



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

Cultural Resources Program Highlights

BLM Colorado Fiscal Year 2023



Mission statement

The Bureau of Land Management sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Cover Photo

Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area, Colorado

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Bureau of Land Management Colorado Cultural Resources Program Highlights Fiscal Year 2023

Travel Management Inventory in the Colorado River Valley Field Office *Colorado River Valley Field Office*

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Colorado River Valley Field Office contracted 1,124 acres of Class III cultural resource survey across Eagle, Garfield, and Pitkin Counties in support of travel management planning.

Results of the survey included new and re-recordings of prehistoric open camps and lithic scatters, as well as historic artifact scatters, roads, and pipelines. The age of the finds spanned from the early Archaic period (about 8,400 BP) to the mid-20th century. Five sites are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP); two are historic, two are multicomponent, one is prehistoric. The two multicomponent sites have prehistoric components recommended eligible for inclusion in the NRHP (the historic components are recommended not eligible).



Figure 1. Site overview recorded during travel management Class III survey in Eagle County.

Consulting parties for this project included the State Historic Preservation Office, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, and the Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe.

Improvement of Historic Maybell Ditch Intake Area to Conserve Water for Benefit of Native Fish Little Snake Field Office

The intake area of the Maybell Ditch is being reconstructed to provide water more efficiently to ranchers in the vicinity of Maybell. The project will revamp the rip-rap diversion dam, reposition boulders in the intake area to elevate the river water at the beginning of the ditch, and make better use of gravity to supply the ranchers with sufficient water for hayfields while leaving more water in the river for downstream human use and for native fish habitat.



Figure 2. Aqueduct transporting Maybell Ditch water across the Yampa River.



Figure 3. Headgates of the Maybell Ditch.

Since its completion in the early 1900s, the historic Maybell Ditch has been supplying water to hayfields along the south side of the Yampa River. After devastating blizzards in the late 1800s wiped out entire herds of cattle grazing on the open range, the growing of natural grasses and imported crops, such as alfalfa, in irrigated locations was a key development that allowed the livestock industry to survive and thrive to this day. The Maybell Ditch is also important to the history of Maybell, as well as to the history of architecture and works of engineering related to water control structures.

Multiple government agencies, including the BLM Little Snake Field Office, and private organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy, are collaborating to complete this conservation project. The Bureau of Reclamation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board are funding contributors.

Coyote/Sylvester Oil and Gas Project

White River Field Office

Anschutz Exploration Corporation (Anschutz) proposed to newly develop two new exploratory oil well pads and associated infrastructure in Federal leases (Coyote and Sylvester). Both well pads would be accessed in-part by two newly constructed roads, which would be constructed adjacent to newly installed buried pipelines.

Due to archaeological resource concerns identified during the Class III survey, and in consultation with the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah & Ouray Reservation, the White River Field Office worked with Anschutz to reroute the originally proposed linear developments to avoid physical impacts to multiple identified historic properties. A cultural resources monitor will still be required throughout the duration of the project to ensure avoidance.



Figure 4. Representative setting overview of the Coyote/Sylvester oil and gas project area.

Ongoing Tribal consultation also identified that the project area is part of a larger, tribally important ethnohistoric landscape. With physical impacts to archaeological resources avoided, Anschutz also agreed to facilitate an additional 40-acre survey elsewhere within the greater landscape to mitigate the adverse visual and audible impacts to this presently intact setting. This survey is intended to improve BLM's knowledge of the archaeological resources in the area and thereby facilitate planning and avoidance for potential future oil & gas development in the valley. The 40-acre additional survey will be required as a Condition of Approval in the associated NEPA document.

Consulting parties for this project include the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah & Ouray Reservation, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Eastern Shoshone Tribe, Pueblo of Jemez, and the Hopi Tribe.

Browns Canyon National Monument Ethnographic Study
Royal Gorge Field Office/Browns Canyon National Monument

This project, in partnership with the Living Heritage Research Council (LHRC), strives to strengthen government-government relationships in the understanding of tribal connections with the Browns Canyon National Monument (BCNM). Project strategic goals include:



Figure 5. USFS employee assists Southern Ute Representative along trail in BCNM.

