association regularly hosts Paleo Days events. This event is focused on the specific paleontology resource value of MCNCA. Over the course of two days, 200 8th graders learn about and pledge adherence to the 7 principles of Leave No Trace before visiting the Fruita Paleo Area and Trail Through Time. With help from staff at the Museums of Western Colorado's Dinosaur Journey, students touch and analyze plaster casts containing different dinosaur fossils, learn about the process of paleontological excavation, and learn about phylogenetic organization of plants and animals.



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