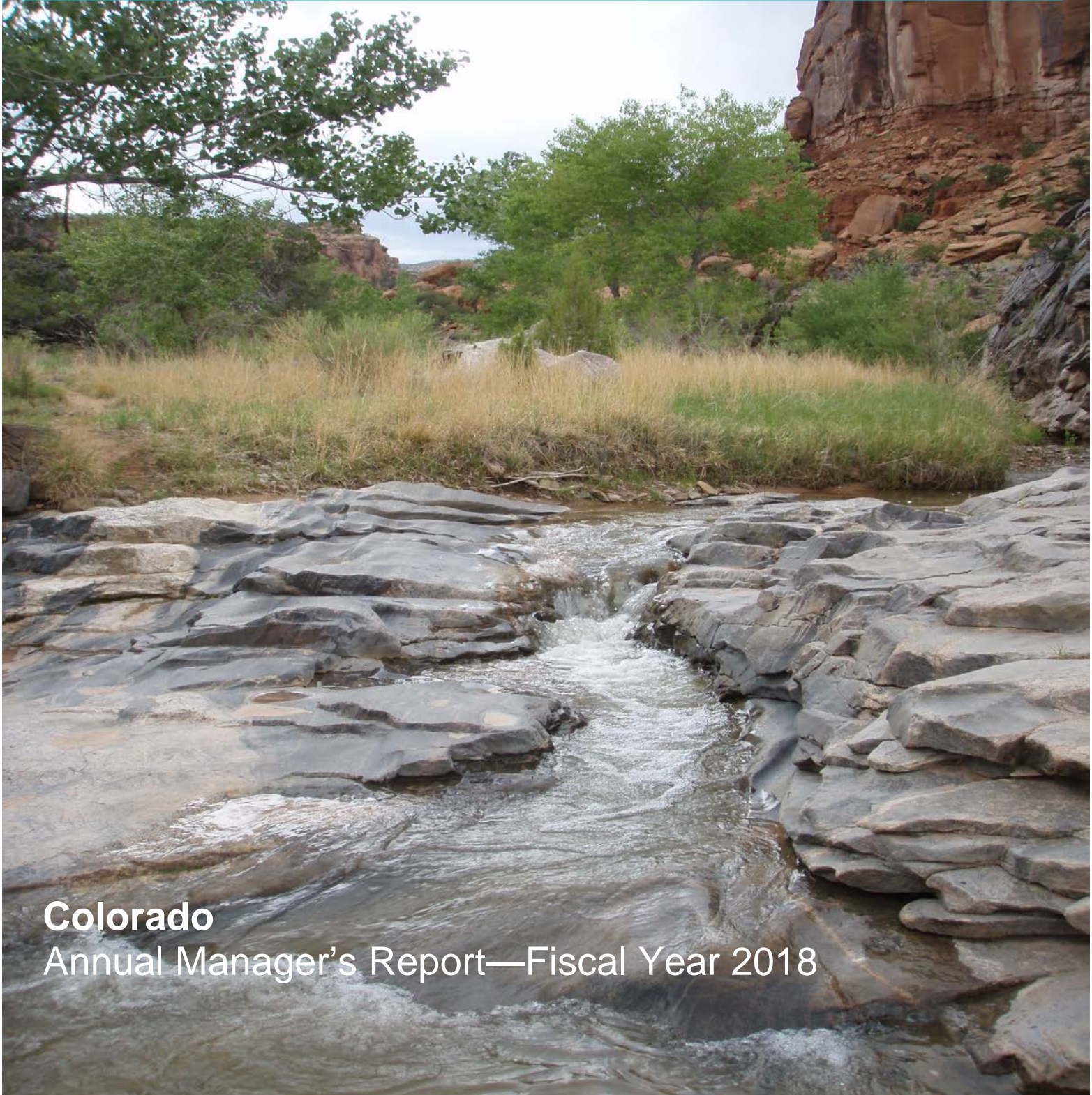




**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

# Dominguez-Escalante

National Conservation Area



**Colorado**

Annual Manager's Report—Fiscal Year 2018

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

# 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 (**DENCA; the 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. DENCA provides one of Colorado's most recognizable landscapes, with red rock canyons, the Gunnison River, and the picturesque Dominguez and Escalante canyons.

