



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

# McInnis Canyons

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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# McInnis Canyons

National Conservation Area

## Designating Authority

**Designating Authority:** Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-353), October 24, 2000, renamed through Public Law 108-400, October 30, 2004

**Date of Designation:** October 24, 2000

## Additional Designations

Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness  
Old Spanish National Historic Trail

## Site Description

McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (NCA) forms a part of the Uncompahgre Plateau, which rises like a giant rolling wave above the Grand Valley of Colorado. It encompasses 123,460 acres of rugged canyons that descend to the Colorado River and contain some of the most spectacular landforms found anywhere in the country. Rattlesnake Canyon, Dinosaur Hill, Devil's Canyon, and Mee Canyon are just a few of the areas that contribute to the mystery, splendor, and diversity of this landscape. It is home to coyotes, bald eagles, mountain lions, a variety of small mammals, and songbirds.

## NCA Offerings

McInnis Canyons NCA has many recreational opportunities. Visitors to the NCA can participate in an exceptionally wide variety of recreational activities, including world-class mountain biking, river rafting, hiking, camping, hunting, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel, and wildlife viewing. Visitors can also enjoy a broad range of recreational settings, including remote wilderness, riparian wetlands, and culturally or historically significant sites. The 142-mile Kokopelli Trail runs through the NCA to Moab, Utah, and the Colorado River winds its way for 19 miles through the spectacular canyon country of the NCA.

Communications sites in the NCA host 17 towers/facilities. The first right-of-way (ROW) grants were issued in the mid-1950s to utility companies such as Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company, Public Service Company, and Grand Valley Transmission Company. The first ROW for a commercial broadcast station was granted to Jan-Di Broadcasting for KEKB in 1984. Since then, the BLM has issued additional ROWs for television and radio broadcasting facilities. Other facilities provide public safety communications, such as the Grand Junction Regional Communications Center, responsible for answering 911 and non-emergency calls, the Western Colorado

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Amateur Radio Club, serving local volunteer organizations such as Mesa County Search and Rescue, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's SKYWARN volunteers.

### **Year Accomplishments**

- Nature Knowledge Days in McInnis Canyons
- OHV Crew Grant
- Connecting with Communities
- New Interpretive Signs
- Devil's Cabin Restoration
- Hilltop Discovery Hikes
- River Trips for High Schools and Middle Schools

### **Future Priorities and Opportunities**

- Improved camping facilities in Rabbit Valley
- Improved opportunities for April and October river trips by extending the fee calendar, which will improve management and discourage no-shows
- New mixed-use, single-track trails in Rabbit Valley as directed by the Resource Management Plan
- New equestrian trailhead in Rabbit Valley
- Construction of the Skinner Cabin accessibility trail

## **McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area**

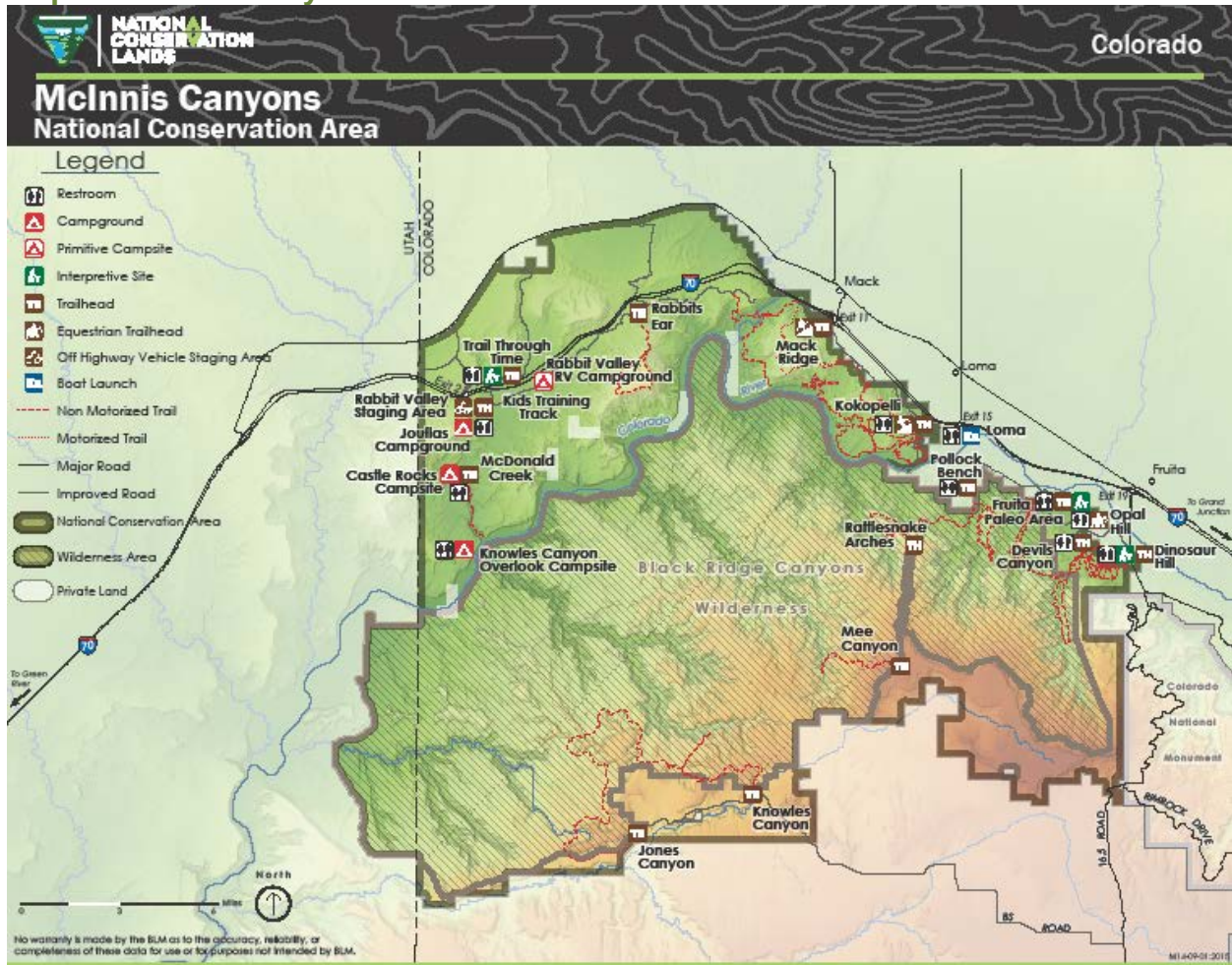
2815 H Road  
Grand Junction CO 81507  
Phone: 970-244-3000

