



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

Dominguez-Escalante

National Conservation Area



Colorado

Annual Manager's Report—Fiscal Year 2019

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

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U.S. Department of the Interior
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Dominguez-Escalante

National Conservation Area

Designating Authority

Designating Authority: Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11)

Date of Designation: March 30, 2009

Additional Designations

Dominguez Canyon Wilderness

Old Spanish National Historic Trail

Site Description

Known for its breathtaking and uniquely Colorado scenery, the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA) holds geological and paleontological resources tracing back 600 million years. There are also many cultural and historic sites located within the NCA. Today, the Ute Tribes consider these pinyon juniper-covered lands an important connection to their ancestral past. Dominguez-Escalante NCA provides one of Colorado's most recognizable landscapes with its red rock canyons, the Gunnison River, and the picturesque Dominguez and Escalante canyons.

NCA Offerings

The Dominguez-Escalante NCA comprises 210,172 acres of protected public lands and includes the 66,280-acre Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. The NCA was created by the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Management Act and is managed as part of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) National Conservation Lands.

Dominguez-Escalante NCA is a fine example of the spectacular canyon country of the Uncompahgre Plateau. The Escalante, Cottonwood, Little Dominguez, and Big Dominguez Creeks cascade through sandstone canyon walls that drain the eastern Uncompahgre Plateau. Unaweep Canyon on the northern boundary of the NCA contains globally significant geological resources. Elevations in the NCA are approximately 4,800 to 8,200 feet.

Nearly 30 miles of the Gunnison River flow through the Dominguez-Escalante NCA, supporting fish, wildlife, and recreational resources. The Old Spanish National Historic Trail, a 19th Century land trade route, also passes through it. A variety of wildlife call the area home, including desert bighorn sheep, mule deer, golden eagle, turkey, elk, mountain lion, black bear, and the collared lizard. There are 115 miles of streams and rivers in the NCA, and there is habitat suitable for 52 protected species of animals and plants. Local ranchers graze sheep and cattle on 16 active grazing allotments.

Communications sites in the NCA house seven towers/facilities that have been used since the mid-1960s. The types of uses at these sites include communications providers, such as Qwest Communications and other cellular providers, commercial mobile radio service providers, and Union Pacific Railroad Company. The NCA hosts 1 active mining claim. Target shooting and gold panning is allowed in most of the NCA, and many families harvest Christmas trees in the NCA under permits from the BLM.

Year Accomplishments

- Travel Management Plan Implementation
- Sage Brush Habitat Treatments
- NEPA Decision on Dominguez Road Crossing
- Continued Planning for Escalante Triangle Trail System
- Completion of North Fork Escalante Fish Barrier

Future Priorities and Opportunities

- Improved hiking and equestrian opportunities on Ninemile Hill
- New bike trails in Escalante Triangle
- Planning for the Escalante Trail – mixed use trail between Delta and Whitewater
- Gunnison River campsite designations and reservation system planning
- Improved protections for the River Rims and Gunnison Gravel ACECs
- Interpretation of the Rambo Homestead