## NCA Offerings

The Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area 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 National Conservation Lands.

DENCA 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 DENCA, 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 one active mining claim. Target shooting and gold panning are allowed in most of the NCA, and many families harvest Christmas trees in the NCA under permit from the BLM.

### **Year Accomplishments**

- Travel Management Plan implementation
- Riparian habitat improvement
- Dominguez Canyon Wilderness gate installation
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision for Gunnison Gravels Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) fence
- NEPA decision for cutthroat trout project

### **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



# 1 Dominguez-Escalante Overview

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## Acreage

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

## Budget

Budget Title	Code	Funding
Monuments & Conservation Areas	1711	\$454,000
Rangeland Management	1020	\$60,000
Riparian Management	1040	\$26,000
Wilderness Management	1210	\$24,000
Recreation & Visitor Services	1220	\$50,000
Other BLM Programs		\$54,000
Total Budget		\$668,000

DENCA also receives substantial benefit from partnerships 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

The BLM will continue its focus on being a good neighbor and serving the local communities in southwest Colorado. We recognize the high level of public interest in DENCA and we will remain committed to working with local governments, private citizens and our partners to pursue shared conservation stewardship of the NCA.

## Travel Management Plan Implementation

BLM continues to make travel management a top priority and implement the travel management plan. BLM continued installing signage of the route system, which is almost complete, as all open routes have been signed. This year, the Grand Junction Field Office and DENCA staff have begun to focus on archaeology surveying on some of the more frequently used routes in the DENCA. This year's work focused on the Ninemile Hill area in the northern portion of the NCA. To date, our crew has surveyed 153 acres, which resulted in the recording of six sites and 76 isolated finds. This survey has facilitated the implementation of our travel management plan, allowing routes to be maintained or rehabilitated. In addition, members of the Western Slope ATV Association helped BLM install route width limiters to ensure outstanding riding opportunities on ATV trails.



### **Riparian Habitat improvement**

BLM, CCA, and Western Colorado Conservation Corps (WCCC) are working along the Gunnison River to remove invasive species and improve habitat. In September 2018, two WCCC crews spent two weeks at Leonard's Basin, Leonard's Beach and Sand Flats removing tamarisk, creating burn piles and spreading vegetation for wildlife habitat.



### **Planning and NEPA**

#### **Gunnison Gulch Route Gate**

The BLM has received reports from the public several times over the years of wilderness boundary violations by off-highway vehicles that have driven into the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Area. In 2018, BLM completed planning and implementation to resolve this issue. The BLM and volunteers from Backcountry Hunters and Anglers constructed a gate to avoid future incursions. The gate was placed three-fourths of a mile before the Wilderness boundary to avoid people being able to drive around it. This gate should help to maintain big-game habitat and improve primitive hunting opportunities inside and outside the wilderness, as well as improve outstanding opportunities for other types of primitive recreation and solitude in the wilderness. This area of the Wilderness offers outstanding opportunities for backcountry hunting in GMU 62, an unlimited over-the-counter bull elk unit. Thanks goes to Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) for their support on this project.



#### **Gunnison Gravels Fence**

BLM completed planning for a fence to protect the Gunnison Gravels Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The decision implements direction in the DENCA Resource Management Plan (RMP) to protect the fragile geologic resource of the Gunnison Gravels ACEC.

#### **Invasive Species Removal**

BLM conducted planning for removal of invasive species along the Gunnison River to improve riparian habitat. Utilizing saw crews, Tamarisk, Russian olive and other invasive species are piled to be burned, or are scattered to improve wildlife habitat.

### **NEPA decision for North Fork Escalante**

BLM completed planning for a fish barrier on North Fork of Escalante Creek. In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and Trout Unlimited, when constructed, this barrier will protect native cutthroat trout by avoiding interbreeding with rainbow trout in the creek below.