Unit Manager: Collin Ewing

Site Web Address: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/colorado/mcinnis-canyons>

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# Map of McInnis Canyons NCA



# 1 McInnis Canyons NCA Overview

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## Acreage

<b>Total Acres in Unit</b>	123,460 Acres
<b>BLM Acres</b>	123,460 Acres
<b>Other Federal Acres</b>	25 Acres (FAA)
<b>State Acres*</b>	0
<b>Private Acres*</b>	814 Acres

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

## Budget

Budget Title	Code	Funding
Monuments & Conservation Areas	1711	\$532,000
Soils and Rangeland Management	1020	\$25,000
Water, Fisheries and Riparian Management	1160	\$24,000
Wilderness Management	1210	\$59,000
Recreation & Visitor Services	1220	\$109,000
Other BLM Programs	various	\$72,000
Ruby-Horsethief camping fees	1232	\$120,000
Total Budget		\$941,000

McInnis

Canyons NCA receives benefits from partnerships like the NCA's Friends group, Colorado Canyons Association (CCA). CCA holds fundraisers, applies for grants, receives donations, and collects membership dues, which they use to further the community stewardship, education, and restoration programs in the NCA.



## Current Areas of Focus

### Rabbit Valley Camping

The focus in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 was developing a plan to better manage the camping issues in the Rabbit Valley area. The BLM issued a decision to make improvements to the area and expand developed camping opportunities to approximately 72 sites among four campgrounds, to accommodate a mix of tent, trailer, and recreational vehicles. Long-term, all camping in Rabbit Valley will only be permitted in developed campgrounds. Fees will be charged for camping at the campgrounds. This work will continue in FY 2020 with the first phases of implementation.



## Planning and NEPA

### Rabbit Valley Camping

An environmental assessment was completed regarding the development and expansion of campgrounds at Rabbit Valley. Additionally, a business plan was presented to the Southwest Resource Advisory Council, and they recommended the BLM implement it by charging an expanded amenity fee for camping.

### Rabbit Valley Equestrian Trail Ride

The BLM issued a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) to the North America Trail Ride Conference Region 3 to conduct a competitive equestrian trail ride event in Rabbit Valley. The term of the permit is for five years (2019 through 2023). Events would be conducted during October each year. The proponent proposed conducting the event October 12 and 13 of 2019. The event staging would occur in the large gravel parking lot 1.4 miles east of the main Rabbit Valley Staging area. The proponent anticipated a maximum total of 60 participants. There were three water stations proposed. The event organizers hauled water to these locations in a 300-gallon tank in the back of a pickup truck. According to the proponent, these events do not attract many spectators, so no spectator areas were proposed. All courses were marked on existing trails and roads designated open for public use. Proposed trails and roads in Utah were evaluated and approved by the BLM Moab Field Office. The proposal included four portable toilets at the staging area. Most campers would use RVs that include self-contained sewer systems. All communications and emergency medical staff were located at the staging area or along designated roads throughout Rabbit Valley.

### Upper Bench, Lower Bench, and Battleship Allotments permit renewal

This environmental assessment was prepared by the BLM to analyze the issuance of a 10-year grazing permit for livestock grazing use on the Upper Bench, Lower Bench, and Battleship Allotments. The Upper Bench and Lower Bench allotments are entirely within

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McInnis Canyons NCA and include motorized use in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness. The BLM is currently in the process of reviewing a protest of the proposed decision.

### **Status of the Resource Management Plan**

The Colorado (McInnis) Canyons NCA Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision were completed in October 2004.