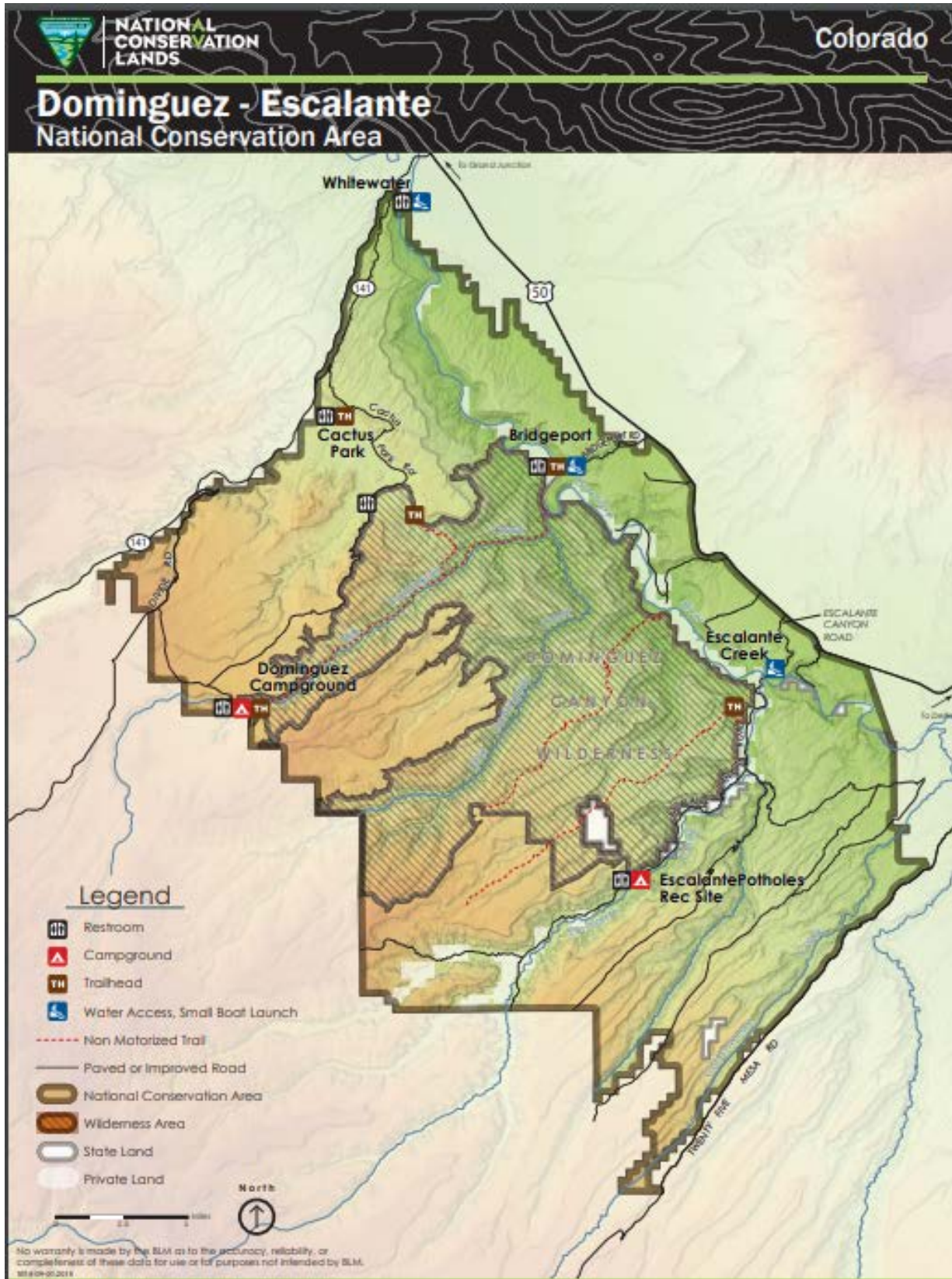
Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area

Southwest District
2815 H Road
Grand Junction CO 81506
Phone: 970-244-3000

Unit Manager: Collin Ewing

Site Web Address: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/colorado/dominguez-escalante-nca>

Map of Dominguez-Escalante NCA



1 Dominguez-Escalante Overview

Acreage

Total Acres in Unit	218,393 Acres
BLM Acres	210,172 Acres
Other Federal Acres	0
State Acres*	1,803 Acres
Private Acres*	6,418 Acres

*State and Private Acres are not part of the total unit acres

Budget

Budget Title	Code	Funding
Monuments & Conservation Areas	1711	\$472,000
Soils and Rangeland Management	1020	\$54,000
Water, Fisheries, and Riparian Management	1160	\$53,000
Wilderness Management	1210	\$59,000
Recreation & Visitor Services	1220	\$57,000
Other BLM Programs		\$69,000
Total Budget		\$764,000

Along with allocated federal funding as outlined above, Dominguez-Escalante NCA also receives substantial benefit from partnerships with organizations such as our Friends group, Colorado Canyons Association (CCA). CCA holds fundraisers, applies for grants, receives donations, and receives membership dues, which they use to further the community stewardship, education, and restoration programs in the NCA.

Current Areas of Focus

Travel Management Plan Implementation

The BLM continues to make implementation of the NCA's travel management plan a top priority. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, the BLM continued signage of the route system. The NCA off-highway vehicle (OHV) crew members spent the season installing approximately 170 signs, 15 50" limiters at trail heads/winter closure boundaries, and six administrative gates. In the spring and fall, the crew removed weeds from staging, camping, and parking areas. The BLM worked with volunteer groups to find solutions to potential trail issues. Another focus within the D-E NCA was sage brush habitat rehabilitation. Over the year, 13.6 miles of routes were rehabilitated in the Gibbler Area of D-E NCA.

Planning and NEPA

Escalante Triangle Trail System

The Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA) submitted a conceptual trail system plan developed by a trail planning and construction company (Sweet and Sustainable Single-track) that they hired using funds from a Recreation Equipment, Inc. (REI) grant. In 2019, a BLM interdisciplinary team, consisting of staff from both the Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) and the Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO), reviewed the proposal internally and with COPMOBA to assess the feasibility of the proposal and its potential impacts to wildlife, plant, cultural, range, and paleo resources in the area. Development of a formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document is still pending.

Dominguez Road Crossing

Last fall, flooding caused by beaver dams along Big Dominguez Creek increased the water level at the low water crossing on Dominguez Road at the campground. This crossing provides access between Dominguez-Escalante NCA and Forest Service lands on the Uncompahgre Plateau and beyond, and is used by hunters, off-highway vehicles, cyclists, and ranchers. This route provided critical access to and egress from the Bull Draw fire in fall 2019. Similar flooding occurred in 2016.