- 1) Providing information relevant to the management of cultural and natural resources within the monument boundary through ethnographic research with traditionally associated tribal communities.
- 2) Providing opportunities for elders and cultural experts from associated tribal communities to participate in onsite field research to preliminarily identify natural and cultural resources of cultural significance.
- 3) Serving as a pilot study that will solicit tribal input regarding future and in depth ethnographic, traditional cultural property, ethnobotanical, traditional use and/or cultural landscape studies.
- 4) Generating Tribe-approved educational and public outreach material to be used both in tribal communities and with the public at Browns Canyon National Monument.

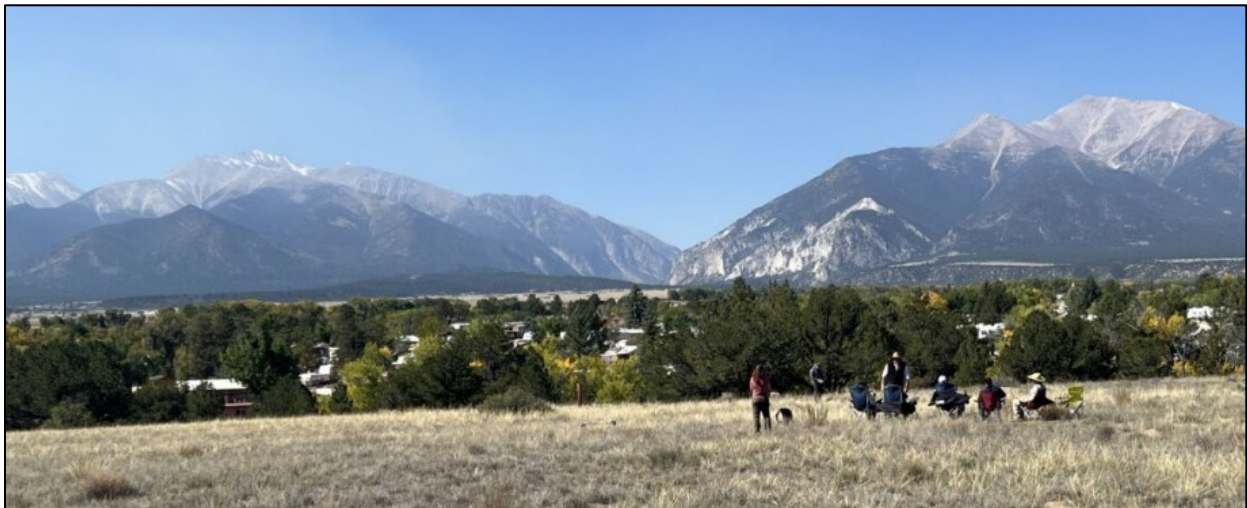


Figure 6. Representatives of LHRC, Southern Ute Tribe, U.S. Forest Service, and BLM visiting Browns Canyon National Monument.

The final visit with representatives from Southern Ute and two Tribal Liaisons with the Forest Service took place in 2023.

Ute Trails Workshop – Co-Stewardship Project
Colorado River Valley Field Office, White River Field Office, and Grand Junction Field Office

In August 2023, BLM Colorado hosted the first Ute Trails workshop in Silt, Colorado at the Colorado River Valley Field Office. This project is being conducted with the three Ute Tribes (the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation), three BLM Colorado Field Offices (Colorado River Valley, White River, and Grand Junction Field Offices), and the White River National Forest, with assistance from the LHRC. The Ute Trail is a significant cultural resource that has been used for thousands of years by the Ute people who depended on the resources along the trail. The Ute Trail extends across all landscapes in Colorado and therefore across agency boundaries as well. The goals of this project were to determine future data needs, ensuring intellectual rights protection, and developing language for interpretive materials. These partners met for three days in August to discuss project goals and outline next steps. The partners also had a full field day visiting different segments of the Ute Trail and viewing resources such as cultural sites, fossils, springs, and native plants. This workshop is just the beginning of a larger, ongoing project and it is completely driven by the three Ute Tribes’ needs and goals for this specific resource. BLM Colorado will be pursuing additional funding to continue this project in future years and eventually expand the project state-wide.



Figure 7. Ute, BLM, and LHRC participants in the Ute Trails Workshop.

Monument Cultural Site Stewardship Program
Canyons of the Ancients National Monument

The Monument Cultural Site Stewardship Program (MSSP), administered by the BLM and the Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance, includes 117 prehistoric, historic, and dual-component sites. The program includes sixty-one (61) site stewards, each of whom primarily monitor more than one site. Additionally, site stewards have participated in 636 hours of training, lectures, and volunteer work during the year, helping them all better understand the sites and landscape for which they volunteer.