### **Status of Activity Plans**

The 2004 RMP was detailed and included many of the components of an activity level plan. The RMP included travel management route designations and specified new routes to be constructed. The RMP also identified new gate placements, day use areas, parking areas, and direction for posting visitor use information. Recreation outcomes, setting prescriptions, management and marketing actions, administrative and monitoring actions for each management zone were also included.

Most of these actions have been completed, and additional needs have been identified in areas of high recreation use such as Ruby-Horsethief Canyons, Rabbit Valley, and the Fruita Front Country. As a result, these two activity level planning efforts were completed in 2011-2012 for Ruby-Horsethief Canyons and the Fruita Front Country and are now being implemented. The BLM has recently begun work on an activity level plan for Rabbit Valley.

### **Status of the RMP Implementation Strategy**

In 2018, the BLM Colorado State Office came to Grand Junction to conduct an evaluation of the 2004 Resource Management Plan. They gathered an evaluation team, reviewed the RMP documents, provided an RMP evaluation questionnaire to the field staff and managers, conducted interviews of field staff and managers, and developed a draft evaluation report, making recommendations on needed maintenance, implementation planning, and amendments, to keep the RMP relevant. The final report was completed in 2019, and the BLM will develop a strategy for implementing the recommendations in 2020.

### **Staffing**

The permanent staff of McInnis Canyons NCA consists of an NCA manager, a science ecologist, a law enforcement officer, a National Conservation Lands Specialist, a career seasonal OHV Ranger, a Supervisory Park Ranger, and a River Ranger. All permanent positions except for the Supervisory Park Ranger and River Ranger are shared with the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. In FY 2019, seasonal staff included a Wilderness Ranger, an Ecology intern, a Wilderness intern, an Old Spanish Trail intern, two Off Highway Vehicle Trail Crew members, and two recreation maintenance interns. All seasonal staff except for the Wilderness Ranger are shared with the Dominguez-Escalante NCA, and the two recreation maintenance interns are also shared with the Grand Junction Field Office.





The NCA receives Special Recreation Permit administration, facilities maintenance, and other program support from the Grand Junction Field Office. This support contributes to 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 Colorado Canyons Association (CCA) to hire an NCA Lands Program Coordinator and an NCA River Program Coordinator, as well as an AmeriCorps VISTA to plan volunteer stewardship and youth education programs for McInnis Canyons and Dominguez-Escalante NCAs.

# 2 Programs and Accomplishments

## General Accomplishments

The year 2019 marked the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of McInnis Canyon NCA. Several projects in the NCA were made possible with the hard work of the NCA staff and the NCA's many partners. Included in this report are the details of the projects, NEPA work, outreach, and education events that happened over FY 2019. The NCA's biggest accomplishments in 2019 include:

- Nature Knowledge Days in McInnis Canyons
- OHV Crew Grant
- Connecting with Communities
- New Interpretive Signs
- Devil's Cabin Restoration
- Hilltop Discovery Hikes
- River Trips for High Schools and Middle Schools

## General Accomplishments Table

	Number of Visitors	Education Participants	Interpretative Participants	Visitor Center/Contact Station Visits	Hours of Volunteers	SRP Events		
<b>TOTALS</b>	264,390	900	25	1,849	6732	1,075		

## Education, Outreach, and Interpretation

### Nature Knowledge Days in McInnis Canyons

Working in partnership with CCA, over 900 third graders paid a visit to Devil's Canyon within McInnis Canyons NCA. Students rotated between eight different stations where they explored topics ranging from geology and biological soil crust to archaeology and historic ranching. Following standards-based educational programming, students participated in outdoor learning experiences that complement and reinforce the classroom experience, increase understanding of the cultural and natural resources within our NCAs, and gain knowledge of the skills and ethics that will ensure a sustainable future for our NCAs. Students learned from dozens of expert volunteers and documented their experiences in their individual passport booklets. Usually, this event happens once annually. This year, thanks to our wonderful volunteers and partner groups, NCA staff members were able to make Nature Knowledge Days available to

students in both the spring and the fall of FY 2019. Each event was a huge success, and NCA staff plan to continue offering this event twice a year.

### **Hilltop Discovery Residential Youth Services Hikes**

Students learned the Leave No Trace principle of “leave what you find” while interacting with the fossils on the trail. Students learned why leaving artifacts and fossils in place is important as well as how to differentiate between fossils, archaeological remains, and rocks through direct field identifications. The students discovered how the environment of Colorado was different in the past and how ancient Earth forces have shaped the



Grand Valley. Students also learned about government and non-government jobs that allow people to work outside and improve our shared public lands. Students studied and explored their environment through illustrations and journaling.

### **Dual Immersion Academy Fruita Paleo Area Hike**

While on a hike, students learned about the history of human use and understanding of fossil resources in the Fruita Paleo Area, Leave No Trace, and the types of fossil animals found within the Fruita Paleo Area and the NCA.

### **Riverside Educational Center Paleo Hike**



Students learned about the Leave No Trace principle of “leave what you find” while interacting with the fossils on the trail. Different careers that allow people to work outside and improve our shared public lands were discussed. Students were also able to learn and explore their environment through illustrations and journaling.