After exploring a range of options to best resolve flooding issues, the BLM, along with the Mesa County Transportation Department, determined that improving the road surface at the campground would allow for a more sustainable and effective crossing to accommodate higher water flows. The BLM and Mesa County secured funding and the BLM completed the necessary environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to install articulated concrete block mattresses (ACBM). The ACBMs raise and harden the road surface and still allow water to pass during times of lower stream flows. The BLM anticipates project work to begin during the spring of 2020.

North Fork Escalante Fish Barrier In 2018, the BLM completed planning for a fish barrier on North Fork Escalante Creek. The project was completed in FY 2019. The U.S. Forest Service entered into an assistance agreement with Trout Unlimited (TU) for \$70,000 to design and construct the barrier. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) also contributed money for the project. The BLM's fisheries biologist drafted the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Biological



Assessment. The biologist also went on field visits to ensure compliance with the best management practices listed in the EA. The projects resulted in an improved diversion that acts as a partial barrier, a retaining wall to protect the eroding bank, and a four-foot barrier with a strong shallow footing to not allow fish to gain speed for jumping.

Staffing

Permanent Dominguez-Escalante NCA staff consists of an NCA Manager, a science ecologist, a law enforcement officer, a National Conservation Lands Specialist, a career seasonal OHV Ranger, and a Natural Resources Specialist. All permanent staff except for the Natural Resources Specialist are shared with the McInnis Canyons NCA. In FY 2019, seasonal staff included three river rangers shared with the UFO, two Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Trail Crew members shared with MCNCA, an Ecology intern shared with MCNCA, a Wilderness intern shared with MCNCA, an Old Spanish Trail intern shared with MCNCA, and two recreation maintenance interns shared with MCNCA and GJFO.



The NCA receives Special Recreation Permit administration, facilities maintenance, and other program support from the GJFO and UFO, primarily in the areas of visitor services and contact; geology and paleontology; archaeology; realty; range management; wildlife biology; ecology; weed management; geographic information systems (GIS); and soil, water, and air quality.

The BLM partners with CCA to hire an NCA Lands Program Director, NCA River Programs Director, and two AmeriCorps VISTAs who develop and implement volunteer stewardship and youth education programs for the McInnis Canyons and Dominguez-Escalante NCAs.

2 Programs and Accomplishments

General Accomplishments

The year 2019 marked the 10th anniversary of Dominguez Escalante NCA. For the past ten years, several projects were made possible and completed with the hard work of dedicated NCA staff and our many partners. Included in this report are the details of the projects and associated NEPA work, outreach, and education events that have happened over FY 2019. The NCA's biggest accomplishments to date include:

- Escalante Field Experience
- Nature Knowledge Days
- Hilltop Youth River Trip
- OHV Crew Grant
- Fish Barrier Completion

General Accomplishments Table

	Number of Visitors	Education Participants	Interpretative Participants	Visitor Center/Contact Station Visits	Hours of Volunteers			
TOTALS	103,372	855	15	1,849	2,474			

Education, Outreach, and Interpretation

10th Anniversary Celebration

On March 30, 2019, approximately 50 Dominguez-Escalante NCA partners and enthusiasts joined the BLM to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Congress designating the land as an NCA in 2009. Former Delta County Commissioner Jan McCracken, BLM Colorado State Director Jamie Connell, CCA Director Joe Neuhof, Ute Indian Tribe Preservation Officer Betsy Chapoose, and local Historian Zebulon Miracle (The Curator of Curiosity) spoke about the people, landscapes, and resources that make this place special.



Career Fair: BLM and Career Paths

In February and March 2019, a BLM representative spoke to high school and middle school students about the NCA, the BLM's role in managing it, and what working for federal agencies like the BLM entails. Education requirements for working with the BLM were also discussed, as well as how students can get involved with their public lands.

Teaching Science to Teachers (TENS)

In partnership with CCA, CPW, Gateway Resort, and Museum of the West, BLM staff members participated in the TENS program in FY 2019. The program provides local teachers with methods to incorporate public lands into teaching material. The program also promotes teachers learning environmental science from professionals. This year, the TENS program brought teachers to the Hunting Grounds and Unaweep Canyon in Dominguez-Escalante NCA to learn more about weaving public lands into their environmental science education curriculum.

Escalante Field Experience

The 2019 Escalante Field Experience – a joint venture between CCA, BLM, The Nature Connection, and CPW – was a huge success. Over 260 seventh grade students from across Delta County participated in the event. Students hiked to the historic Gunnison Water Wheel, discovered dinosaur tracks in the sandstone, learned about Pinyon Jay life modes and lizard habitats, and visited the privately-owned Captain Smith Cabin to learn about the



history of American settlement in Dominguez-Escalante NCA. Students gained an appreciation for the preservation of cultural resources.