### **Staffing**

The permanent staff of the DENCA consists of a NCA Manager, a science ecologist shared with McInnis Canyons NCA (MCNCA), a law enforcement officer shared with MCNCA, a National Conservation Lands Specialist shared with MCNCA, and a Natural Resources Specialist. In Fiscal Year FY 2018, seasonal staff included three river rangers shared with the Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO), three Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Trail Crew members shared with MCNCA, two Ecology interns shared with MCNCA, two Direct Hire interns shared with MCNCA, and two recreation maintenance interns shared with MCNCA and Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO).

The NCA receives Special Recreation Permit (SRP) administration, facilities maintenance and other program support from the GJFO and UFO, primarily in the areas of visitor services and contact representatives; 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 one NCA Stewardship Coordinator and one NCA education coordinator, and two Americorps VISTAs who develop and implement volunteer stewardship and youth education programs for MCNCA and DENCA.

## **2**

## **Programs and Accomplishments**

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### **General Accomplishments**

This year marked the ninth anniversary of DENCA. There were a number of projects in the NCA made possible with the hard work of the staff and our many partners. Included in this report are the details of the projects, NEPA work, outreach and education events that have happened over the 2018 fiscal year. Below you will find a list of the biggest accomplishments for 2018.

- Old Spanish Trail Recreation and Development Strategy
- Escalante Field Experience
- Nature Knowledge Days
- Hilltop Youth River Trip
- OHV Crew Grant
- Fish Barrier

### **General Accomplishments Table**



	Number of Visitors	Education Participants	Interpretative Participants	Visitor Center/Contact Station Visits	Hours of Volunteers	Grazing AUMs			
<b>TOTALS</b>	103,372	768	15	1,849	884	14,000			

## Education, Outreach, and Interpretation

### Southern Ute Indian Tribe's Youth Culture Camp

This year, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe invited the BLM to participate in the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's Youth Culture Camp. Our archaeologist led a tour to rock art sites in the NCA and talked to tribal youth about the sites from an archaeological perspective, while elders and tribal leaders shared their Southern Ute perspectives on the sites.

### American Rock Art Research Association Conference

The cultural resources of DENCA were highlighted during the annual conference for the American Rock Art Research Association that was hosted in Grand Junction, Colorado this year. Conference participants enjoyed a rock art tour in Big Dominguez.



### Old Spanish Trail Recreation and Development Strategy

Beginning in the spring of 2018, DENCA, in partnership with BLM's Historic Trails Program Lead and the National Park Service's (NPS) National Trails Intermountain Region, developed a Recreation and Development Strategy for the Old Spanish National Historic Trail. The purpose of this strategy is to explore different possibilities for local communities to increase recognition, general knowledge, and usage of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail. Congress designated the trail in 2002 under the authority of the National Trails System Act, which recognizes the 2,700 mile-long trade route between Santa Fe, New Mexico and Los Angeles, California. The strategy identifies potential projects that could enable the public to find, follow, and experience the trail throughout Mesa and Delta Counties. The Old Spanish National Historic Trail has a diverse, unique and rich history, with plentiful recreational activities.



### **Escalante Field Experience**

This year's Escalante Field Experience, a joint venture between CCA, BLM, The Nature Connection, and CPW was a fantastic event. Approximately 400 seventh grade students from across Delta County participated in the event - hiking to the historic Gunnison Water Wheel, discovering dinosaur tracks in the sandstone, learning about Pinyon Jay life modes and lizard habitats, and discovering the history of American settlement in the NCA at the Captain Smith Cabin.



### **Nature Knowledge Days**



DENCA continues to serve the American family, one of the administration's leadership priorities, through its efforts to educate local youth. In coordination with CCA, the NCA hosted Nature Knowledge Days for 3rd grade students in Delta County. Over the course of the week, over 263 third grade students participated, representing four different schools from within school

district 50J in Delta County, into DENCA. Students rotated between eight different stations where they explored a specific topic before receiving a stamp in their personal copy an activity book.