### **Classroom Pre-Trip Visits**

Before Nature Knowledge Days and river trips, a BLM representative went to classrooms and taught students the 7 principles of Leave No Trace. This was beneficial to set expectations for students

and teachers before field trips. Students learned what to pack, and not pack, for their outdoor excursions, as well as how to behave when outdoors. These talks prevented students from wearing inappropriate attire, reduced waste, and made students more aware of what items they brought and whether they could be packed out.

### **Riverside Educational Center River Trip**

Students rafted 25 miles down through the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater, Utah. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, and leadership while floating through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. Students spent one night camping at the Catalpa property.



### **OWL Overnight River Trip**

Students rafted 25 miles down through the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater, Utah. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, and leadership while floating through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. Students spent one night camping at the Catalpa property.

### **Juniper Ridge Community School River Trip**

Students rafted 25 miles down the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater, Utah. The eighth-grade class trip celebrated the culmination of the class and their progress throughout the year. This trip was a powerful way for the students to experience adventure, challenge, and social bonding in the outdoors. The trip was designed to build and support each student’s confidence in a structured and supervised setting. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, leadership, and resiliency while rafting through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons.

### **Girl Scouts River Trip**

A group of Girl Scouts learned about desert ecology, local history, leadership, and river safety while rafting 25 miles through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons on this flatwater section of the Colorado River. Participants spent one night camping at Colorado Canyon Association's Catalpa Youth Camp.



### **Eureka! Science Museum River Trip**

Students rafted 25 miles down through the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater, Utah. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, and leadership while floating through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. Students spent one night camping at Mee Corner and one night camping at the Catalpa property.

### **Mesa County Partners River Trip**

Students rafted 25 miles down through the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater, Utah. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, and leadership while floating through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. Students spent one night camping at Mee Corner and one night camping at the Catalpa property.

### **Independence Academy Charter School River Trip**

Students rafted 25 miles down through the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater, Utah. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, and leadership while floating through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. Students spent one night camping at the Catalpa property.

### **Central High School River Trip**

Students rafted 25 miles down through the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater, Utah. They learned about river rafting, desert ecology, and leadership while floating through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. Students spent one night camping at the Catalpa property. Students also helped wrap cottonwoods at May Flats to help improve riparian habitat along the Colorado River.

## Grazing

The BLM manages 10 grazing permits on 21 allotments for a total of 7,570 Animal Unit Months within McInnis Canyons NCA.

The BLM is continuing work with permittees in three allotments to renew their grazing permit motorized use agreement for management of livestock within the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Area. An environmental assessment was prepared by the BLM to analyze the issuance of a 10-year grazing permit for livestock grazing use on the Upper Bench, Lower Bench, and Battleship Allotments. The BLM is currently in the process of reviewing public comments.



## Paleontology

### Permits

There are three active excavation permits in McInnis Canyons NCA, including Mygatt Moore, Tom's Place, and the Callison Quarry.

### Fossil Poaching Incident

One fossil poaching incident occurred in 2018 in which legal charges have been decided and the trial has been completed. The poach site required approximately 80 total man-hours split between multiple specialties and 6-8

volunteers and interns. It required over 200 acres of survey to locate and understand the extent of the bone-bearing strata (a probable 'lag deposit' of sandstone at least 500 meters long, and up to 300 meters wide), plus a number of independent localities near the poached horizon. The individual pled guilty to one count of a felony PRPA violation. The individual was sentenced a \$4,100 restitution and time served with probation. We have received several small payments toward the restitution.

## Partnerships

### Colorado Canyons Association

CCA is the Friends group to the local National Conservation Areas. In FY 2019, they helped 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, and creating awareness in the



community surrounding the stewardship and management of the NCA.

### **AmeriCorps VISTA**

In 2019, the BLM and CCA were proud to host two AmeriCorps VISTA interns with duties in McInnis Canyons NCA. In FY 2019, Alexandra Martin finished her service and new VISTA Alice Corcoran began her service. During their AmeriCorps terms, they engaged multiple communities to learn how they can better enjoy public lands and assisted with setting up Science, Technology, Engineering and Math programming. 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 and the BLM.



### **Colorado Mesa University**

McInnis Canyons NCA staff partnered with Colorado Mesa University (CMU) for many different projects. McInnis Canyons 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, provided visitor information services, conducted wilderness monitoring, and assisted with archaeological inventory and data recovery.



### **The Conservation Fund**

The Conservation Fund (TCF) is partnering with the BLM for the Crow Bottom Acquisition to protect a key inholding and provide increased access to recreation opportunities along the Colorado River in McInnis Canyons NCA. In the past year, TCF initiated discussions with the private landowner of the property, contracted the appraisal, and conducted preliminary due diligence for the acquisition. The private landowner has expressed desire to sell the property to TCF for later conveyance to the BLM, subject to the federal appraisal process, valuation, other due diligence, and availability of funding for the BLM to purchase the property.