Nature Knowledge Days

In coordination with CCA, Dominguez-Escalante NCA staff members hosted Nature Knowledge Days for 3rd grade students in Delta County. Over the course of the week, students rotated between eight different station exploring different topics while documenting their observations in an activity book. Over 310 third-grade students participated, representing four different schools within school district 50J in Delta County.

Outdoor Understanding for Teachers (OUT) Program

The BLM and CCA participated in the 2019 Outdoor Understanding for Teachers (OUT) teacher education program hosted by CPW. Dominguez-Escalante NCA staff provided an opportunity for 12 Delta County teachers to learn about the historic, cultural, geological, and paleontological resources of the NCA, and the various ways in which they (with support from CCA and BLM) can use these resources to help reach their students throughout the school year. This program has been highly successful in the past, and the NCA is excited to be a partner in this opportunity to encourage teachers and their students to explore National Conservation Lands.

Hilltop Youth River Trip

In FY 2019, CCA and the BLM took eight students from the Residential Youth Services Program (RYS) of Hilltop on a Gunnison River rafting trip through the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The RYS houses at-risk students, a majority of whom had been recently released by the Department of Youth Corrections. For many students, it was their first time off the Hilltop Campus in over a year and first recreational experience exploring their public lands. For RYS students, a day on the river is an immeasurable reward for their commitment to their schoolwork and self-improvement. Together, RYS,



BLM, and CCA can bring the therapeutic qualities of nature to the kids that need it most.

Girls Scouts River Trip

The BLM, alongside CCA, hosted an 11.5-mile rafting trip for 20 Girl Scouts on the Gunnison River through Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The Girl Scouts learned about desert ecology, local history, leadership, and river safety. Additionally, the Girl Scouts learned about land management policies and river resources.

Riverside Educational Center River Trips

Students from Riverside Education Center rafted 11.5 miles down the Gunnison River in Dominguez-Escalante NCA on three separate occasions. With the help of CCA, the students learned about desert ecology, local history, leadership, and river safety on each trip. Additionally, students learned about land management policies and river resources.

Independence Academy Charter School River Trip

This rafting trip, which took 13 students 11.5 miles down the Gunnison River in D-E NCA, focused heavily on teaching about invasive species and human impact on ecosystems. These students left with a greater understanding of how to be stewards to our environment, and best practices for reducing their impact outdoors.

Delta County Partners River Trip

Students rafted 13.5 miles down the Gunnison River, learning about land management policies and other appropriate site specific information. The BLM and CCA helped with this trip by providing equipment and knowledge.

The Nature Connection River Trips

The Nature Connection, in conjunction with CCA and BLM, took students from Paonia, Hotchkiss, Cedaredge, and Delta high schools down the Gunnison River in D-E NCA on four separate occasions in FY2019. The trips varied in length, from 11.5 miles to 13.5 miles. On two trips, students spent the night in Dominguez Canyon. On these trips, students learned about desert ecology, local history, and river safety.

Leave No Trace Outreach

BLM Recreation Staff, Leave No Trace Travelling Trainers, and CCA teamed up over Memorial Day weekend to spread awareness about low-impact recreating practices with visitors to the Dominguez-Canyon Wilderness in the Dominguez Escalante NCA. During the two-day course, over 250 visitors learned about techniques to minimize stress to the bighorn sheep in the canyon by keeping dogs on leash, packing out all waste, (including human waste), and visiting the numerous cultural and historic sites within the canyon with respect.



Grazing

The BLM authorizes 12 grazing permits in the NCA on 16 allotments covering 206,000 acres. Sheep and cattle ranchers use the NCA to provide up to 14,000 animal unit months' worth of forage for their herd each year. The BLM issued three grazing authorizations using the amended Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. Due to the drought conditions experienced in Dominguez-Escalante NCA over the last three years, all permittees in lower allotments did not graze their livestock in the lower salt desert allotments. This change resulted in lower number of site visits and less monitoring needs for FY 19.

Paleontology

Four new paleontology sites of interest were found within Dominguez-Escalante NCA on a transect from the rim to the Gunnison River near the Delta-Mesa county line above the river. All of the localities were dinosaur footprints, ranging in age from early cretaceous to middle Jurassic.

Partnerships

In keeping with the administration's priority of shared conservation stewardship, Dominguez-Escalante NCA works closely with a wide variety of partners to promote multiple-use of the public lands within the NCA.

Colorado Canyons Association

CCA is the Friends group to the local National Conservation Areas. In FY 2019, CCA helped BLM staff host river cleanups, trail monitoring classes, and educational trips for local youth. In addition, CCA assisted the BLM by providing visitor services for the NCA at the Dominguez-Escalante BLM office, organizing volunteer projects, restoring habitat along the Gunnison River, and creating awareness in the community around ongoing stewardship and management of the NCA.