Spring Creek Fire

Upper Colorado River District

An important Ute site was threatened by the Spring Creek fire outside of Parachute, Colorado in 2023. The site contained a wickiup, a brush shelter used by the Ute people. The site was first identified by oil and gas surveys years previous. Therefore, it was identified as a value at risk and identified in a literature review by a district Fireline Archaeologist (REAF). The vulnerable wooden structure was threatened by both the fire and suppression activities. The REAF was able to coordinate with Operations to construct a defensible fire line around the site and preserve it from harm.

The REAF utilized this opportunity to educate firefighters and other fire staff on the nature of these sites and their vulnerability to wildfire. Many firefighters are unaware of these special resources, and they can be difficult to recognize while constructing fire line or working on fuels projects. The REAF demonstrated the best techniques to construct effective fire line around these sites that will not adversely affect the site or structure in the process.



Figure 8. Spring Creek Fire overview.

Wickiups are important sites to the three Ute Tribes and can provide valuable information to archaeologists concerning settlement patterns and resource procurement. They are uncommon and deteriorating since they are constructed of wood, vulnerable to decay and wildfire. Protecting this vanishing treasure was a success story for the district's resource advisor and fire programs. The district received complements from the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation for their efforts to protect this site.

Newly Discovered Baskets and Pictograph

Uncompahgre Field Office

In April 2023, a local archaeologist reached out to the Uncompahgre Field Office archaeologist regarding two intact baskets that were identified poking out of the surface of an undisturbed rock shelter. A newly discovered pictograph was also noted. In May 2023, the field office archaeologist, alongside representatives from the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, visited the baskets and the pictograph. The field office is still working with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe to schedule a field trip to visit the new discoveries. Photographs contained culturally sensitive content not appropriate for public dissemination.

Long Gulch Section 110 Survey Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area

The Uncompahgre Field Office archaeologist surveyed roughly 60 acres in the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. The area is currently being surveyed and will continue to be surveyed in the next few field seasons. The project area has been identified as a potential Ute Indian Trail. This project will be brought forward to the Tribes this winter, as well as planned for consultation next fiscal year.



Figure 10. Overview photo of Long Gulch.



Figure 9. Obsidian projectile point found on survey.

Mount Garfield Middle School Service Day Grand Junction Field Office

Mount Garfield Middle School (MGMS) Service Day started at the Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) and MGMS in 2017. In its fifth iteration, the event brought 30 eighth grade students to the Ute Learning Garden – an ethnobotany project managed by the GJFO and Colorado State University Extension Office (CSU) located at the Mesa County Fairgrounds. The Ute Learning Garden was a joint venture started in 2009 by the BLM, US Forest Service, CSU, and Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation as a demonstration and teaching garden that displays how native cultures used native plants in daily life. Specifically, the garden highlights the



Figure 11. Students plant beans, corn, and squash in the newly created three sisters garden area of the Ute Learning Garden.

Ute lifeway of moving seasonally from eco-zone to eco-zone, harvesting plants and trading with other Ute speakers.

2023 was the first year that the service day was held at the Ute Learning Garden, and by all accounts it was an absolute success. Students worked very hard to make much-needed improvements to the garden. Beyond the benefits to the garden, the project served to connect local youth to public lands in their backyards while also learning about the natural and cultural history of those lands in an educational setting. Ultimately, projects like Mount Garfield Middle School Service Day foster the protection of cultural and natural resources by teaching awareness, appreciation, and respect.

To be selected for the service day event, students submitted an essay about why they wanted to participate and why they think the project is important. During the morning, students rotated in groups of ten through three educational stations: one station focusing on the web of life; one station focusing on archaeology; and one station focusing on ethnobotany. In the afternoon, the students participated in various tasks with CSU master gardeners to improve the garden, which included weeding and mulching a Ute-style ramada, planting a three sisters garden (corn, squash, beans), pruning overgrown bushes and plants, and relocating signage.