### **Grand Valley Trails Alliance (GVTA)**

BLM Recreation staff participates in monthly GVTA roundtable meetings that address trail development and maintenance projects/issues throughout the Grand Junction Field Office, including McInnis Canyons NCA.



### **City of Fruita Coordination Meetings**

BLM managers met regularly with City of Fruita employees to develop projects involving BLM and City of Fruita lands. The BLM-Fruita partnership projects include Mack Ridge Trail planning and construction, planning for and completing the



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paved bike path from Fruita to the Loma boat ramp and Kokopelli Trailhead, and trash removal at the Devil's Canyon Trailhead.



## **Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)**

The GOCO Inspire initiative aims to connect youth and their families to the outdoors. A coalition of partners from the City of Grand Junction, Mesa Land Trust, CCA, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, DIA, School District 51, and the Riverside Education Center received a planning grant to develop programs, pathways, and places that bring youth closer to the outdoors.



## **Other Partnerships**

McInnis Canyons NCA staff also closely collaborated with CPW, Colorado State University, Rivers Edge West, Western Colorado Conservation Corps (WCCC), Grand Valley Trails Alliance, Grand Mesa Backcountry Horsemen, Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Association, Motorcycle Trail Riders Association, Museums of Western Colorado, Hilltop Trail Crew, and School District 51.

## **Recreation and Visitor Services**

### **Devil's Canyon Cabin Rehabilitation**

The BLM McInnis Canyons NCA partnered with the WCCC to restore the Devil's Canyon Cabin in the Black Ridge Wilderness. This eligible property represents a typical line camp structure related to historic grazing in McInnis Canyons NCA. The cabin is along a popular recreation trail and is of interest to recreationists. Over time, the roofing materials and felt paper lining on the walls have deteriorated. To restore the cabin and protect it from the elements, the BLM and WCCC crew brought in materials on foot, re-papered and tarred the roof, and re-papered the walls. Crews also cleaned up modern trash in the area, re-hinged the door and sheep pen gate, and nailed shut the cold storage box which was being misused by some visitors. The resulting restoration will lead to a longer life span of the cabin and an enhanced visitor experience to the area.

### Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compatible Skinner Cabin Trail

The Skinner Cabin trail was designed specifically to meet the standards set by the giving those with disabilities more access to outdoors and our public lands. The BLM was obtain funding to design and build an ADA accessible trail in McInnis Canyons NCA.



ADA by the able to

from NCA

The new trail is one-mile round trip, starting the Fruita Paleo Area in McInnis Canyons and leading to the historical Skinner Cabin. Between 2016 and 2017, there was a restoration project at the site to help preserve the history of the cabin for future generations. The project was a collaborative effort between the BLM, Museums of Western CO, and School District 51.

### Secretary Bernhardt Visit

In September of 2019, the Secretary Interior David Bernhardt visited Canyons NCA with the District Stephanie Connolly, State Director Connell, and NCA Manager Collin. They toured the new Skinner Cabin and the Rabbit Valley area to discuss NCA management.



of the McInnis Manager Jamie Ewing. ADA trail



### Geology Trail Sign Reprint and Installation

With funding assistance from the Grand Junction Geological society, the BLM was able to reprint signs for the Geology Trail in McInnis Canyons NCA. The signs, which were initially installed in 2016, had faced significant deterioration from various weather factors and sun exposure. The reprint allowed for signs to be more weather resistant and to account for sun exposure. In total, 26 signs were replaced.

### New Brochures

In 2019, the BLM produced new brochures to provide public information on the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Area, including Rattlenake Arches and Mee Canyon, and on the Floating Ruby-Horsethief Canyons.

## Mack Ridge Trails

BLM personnel completed final flagging of three new trail segments (previously authorized in an environmental assessment) in the Mack Ridge/Kokopelli Trail system. Paid for by the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association, professional trail building company Singletrack Trails completed construction of the Steve's Loop reroute (0.9 miles), Wrangler extension (1.7 miles), and Lower Moore Fun (0.6 miles).



## OHV Crew Grant

Through a CPW Trails Program grant, a three-person OHV crew was hired to be shared between McInnis Canyons NCA and Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The crew worked for six months this summer and accomplished many projects, including parking lot and trail maintenance as well as sign installation. OHV staff maintained and updated approximately 20 signs within Rabbit Valley, installed two single track limiters with fencing, completed trail work on trails 2/3/4/8, updated and maintained kiosks, and removed weeds from staging, camping, and parking areas in the spring and fall of 2019. The staff routinely made contact with trail users, often receiving unsolicited positive feedback. Employees surveyed and recorded sites for expanded camping amenities, assigned site numbers and installed signs at Joufflas camp, and worked with the Leave No Trace non-profit to disseminate brochures, maps, and other information on Leave No Trace principles as well as OHV etiquette and law.



## **McInnis Canyons NCA Wilderness Characteristics Inventory**

The BLM continuously updates its inventory of lands possessing wilderness characteristics as directed by section 201 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. A comprehensive inventory of lands with wilderness characteristics has never been completed for McInnis Canyons NCA. Beginning in 2017, BLM staff assessed the merits of lands in McInnis Canyons NCA outside of Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness, identifying the area's naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, and supplemental values such as cultural and geological resources present. Seven wilderness characteristics inventory units have been identified, extending to the Utah border. Currently, McInnis Canyons NCA staff is in coordination with the Moab Field Office to finalize the inventory.