AmeriCorps VISTA

In FY 2019, the BLM and CCA were proud to host three AmeriCorps VISTA interns. Tatyana Sukharnikova and Alexandra Martin finished their service in 2019, and Alice Corcoran recently entered her service to help with stewardship of the NCAs. During their AmeriCorps terms, they set up Science, Technology, Engineering and Math programming, hosted several community outreach events, and engaged multiple communities around how they can better enjoy public lands. These interns' projects and their service help extend the capacity of CCA and the BLM addressing pressing needs within Dominguez-Escalante NCA.



Colorado Mesa University

Dominguez-Escalante NCA staff collaborated with Colorado Mesa University for many different projects throughout FY 19. Dominguez-Escalante NCA staff hosted several student interns from Colorado Mesa University's Environmental Science Program. Interns completed assessments and conducted inventory and monitoring studies on rare plants within the NCA.



Western Rivers Conservancy

Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) partnered with the BLM for the Hallock Homestead Acquisition and Meridian Junction Acquisition to protect key inholdings and provide increased access to recreation opportunities along the Gunnison River in Dominguez-Escalante NCA. WRC initiated discussions with private landowners, contracted the appraisal for the Hallock Homestead Property, and conducted preliminary due diligence for the acquisitions. The private landowners sold their properties to WRC, for conveyance to the BLM, subject to the federal appraisal process, valuation, other due diligence, and availability of funding for the BLM to purchase the properties.



The Nature Connection

The BLM's partnership with The Nature Connection (TNC) has allowed BLM programs and services to reach communities they otherwise might not. Due to TNC's familiarity with and connections to school districts a considerable distance away from Dominguez-Escalante NCA, outreach to these areas has increased exponentially as a result of this partnership. TNC has helped increase students' access to and participation in the NCA, especially concerning rafting trips, while introducing students to what the BLM does to manage public lands.



Other Partnerships

Dominguez-Escalante NCA also closely collaborated with the Interpretive Association of Western Colorado, Rivers Edge West, CPW, Museums of Western Colorado, Denver Botanic Gardens, and Colorado State University on several educational and scientific projects.

Recreation and Visitor Services

Bridgeport Kiosks Redesign

Staff worked to update the information and maps available at the Bridgeport Trailhead and at the kiosk leading into the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness from Big Dominguez Canyon. The information and maps had not been updated for several years, but they are now in-line with the Dominguez-Escalante NCA Resource Management Plan.

OHV Crew Grant

The GJFO utilized CPW OHV registration grant funds to hire three NCA OHV crew members who worked from May 2019 through December 2019. The crew spent the season implementing a new travel management plan, installing signs and infrastructure, maintaining motorized trails, and educating the public. The crew installed and maintained approximately 170 signs as well as 15 50" limiters at trail heads/ winter closure boundaries with winged fencing. The crew also installed six administrative gates, removed weeds from staging, camping, and parking areas in spring and fall, routinely made contact with trail users often receiving unsolicited positive feedback, and worked with volunteer groups to find solutions to potential trail issues.



Fish Barrier

The North Fork of Escalante Creek contains a conservation population of Colorado River Cutthroat Trout (CRCT), which exists upstream of a population of non-native rainbow trout. Through population monitoring, the BLM, in cooperation with CPW, determined that hybridization between the two trout species has been occurring and poses a direct threat to the survival of the CRCT conservation population. In the beginning of 2019, the BLM and CPW installed a barrier in the North Fork of Escalante Creek, effectively separating the genetically pure CRCT from the non-native rainbow trout below. This effort will protect the conservation population and potentially facilitate future recovery downstream.

Gunnison River Tamarisk Removal, Pile Burning, and Weed Spraying

In partnership with WCCC, CCA, and The National Wild Turkey Federation, the BLM treated 15 acres for weeds along the Gunnison River. The BLM removed and sprayed tamarisk with BLM-approved herbicide and also sprayed secondary weeds, including Whitetop and Russian Knapweed. In accordance with the Dominguez-Escalante NCA Resource Management Plan, the BLM did not remove more than 50 percent of tamarisk to retain soil shading and promote native plant recruitment. The BLM will monitor the sites and re-treat as needed.

Gibbler Gulch/Farmers Canyon Fuels and Sage Brush Projects



In FY 2019, the Dominguez-Escalante NCA Gibbler Gulch area and Farmers Canyon area received fuel treatments to improve habitat for Gunnison Sage-grouse, a federally listed threatened species. There was also mitigation for hazardous fuels around ponderosa pine stands. Farmers Canyon had a prescribed burn of 200 acres for pinyon-juniper removal. Gibbler Gulch had a mechanical treatment of 236 acres for pinyon-juniper removal and a pile burn of 70 acres from mitigation around

ponderosa pine. Tabeguache also had a mechanical treatment resulting in 100 acres of pinyon-juniper removal.

Dry Mesa Fuels and Wildlife Habitat Project

Efforts to improve mule deer habitat occurred throughout FY 2019. These efforts included 531 acres of lop and scatter, 263 acres of mastication, and 167 acres of seeding.