### **OUT Program**

This year the BLM and CCA participated in the Outdoor Understanding for Teachers (OUT) teacher education program hosted by CPW. DENCA staff took teachers from Delta County into the NCA to educate them about the historic, cultural, geological, and paleontological resources of the area, 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 serve our local communities and get teachers and their students out into the National Conservation Lands.

### **Hilltop Youth River Trip**

In FY 2018, CCA and the BLM took seven students from the Residential Youth Services Program (RYS) of Hilltop on a Gunnison River rafting trip through the NCA. RYS houses students who, for the most part, been recently released by the Department of Youth Corrections. For many of the students it was their first time off the Hilltop Campus in over a year and for all of them it was their first day out in nature. 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.



### **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 of forage for their herd each year. Three grazing authorizations were issued this year. Permittees maintained several range improvement projects in FY 2018, as well as maintaining four ponds and two roads.



## Locatable and Mineral Materials

Two previously undocumented Abandoned Mine Sites were located, including one with easy access and a clear view of Unaweep Canyon.

## Partnerships

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

### Colorado Canyons Association

CCA is the friends group to the local National Conservation Areas. In FY 2018, they helped the BLM staff host river cleanups, trail monitoring classes, and educational trips for area youth. CCA provided crucial assistance in providing visitor services for the NCA at the BLM office, organizing volunteer projects, performing restoration along the Gunnison River, and creating awareness in the community surrounding the stewardship and management of the NCA.



### AmeriCorps VISTA

In 2018, the BLM and CCA were proud to host three AmeriCorps VISTA interns- Killian Rush, Tatyana Sukharnikova, and Alexandra Martin - to help with conserving the NCAs. During their AmeriCorps terms, they assisted with setting up Science, Technology, Engineering and Math programming, and engaged multiple communities about how they can better enjoy public lands. Other projects included hosting and assisting with many community outreach events, and implementing the initial phases of re-vamping CCA's Trail Stewardship Program. They completed these projects, among many others, to help build the capacity of CCA.



### Colorado Mesa University

DENCA staff collaborated with Colorado Mesa University (CMU) for many different projects. The NCA hosted several student interns from CMU's Environmental Science Program. Interns completed assessment, inventory and monitoring studies, continued work on a plant inventory, completed rare plant monitoring,



### Delta Area Mountain Bikers

The Delta Area Mountain Bikers completed a conceptual trail layout and design in the Escalante Triangle Recreation Management zone. The DENCA RMP calls for development of a mountain bike trail system in this area. The BLM matched the grant

funds and Delta Area Mountain Bikers expects to move on to on-the-ground layout in 2019.

### **Other Partnerships**

DENCA also closely collaborated with the Interpretative Association of Western Colorado, Rivers Edge West, CPW, Museums of Western Colorado, Colorado State University (CSU), and CMU on several educational and scientific projects.

## **Recreation and Visitor Services**



### **Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Keeping it Wild Wilderness Character Monitoring**

During 2017 and into 2018, BLM staff conducted a comprehensive monitoring effort to document existing conditions in Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. This effort is part of a strategy specifically designed to be nationally consistent among the four agencies that administer designated wilderness: the NPS, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, and the BLM. The strategy incorporates a wide variety of information and data from interdisciplinary resource programs into single framework

describing what makes wilderness unique among all federal lands – its wilderness character. This effort is a follow-up to the baseline monitoring effort that occurred in 2012. The results of this monitoring effort will provide the BLM with information about how wilderness character in Dominguez Canyon Wilderness may change over time. The final monitoring report is anticipated to be completed during the winter of 2018/2019, and will be submitted to the BLM Colorado State Office.

### **OHV Crew Grant**

Through a CPW Trails Program grant, a three-person OHV crew was hired to be shared between MCNCA and DENCA. The crew worked for six months this summer and accomplished many projects including, parking lot and trail maintenance, and sign installation. The crew also installed eight ATV limiters and participated in National Public Lands Day along with Western Slope ATV Club and Stay the Trail.