## **Plein Air Event**

The 2019 Monuments and Canyons Plein Air Invitational occurred October 2019. In its third year, the event raised money for the Colorado National Monument Association as well as CCA.



CCA was able to provide six artists a two-day plein air float trip down the Colorado River in Ruby Horsethief Canyon.

The artists had two group paint-outs, with one of them occurring at the Devil's Canyon Trail in McInnis Canyons NCA. The consensus from the artists was that this part of Colorado is one of the most beautiful they had ever seen, and that many did not know about it.

The three-day exhibition was hosted in downtown Grand Junction, Colorado. Artists were able to relax after their busy week of painting and sample wines as well as meet the public and talk about the lands in which they painted.

## **Colorado River Tamarisk Removal, Pile Burning, and Weed Spraying**

In partnership with WCCC, 20 acres were treated for weeds along the Colorado River. Tamarisk was removed and sprayed with BLM-approved herbicide. Secondary weeds including Whitetop and Russian Knapweed were also sprayed along the river corridor.

## Volunteers



### **McInnis Canyons River Cleanup**

The BLM partnered with CCA to host the 8<sup>th</sup> annual McInnis Canyons River cleanup. Volunteers spent two days on the Colorado River in Ruby-Horsethief Canyons and donated 165 hours to picking up trash on a 25-mile section of the river.

### **Trail and Campsite Cleanups**

In FY 2019, multiple trash cleanups occurred on our public lands thanks to McInnis Canyon NCA's generous volunteers. There were cleanups along 4 roads and 3 campsites, totaling 7 cleanup events throughout the year. Trailside litter was removed and abandoned camps were restored.

### **Rabbit Valley Campfire Ring Dispersal**

Ten volunteers assisted the BLM with dispersing fire rings in Rabbit Valley.

### **National Public Lands Day Trail Maintenance**

For National Public Lands Day, 25 community members, including members from Mesa Monument Striders and Great Old Broads for Wilderness, helped repaint the Devil's Canyon Trailhead kiosk, installed signage along the trails, and restored trails by planting vegetation.

### **Opal Hill Kiosk Installation**

Six volunteers from Grand Mesa Backcountry Horsemen helped install a new information kiosk at the Opal Hill Trailhead. Previously, nothing was at the trailhead. Due to this work, visitors will now be able to learn about equestrian parking at the trailhead as well as view a map of the area before they embark on their hike.



# 3 Science

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## Science

### **Salt Desert Restoration Project**

One experimental plot was installed in McInnis Canyons NCA in partnership with the Upper Colorado Native Plant Center to help determine best management practices and the best sources for native plants in salt desert restoration. Additionally, a second experimental plot was installed in McInnis Canyons NCA as part of the U.S. Geological Survey Restoration Assessment and Monitoring Program for the Southwest Program. These will help improve restoration efforts in drylands. Monitoring has occurred in these plots.

### **Amphibian Surveys**

Amphibian surveys were conducted to determine presence of bullfrogs with the use of eDNA. The BLM partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey and Colorado Mesa University to complete the surveys. The field and laboratory work on this project have been completed, and it is in the assessment and data analyzation stage.

### **Salt Desert Seed Banks**

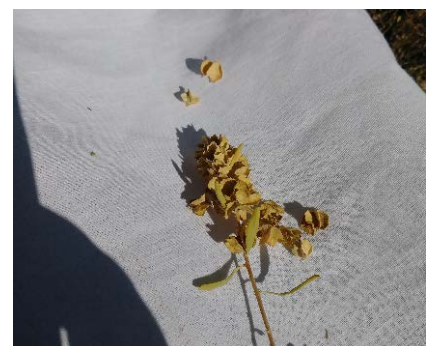
In partnership with Colorado State University, field work was completed in McInnis Canyons NCA and Dominguez-Escalante NCA to study seed banks, which can determine site potential in degraded areas, and compare these areas with more intact vegetation communities. Field work and data analysis for this project has been completed, and it is currently in the final writing stages.

### **Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring Baseline Data/Transition Plan**

Baseline Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring data was collected according to the Northwest district design. McInnis Canyons NCA, in cooperation with the Grand Junction Field Office, is working on incorporating Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring into NEPA documents and field office level decisions. This project is ongoing and will continue in FY 2020.

### **Seed Collection**

Native seeds were collected in both McInnis Canyons NCA and Dominguez-Escalante NCA to be used in salt desert restoration trails and incorporated into the Seeds of Success program. This project also contributed to a regional Seeds of Success collection of *Phacelia crenulata* in FY 2019.



## 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. Monitoring is done by collecting data using various scientific monitoring protocols. These methods include 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, McInnis Canyons NCA was monitored 6 times.