Volunteers

North Fork of Escalante Creek Fish Barrier

The BLM and Trout Unlimited hosted a TU volunteer workday where volunteers scattered native wetland and upland seed and planted willows. Eight volunteers spent over four hours seeding the site and planting willows.



3 Science

Science

Long Term Colorado Hookless Cactus Demographic Monitoring

This project is being done in conjunction with the Denver Botanic Gardens and involves three monitoring plots in the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The project began in 2008 to monitor long-term hookless cactus population changes. As of December 2018, the study includes 10 plots across the range of the species. The study is also looking at growth rates, reproduction, and climatic factors to better understand the species. While these populations were generally stable or increasing during this short time period (2008-2018), it is important to continue demographic monitoring to observe true trends among the stochastic fluctuations and in response to climate change.



Gathering more comprehensive data than currently exists better equips the BLM offices that are largely responsible for the protection of this species on public lands.

Monitoring Golden Eagles and Peregrine Falcons in Dominguez-Escalante NCA in Relation to Climbing Areas

In response to increasing recreational and permitted rock climbing, the BLM conducted a raptor nest monitoring effort in Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The BLM surveyed for a total of 33.3 hours of actual observation time, resulting in monitoring the nests of 11 golden eagles, 1 bald eagle, 4 peregrine falcons, and 6 unknown raptors. The BLM coordinated these efforts with CPW, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, and private consultants.



Aquatic AIM Training and Sampling

Aquatic Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) training brought national trainers to East Creek on the northern boundary of Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The BLM introduced AIM field staff to collecting field indicators and field calibration. After completing training later in the season, they returned to Dominguez-Escalante NCA to sample Big Dominguez Creek and another site on East Creek. Data analysis including results of macroinvertebrate samples will be complete in early 2020.

Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Keeping it Wild Wilderness Character Monitoring Report, Five-year Update

Throughout 2018, BLM staff conducted an exhaustive monitoring effort to document existing conditions in Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. This effort is part of a strategy designed to be consistent among the four national agencies that administer designated Wilderness: the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the BLM. The strategy incorporates a wide variety of information and data from interdisciplinary resource programs into a single framework describing what makes Wilderness unique among all federal lands – its wilderness character as defined by Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. This effort is a follow-up to the baseline monitoring effort that occurred in 2012. The results of this monitoring effort provide the BLM with information about how wilderness character in Dominguez Canyon Wilderness has changed over time. The final monitoring report was completed in 2019 and provides a snapshot of the evolution of wilderness character since the baseline monitoring effort was completed in 2012.

Rangeland Monitoring

Rangeland monitoring is used to evaluate what impact the management strategies of grazing operations have on the rangeland. Pasture and rangeland monitoring is a systematic, structured approach to tracking changes in plant communities over time. This monitoring is done by collecting data using various scientific protocols, including compliance checks, utilization studies, and nested frequency. Rangeland monitoring is important in evaluating the effects of grazing and browsing on public lands. In FY 2019, Dominguez-Escalante NCA was monitored nine times.



Salt Desert Restoration Project

One experimental plot was installed in Dominguez-Escalante NCA to help determine best management practices for salt desert restoration. These practices will help improve future restoration efforts in drylands.

Bighorn Sheep

In FY 2019, CPW concluded a study of bighorn sheep within the NCA. This study started in spring 2012. During this time, 23 bighorn sheep in the area were captured and collared. Since the study started, four collared bighorn mortalities have occurred due to natural causes. An NCL Management Studies Grant has been received to use the findings of the study and look at the interaction between bighorn sheep and recreation.



Salt Desert Seed Banks

In partnership with CSU, the BLM conducted field work in MCNCA and Dominguez-Escalante NCA to determine seed banks, which can determine site potential in degraded areas and compare these areas with more intact vegetation communities. The field work and data analysis for this project were completed in FY 2019, and is currently in the final writing stages.

Seed Collection

The BLM collected native seeds in both MCNCA and D-E NCA to be used in salt desert restoration trails and incorporated into the Seeds of Success program.



Raptor Study

The BLM completed a study monitoring nesting raptors in areas used recreationally for climbing. Focal species included golden eagles and peregrine falcons. Rock climbing can disrupt normal raptor nesting behaviors. BLM completed an inventory of raptor nests in areas known to be used by climbers. Over time, these nests will continue to be monitored to determine continued use or abandonment.

4 Resources, Objects, Values and Stressors

Natural Resources including Biological and Environmental Values



Natural and cultural resources are among the 14 purposes of Dominguez-Escalante NCA listed in its enabling legislation. The NCA enjoys an extraordinary abundance of these resources, including an array of rare and common plant and animal species as well as prehistoric and historic sites and artifacts. The NCA's natural and cultural resource

management staff focuses on clearly communicating the importance of conserving and protecting NCA values and expanding the BLM's understanding of NCA resources through assessment, inventory, and monitoring.