### **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. Population monitoring in cooperation with CPW have determined that hybridization between the two trout species has been occurring and poses a direct threat to the survival of the CRCT conservation population. As such, in the fall/winter of 2018, BLM and CPW will install 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.

### **Volunteers**

#### **DENCA Section 110 Survey**

This year in the DENCA, we utilized volunteers and seasonal staff to work with the BLM archaeologists to survey and record cultural resources found near the High Park Heritage Area. During this survey, we found a large prehistoric open campsite. When the results from this survey are finalized they will be compared to the 2013 DENCA Class I model to check the accuracy of the model.



#### **Grand Valley Site Stewards**

In 2018, we were very fortunate to have the support and ability to train a new set of fifteen site stewards to work in the DENCA and surrounding areas. The Grand Valley Site Stewards spent a day up Big Dominguez Canyon learning to monitor sites. We also discussed how to visit sites appropriately and what to do when they meet members of the public who might have questions about archaeological resources in the area. Additionally, over 400 people experienced our outreach efforts in Fiscal Year 2018.



# 3 Science

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## Science

### **Salt Desert Restoration Project**

One experimental plot was installed in DENCA to help determine best management practices for salt desert restoration. These will help improve restoration efforts in drylands.

### **Salt Desert Restoration with the use of Native Shrub Species**

The three NCA's (MCNCA, DENCA, and Gunnison Gorge NCA) were able to leverage a BLM National Conservation Lands science grant and provide funding to expand the partnership to include CSU. Currently a post-doctoral student working under Professor Mark Paschke is reviewing literature and past BLM treatments in salt desert habitats. This review will provide the BLM with a comprehensive review of local successes and failures on BLM lands, as well as successes and failures in other salt desert settings. With this information, the BLM can maximize the likelihood of success with native plant materials provided by the Upper Colorado Native Plant Center.

### **Bighorn Sheep**

In FY 2018, CPW continued a study of Bighorn Sheep within the NCA. This ongoing study started in spring 2012. During this time, they have been able to capture and collar 23 bighorn sheep in the area. Since the study started, four collared bighorn mortalities have occurred due to natural causes. This study will continue through 2019.



### **Arthropod and Gastro-Intestinal parasites of White-tailed Prairie Dogs**

The BLM continued this research started in 2017, as well as continued species identification of trap catches. As funding permits, CMU would like to continue collections at different times and continue to sort and research collected arthropods.

### **Survey of Species Composition and Distribution of Tardigrades in the High Desert**

CMU researchers have been working to survey tardigrades found in mosses in the area and have collected specimens from the MCNCA and DENCA. Research is ongoing throughout both NCAs.

### **Salt Desert Seed Banks**

In partnership with CSU, fieldwork was completed in DENCA to determine seed banks, which can help determine site potential in degraded areas and compare these areas with more intact vegetation communities.

### **Seed Collection**

Native seeds were collected in DENCA to be used in salt desert restoration trails and incorporated into the Seeds of Success program.



# 4 Resources, Objects, Values and Stressors

## Natural Resources including Biological and Environmental Values

Natural and cultural resources are among the 14 purposes of DENCA 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
Natural	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 18
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Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	210,000	42,674	3,996	9
Natural	210,000	210,000	191,383	200
Wildlife	210,000	210,000	210,000	130,000
Riparian	210,000	179,218	3,330	2 Miles

### Stressors Affecting Natural Resources

Stressors on natural and cultural resources and values include wildland fire, invasive plants, recreational use, improper livestock grazing and transmission of 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 18
210,000	210,000	115 miles	17 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 DENCA. 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, wild turkey and chukar.

The DENCA RMP states the goal is to preserve, protect, or enhance the qualities of wilderness character in the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. The monitoring of wilderness character is an ongoing responsibility, and the monitoring of any changes

will help to determine how stewardship decisions influence trends and prioritize actions. In 2017, staff conducted a five-year update to the *Keeping it Wild* Wilderness Character monitoring protocol. The report highlighting the results of this effort are expected late winter 2018.