## Endangered Bonytail Stocking

Salt Creek, located west of Grand Junction in McInnis Canyons NCA, was stocked for the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive year on BLM lands with endangered Bonytail by CPW with BLM assistance. These fish are fitted with passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags prior to stocking so that they can be monitored long term. In addition to endangered Bonytail, PIT tag antennas on Salt Creek have documented use by endangered Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker. Continued stocking and monitoring will be done with CPW partners to continue to document native and endangered fish use of this creek.



# 4 Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors

## Cultural Resources

Cultural resources are among the primary purposes of McInnis Canyons NCA listed in its enabling legislation. The NCA enjoys an extraordinary abundance of these resources, including an array of prehistoric and historic sites and artifacts.

The BLM is committed to conserving, protecting, and restoring the unique values of the NCA and furthering the goals of the BLM's National Conservation Lands, of which the NCA is a part. The NCA's 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.

**Cultural Resources (includes archeological and historical) Status and Trend Table**

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Stable

**Cultural Resources Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Table**

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 2019
123,000	22,757	1,232	17

## Stressors Affecting Cultural Resources

Stresses on cultural resources and values include anthropogenic wildland fire, recreational use, livestock grazing, right-of-way proximity, air pollution, theft, surface disturbance, vandalism, and increased access.

## Natural Resources, including Biological and Environmental Values

Natural resources are among the purposes of McInnis Canyons NCA and are listed in its enabling legislation, and the NCA enjoys an extraordinary abundance of these resources, including an array of rare and common plant and animal species.

**Natural Resources Status and Trend Table**

Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Vegetation	Good	Stable
Biological	Good	Stable



**Natural Resources Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Table**

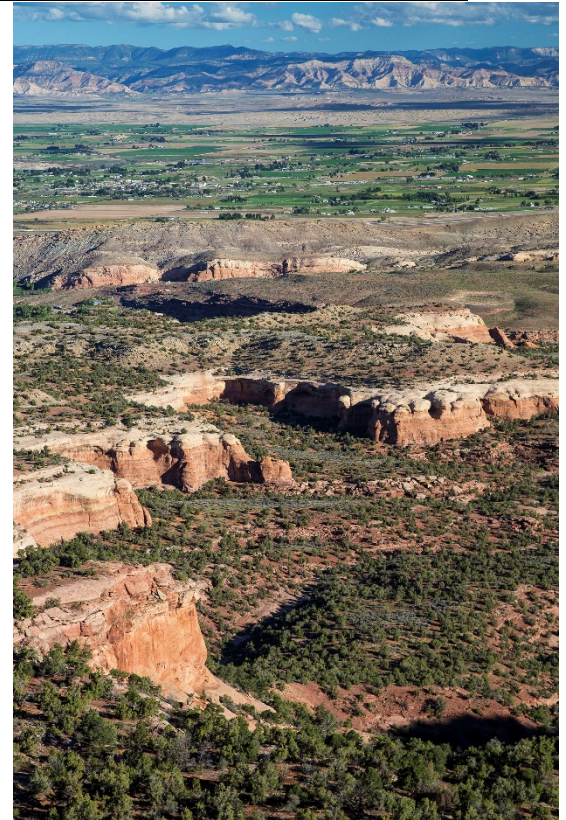
Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 2019
Vegetation	123,000	123,000	123,000	400
Biological	123,000	123,000	123,000	650

**Stressors Affecting Natural Resources**

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

**Water Resources, including Natural and Environmental Values**

Nineteen miles of the Colorado River flow through McInnis Canyons NCA and the side canyons have seasonal flows resulting from snowmelt and summer rainstorms. These aquatic resources are important to fish and wildlife, and the river is popular for visitors to boat and camp. BLM staff members work to expand understanding of these resources through assessment, inventory, and monitoring.



**Water Resources Status and Trend Table**

Resources, Object, or Value	Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Water Resources	Good overall	Stable and Improving

**Water Resources Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Table**

Resources, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 19
Water Resources	123,000 acres	123,000acres	1,000	6

## Stressors Affecting Water Resources

Invasive aquatic plants, recreational use, and improper livestock grazing can threaten air, soil, and water resources.

## Recreational Resources, including Wilderness and Scenic Values

Congress designated the 75,479-acre Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness in 2000 as part of the Colorado Canyons NCA and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000. The entirety of the Wilderness is located within McInnis Canyons NCA. The BLM is committed to protect the Wilderness in such a manner as to preserve its 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.

Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness has long been recognized as one of Colorado's premier wildlands, with sandstone arches, alcoves, monoliths, hoodoos, and spires scattered throughout. The Wilderness, natural in character with negligible human imprints, is characterized by a high east-west ridgeline draining north to the Colorado River through the canyon network. Human imprints on the upland mesas include fence lines, stock reservoirs, and trails that minimally impact the naturalness of the area due to unobtrusive locations and natural screening.

The Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness provides outstanding opportunities for solitude due to the area's size, configuration, topographic variety, and vegetative screening, and it is greatly

accentuated by the area's ability to disperse visitors horizontally and vertically through the landscape.