Natural and Cultural Resources Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	Good	Stable
Vegetation	Good	Stable
Wildlife	Good	Stable
Riparian	Varies depending on species	Unknown

Natural and Cultural Resources Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resources, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 19
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	210,000	43,246	3,402	2
Vegetation	210,000	210,000	191,383	20,000
Wildlife	210,000	210,000	210,000	450
Riparian	210,000	179,218	3,330	3 Miles

Stressors Affecting Natural Resources

Stresses on natural and cultural resources and values include anthropogenic wildland fire, invasive plants, recreational use, improper livestock grazing and domestic livestock diseases, loss of habitat, habitat fragmentation, air pollution, non-native animals, water pollution, theft, surface disturbance, and vandalism.

Water Resources

One of the 14 purposes of the NCA listed in its enabling legislation is “the water resources of area streams, based on seasonally available flows, that are necessary to support aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial species and communities” (Section 2402 of the Omnibus Act). There are 115 miles of rivers and streams in the NCA, including the Escalante, Cottonwood, Little and Big Dominguez Creeks, and nearly 30 miles of the Gunnison River. These aquatic resources support an abundance of fish, wildlife, and recreational opportunities as well as the existing water rights of neighboring landowners. BLM staff work to expand the understanding of water resources through assessment, inventory, and monitoring.

Water Resources Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good Overall	Stable and improving

Water Resources Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 19
210,000	210,000	115 miles	26 miles

Stressors Affecting Water Resources

Invasive aquatic plants, diversion, erosion, recreational use, livestock grazing, and air and water pollution may affect water resources.



Recreational Resources including Wilderness and Scenic Values

Recreation is listed as one of the 14 purposes of the NCA in its enabling legislation, and visitors to the NCA can participate in an exceptionally wide variety of recreational activities, including hunting, hiking, boating, horseback riding, OHV travel, rock climbing, wildlife viewing, and camping. Visitors can also enjoy a broad range of recreational settings, including remote wilderness, riparian wetlands, and culturally or historically significant sites.

The BLM's recreation staff assists in planning for and managing recreational resources and facilities in a manner that conserves National Conservation Lands and NCA values. Thus, roads and other facilities are built only when necessary for public health and safety, for exercise of existing rights, to minimize impacts to resources, or to otherwise further the purposes for which the NCA was designated. Recreation staff members actively engage stakeholders through the land-use planning process to help identify existing and potential uses that are compatible with the legislated purposes of the NCA, and the BLM practices a community-based approach to providing recreational services that is consistent with the purposes of the NCA and the socioeconomic goals of adjacent or nearby communities.

Congress designated the 66,280-acre Dominguez Canyon Wilderness in 2009 under the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. The Wilderness is located completely within the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The BLM is committed to protect

wilderness areas in such a manner as to preserve wilderness character, as well as effectively manage recreational, scenic, scientific, education, conservation, and historic uses permitted under Section 4(c) and 4(d) of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

The Dominguez Canyon Wilderness displays an array of ecosystems, ranging from upper Sonoran piñon-juniper desert along the Gunnison River, to Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine to aspen at higher elevations. Dominguez Canyon Wilderness consists of two major canyon systems, Big Dominguez and Little Dominguez. The canyons drain the northeastern corner of the Uncompahgre Plateau. Little Dominguez is the longer of the two at approximately 12 miles in length. It joins the larger Big Dominguez Canyon a little over a mile before their confluence with the Gunnison River.

The area possesses outstanding geological features, spectacular scenery, ecological diversity, two cascading mountain streams, and opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Large mesas dissected by deep red slick-rock canyons and arroyos characterize the terrain. The area provides valuable wildlife habitat for desert bighorn sheep, deer, elk, mountain lion, black bear, and wild turkey.

The Dominguez-Escalante NCA Resource Management Plan states that the goal is to preserve, protect, or enhance the qualities of wilderness character in the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. Monitoring wilderness character is an ongoing responsibility for the BLM, and monitoring any changes helps the BLM determine how stewardship decisions influence trends and prioritize actions. Throughout 2018, BLM staff conducted a five-year update to the Keeping it Wild Wilderness Character monitoring protocol. The report highlighting the results of this effort was completed in 2019.

The practice of Visual Resource Management in BLM land-use planning inventories the character of a landscape according to the four basic visual elements of form, line, color, and texture. The management goal of scenic resources in Dominguez-Escalante NCA is to protect the open spaces, natural aesthetics, and scenic vistas that are considered a social, economic, and environmental benefit. The entirety of the Dominguez-Escalante NCA is managed with Visual Resource Management Class I and Class II objectives, which are the most protective management classes. Any changes to the characteristics landscape in the NCA should be low and not attract attention.

Recreation Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable

Recreation Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 19
Recreational	210,000	210,000	210,000	140,000
Wilderness	210,000	210,000	66,280	66,280

Stressors Affecting Recreational Resources

Recreational resources and values may be adversely affected by any of the stressors that affect natural and cultural resources, because recreational visitors to the NCA often go there expecting to see pristine habitat, healthy wildlife, or undamaged rock art. Recreational use itself can damage recreational resources where some recreational user experiences are negatively impacted by other forms of recreation. Right-of-way proximity and air pollution may also threaten the integrity of the recreational experiences.