The practice of Visual Resource Management (VRM), 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 DENCA is to protect the open spaces, the natural aesthetics, and the scenic vistas that are considered a social, economic, and environmental benefit. The entirety of the NCA is managed with VRM Class I and VRM 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**

<b>Resource, Object, or Value</b>	<b>Status of Resource, Object, or Value</b>	<b>Trend</b>
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable

**Recreation Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table**

<b>Resource, Object, or Value</b>	<b>Acres in Unit</b>	<b>Acres Inventoried</b>	<b>Acres Possessing Object</b>	<b>Acres Monitored in FY 18</b>
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 (for example) 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.

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, particularly solitude. Visitor use itself can affect 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)

#### (Name of ROV) Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 18
Scientific	210,000	90,007	210,000	200
Geological	210,000	210,000	126,000	10
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 can 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 they run the gamut of 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 website.

### Education Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Stable

### (Name of ROV) Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 18
210,000	210,000	210,000	1,000

## Stressors Affecting Education

Virtually all of the resources of the NCA can be considered educational resources and are susceptible to vandalism; however, interpretive signs, kiosks and cultural sites are more susceptible.





# 5 Summary of Performance Measure

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<b>Resources, Objects, and Values Status Summary Table</b>		
<b>Resource, Object, or Value</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Trend</b>
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

# 6 Manager's Letter

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I have been fortunate to hold the position of NCA manager for more than five years, and I continue to be impressed by the foresight of the people of western Colorado. In 1999, there was some dialog surrounding expanding the NPS's Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Colorado National Monuments. The communities, seeking a way to balance conservation of these landscapes with traditional uses, came together to ask Congress to designate these landscapes

as National Conservation Areas, to be managed by the BLM. Because of their foresight, McInnis Canyons and Gunnison Gorge NCAs were born. Presumably very happy with the outcome of those designations, the local communities went back to Congress a decade later and successfully asked for NCA protection for a third area, Dominguez-Escalante, which was not under consideration for NPS expansion. The people of western Colorado showed great faith in the BLM by entrusting us to manage these nationally significant landscapes as NCAs. They also placed great expectations on us that we manage them to protect sensitive resources while also continuing to allow traditional uses.

Local ranchers, including Dave Hawks, were involved in the designation of McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. Dave tells me that then Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt visited and promised that traditional uses could continue in an NCA. With this promise, the ranchers got on board. Local ranchers have had the fortune of living and working in these amazing landscapes for generations. Dave put it something like this: *If you take a precious gem, and put it on display, where people can hold it and view it up close, people will really appreciate the gem. If you put that gem behind bulletproof glass, and place it off limits, a few people will visit the museum and look through the glass, but it loses its luster. While some gems are so valuable they need to be placed off limits to all humans, the NCAs will be most valuable to people if they are available to use and enjoy.*

It is a challenge protecting world-class resources, while fostering important traditional resource uses. Most know about hiking in Big Dominguez Canyon, ATV riding in Cactus Park, and heritage tourism in Escalante Canyon, but many people are not aware of the other traditional uses that are just as spectacular. DENCA is one of only four desert bighorn sheep hunting areas in Colorado. Each year four of the 13 once in a lifetime desert bighorn sheep hunting licenses issued by CPW across the state are for the herd in DENCA. Residents of Whitewater enjoy walking their dogs in the NCA near their house. Our partner, Colorado Canyons Association, even has a "Dogs of the NCAs" calendar at the CCA bookstore! The Gunnison River has great turkey and waterfowl

hunting. Big mule deer bucks and bull elk call the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Area home.

The DENCA allows grazing on 16 allotments, where 12 local ranchers' cattle and sheep spend part of the year fattening up. These ranches are important to local economies and have sustained local families on the landscape for generations.

The Ninemile Hill Communications site hosts six towers that provide important services to providers like Qwest, cell phone providers, and local radio stations.

I believe the success of this relatively new system of National Conservation Lands rests upon the balancing act; the people value their protected lands when they are allowed to use them. This year I have been fortunate to have some experiences that really brought that paradigm to the forefront of my mind. I am proud that so many people around here choose to belong to the NCA community!

- 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

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