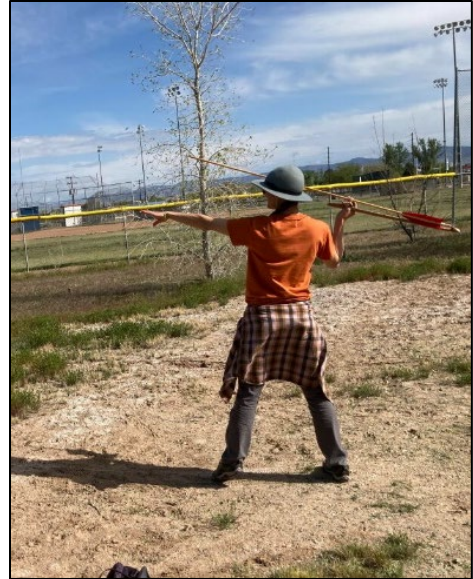


Figure 12. BLM Archaeologist Natasha Krasnow shows students how to throw darts using an atlatl.



Figure 13. Participants after making a significant contribution to the upkeep and maintenance of the Ute Learning Garden.

Yellow Creek Schoolhouse Remediation and Phase I Initial Stabilization

White River Field Office

The White River Field Office (WRFO) completed the initial restoration of the rapidly deteriorating single-room Yellow Creek Schoolhouse (5RB.3058) in rural Rio Blanco County. The Yellow Creek Schoolhouse is listed in the State Register of Historic Properties and is a culturally and locally significant schoolhouse that the WRFO ultimately anticipates converting into a public interpretive site.



Figure 14. HistoriCorps' fieldwork underway for Phase I initial stabilization of the Yellow Creek Schoolhouse, May 17, 2023.

Phase I initial stabilization and all lead remediation of the schoolhouse was completed by HistoriCorps staff and volunteers in coordination with WRFO under HistoriCorps' existing cooperative agreement with BLM Colorado. Tasks accomplished included reversing and stabilizing the structure's eight-inch lean and the roof's two-inch sag, weather proofing the roof and replacing the missing cedar shingles, remediating the lead contaminated materials, and cleaning out the decades of accumulated sediment in the years since the windows went missing. All work was completed over five, five-day sessions between April and May of 2023.

The successful completion of Phase I brought newfound public attention to this building and public support for the initiatives to complete the Phase II and III final exterior and interior restorations. Those in support of this initiative include the Town of Rangely, the Town of Meeker, the Rangely Outdoor Museum, the Board of County Commissioners of Rio Blanco County, and local ranching permittee 4M Ranch. The successful implementation of this pending full restoration would ultimately result in preserving one of the last remaining examples of single-room schoolhouses in the region, providing long-term public educational and recreational opportunities centered on the heritage and legacy of schoolhouses in the West.

Ute Wickiups Photogrammetry Project and Site Assessments

White River Field Office

At the request of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, and with the support of the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, the WRFO created interactive 3D scans (photogrammetry) of a sample of wickiup sites known throughout the field office. These wickiups, or conical brush structures, were the traditional habitation structures for the Ute Tribes. Tree ring data and Ute oral histories have shown that the most recent known wickiup was made in 1919, with the vast majority dating to the mid to late 1800s. At least 70 archaeological sites in this area are known to contain one or more of these Ute wooden architectural features; as such, the WRFO manages the highest density of wickiup sites known in Colorado. Each wickiup comprises a unique construction style, with no two wickiups identical. Dozens of these sites remain standing, oftentimes due to using a living tree as part of the structure, despite the ongoing risk of wildfires, recreation, and cattle impacts, among other potential natural and human-caused risks to these sensitive site types.

As a result of this fieldwork, completed in July 2023, 50 features from five cultural sites were scanned by geospatial specialists with the National Operations Center, with the assistance of WRFO Archaeologist Lukas Trout and two representatives of the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation. Forty-nine of these features are either Ute wickiup, tree platform, or eagle catch features. At the request of the Ute Indian Tribe, a fiftieth photogrammetry data collect was completed of a prehistoric rock art site located in proximity to this focus area.

This project resulted in high resolution images that documented the current condition of these Ute architectural features for current management purposes (e.g., grazing permit renewal analyses). These results also comprise a 'snapshot in time' that provides media for the Ute Tribes and BLM for educational opportunities in perpetuity (including virtual reality simulations). Additionally, the geospatial products created by this project have created heritage records for wickiup sites that may be in terrain that is difficult to navigate and access for those with restricted mobility.



Figure 15. Geospatial specialists with the BLM's National Operations Center completing photogrammetry field collection of a Ute wickiup.