Wilderness resources and scenic values may be adversely affected by any of the stressors that affect other resources within the NCA, with visitor use causing the greatest negative effects on wilderness character. Visitor use itself can damage the resource, especially with increased use due to local and regional population growth.

Scientific, Geological, and Paleontological Resources

The geological and paleontological resources of the NCA are listed in the NCA's enabling legislation among its purposes, and these resources are exceptionally abundant in the NCA. Scientific study of these resources benefits the scientific



community as a whole and effectively informs the BLM’s NCA management. The NCA staff works to identify research needs, encourage science partnerships and citizen science, and incorporate scientific results into management, decision-making, and outreach.

BLM staff members promote the NCA to universities and research institutions as an outdoor research destination, educational laboratory, and potential demonstration center for emerging technology and innovative management practices. In turn, academic institutions, aware of the unique and valuable resources in the NCA, seek out partnerships with the BLM to conduct scientific research and education in the NCA.

Scientific, Geological, Paleontological Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Scientific	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good	Very Stable
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good	Stable and Improved (more sites found every year)

Scientific, Geological, and Paleontological Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 19
Scientific	210,000	90,007	210,000	100
Geological	210,000	210,000	126,000	350
Paleontological	210,000	158,150	1,507	50

Stressors Affecting Scientific, Geological, and Paleontological Resources

Anything that affects geological, cultural, paleontological, biological, or wildlife resources affect scientific resources. Geological and paleontological resources are primarily affected by theft and vandalism.

Education

Educational resources are cited as one of the 14 purposes of the NCA in its enabling legislation, and we strive to provide programming related to all the other resources in the NCA, which are all suitable as subjects for interpretive and educational activities.

The BLM strives to provide young people with opportunities to engage in recreation, practice stewardship, and learn about NCA resources and land management. BLM staff members seek out partnerships with local schools and educators to help them interpret National Conservation Lands and NCA values. The BLM provides interpretive and educational materials to NCA users through the GJFO, UFO, and the NCA websites.

Education Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Stable

Education Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 19
210,000	210,000	210,000	1,000

Stressors Affecting Education

Virtually all NCA resources can be considered educational resources and are susceptible to vandalism. Interpretive signs, kiosks, and cultural sites are especially susceptible to vandalism.



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Summary of Performance Measure

Resources, Objects, and Values Status Summary Table		
Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Cultural	Good	Stable
Natural	Good	Stable
Wildlife	Good	Stable

Riparian	Varies depending on species or habitat	Unknown
Water Resources	Good	Stable
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable
Geological	Good	Very Stable
Paleontological	Good	Stable and improving (more sites found every year)
Scientific	Good	Stable
Educational	Good	Stable

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Manager's Letter

This year marked ten years since congress designated Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area and this is a fitting time to reflect on the people, places, landscapes, and resources that make D-E an amazingly special place. During the celebration on



March 30, 2019, a brilliant line up of speakers reflected on the past 10 years and beyond. Jan McCracken, former Delta County Commissioner discussed her travels to Washington D.C. to ask congress to designate this NCA on behalf of Mesa, Montrose and Delta Counties. She emphasized the importance of protecting this special place for future generations, including her own daughter. Betsy Chapoose, of the Ute Indian Tribe gave a powerful view into the hearts

and souls of the current and past Ute people who are forever endeared to this landscape as their home.

Jamie Connell, BLM Colorado State Director remarked on the impressive collaboration these communities accomplished to meet the needs of current and future generations. Steve Acquafresca, former Mesa County Commissioner, remarked on the importance of preserving traditional uses of the landscape such as ranching, in order to maintain support for protection of these treasured places. Joe Neuhof, director of Colorado Canyons Association, described the amazing effect of the NCA as an outdoor classroom for thousands of students that the BLM and CCA have hosted and educated each year. Our keynote speaker, local historian Zebulon Miracle (The Curator of Curiosity) painted a picture of the NCA's past, including sea beds, dinosaurs, rivers and canyons, Freemont and Ute peoples, ranchers and outlaws, scientists, students, and outdoor enthusiasts, and their benefits for current and future generations of Americans.

March 30 was truly a special day, and I continue to be impressed by the will of the residents of Western Colorado, to come together and agree to protect special places like the canyons of Dominguez and Escalante. Not all Americans agree on the management of their public lands (if they did you wouldn't need guys like me). But in Western Colorado, people are willing to have hard conversations across fence lines, or the hood of a truck, or most often at sterile conference room tables, to find solutions so that all Americans can benefit from the special landscapes this region possesses.

- NCA Manager Collin Ewing



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Dominguez-Escalante

National Conservation Area

Southwest District
Bureau of Land Management
2815 H Road
Grand Junction CO 81506
Phone: 970-244-3000

November 21, 2019

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