The Wilderness provides outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation based on outstanding scenery, landscape variety, geologic features, and cultural and paleontological resources. The area's topographic diversity, unusual geologic features, and intermittent streams appeal to hikers, while regionally unique phenomena, such the arches in Rattlesnake Canyon and the alcove in Mee Canyon, enhance the wilderness experience.

Other popular activities in Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness include horseback riding, climbing, hunting, nature study, photography, wildlife viewing, and backpacking.

The Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness possesses a number of outstanding geological, paleontological, archaeological, and ecological values, and has outstanding opportunities for education and scientific research.

The Colorado Canyons Resource Management Plan established four management goals for Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness:

- To provide for the long-term protection and preservation of the area’s Wilderness character under a principle of non-degradation. The area’s natural condition, outstanding opportunities for solitude, outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation, and any ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value present will be managed so that they will remain unimpaired;
- To manage the Wilderness area for the use and enjoyment of visitors in a manner that will leave the area unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as Wilderness;
- To manage the area using the minimum tool, equipment or structure necessary to successfully, safely, and economically accomplish the objective; and,
- To manage non-conforming but accepted use permitted by the Wilderness Act and subsequent laws in a manner that will prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the area’s Wilderness character.

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 open spaces, natural aesthetics, and scenic vistas within McInnis Canyons NCA are considered a social, economic, and environmental benefit. All actions proposed in the NCA will be planned and implemented to meet the objectives for the Visual Resource Management classes of the area.

**Recreation Status and Trend Table**

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

**Recreation Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Table**

<b>Resource, Object, and Value</b>	<b>Acres in Unit</b>	<b>Acres Inventoried</b>	<b>Acres Possessing Object</b>	<b>Acres Monitored in FY 2019</b>
Recreation	123,000	123,000	123,000	50,000
Wilderness	123,000	123,000	75,550	75,550
Scenic	123,000	123,000	123,000	50,000

### **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, especially with increased use due to local and regional population growth. With increased use of public lands, user interactions can also influence recreation experiences. Some interactions can be positive which would enhance an experience, while some can be negative, degrading an experience. Right-of-way proximity and air pollution may also threaten the integrity of the recreational experience.

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. Other stressors that affect wilderness character include livestock grazing and invasive weeds.

### **Scientific, Geological, and Paleontological Resources**

The scientific resources of McInnis Canyons NCA are cited in its enabling legislation as one of the purposes for its designation, as are the geological, cultural, paleontological, biological, and wildlife resources, all of which are suitable for scientific study and abundant in the NCA. Scientific study of these resources benefits the scientific community as a whole and effectively informs the BLM's management of the NCA. 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 and 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, and 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	Stable
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good Overall	Some vandalism, but stable overall.

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

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 2019
Scientific	123,000	123,000	123,000	100
Geological	123,000	123,000	123,000	5
Paleontological	123,000	150	123,000	50

### Stressors Affecting Scientific, Geological and Paleontological Resources

Scientific resources are affected by anything that impacts geological, cultural, paleontological, biological, or wildlife resources. Geological and paleontological resources are primarily affected by theft and vandalism.

## Wildlife Education



Wildlife education is one of the purposes of the NCA listed in its enabling legislation, and the BLM strives to provide young people with opportunities to engage in recreation and practice stewardship on NCA lands and to 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, and the BLM provides interpretive and educational materials to NCA users

through the Grand Junction Field Office and the NCA.

### Wildlife Education Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Stable

### Wildlife Education Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 18
123,000	123,000	123,000	100

### Stressors Affecting Wildlife Education

Risk factors for wildlife (and thus wildlife education) include loss of habitat, right-of-way proximity, non-native animals, and increased access.

# 5

## Summary of Performance Measure

Resources, Objects, and Values Status Summary Table		
Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	Good	Stable

Natural	Good	Stable
Biological	Good	Stable
Environmental	Good	Stable
Water Resources	Good overall	Stable
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable
Scientific	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good overall	Stable
Wildlife Education	Good	Stable

# 6 Manager's Letter

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As I reflect on 2019, I find myself feeling very thankful for the engagement and support that McInnis Canyons NCA received. It was a big year and many valuable players stepped up to the plate to help in the stewardship, planning, and management of the



NCA. This year we saw new trails and reroutes constructed, old unsustainable alignments rehabbed, and maintenance of the Loma Boat launch access road. We were also able to hire a grant funded career seasonal OHV ranger. We made progress on acquisition of key property for public access, the Secretary of Interior visited the NCA, we held the grand opening of a new wheelchair accessible trail, we replaced faded interpretive signs, restored a historic cabin, transitioned to a new Recreation.gov platform, completed more riparian restoration, continued important scientific research, and the list goes on. None of these could have been accomplished solely

by the federal government, we relied on important partners and the public to accomplish all of these things. Partners like CPW, WCCC, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, City of Fruita, Mesa County, Museums of Western Colorado, the Conservation Fund, and of course Colorado Canyons Association.

Some of our biggest accomplishments this year were planning and business plan updates for Rabbit Valley and Ruby-Horsethief. These were a heavy lift and relied on engaging the local public to inform and shape the future management of these special recreation areas. We are especially thankful to the Southwest Resource Advisory Council (RAC) for their engagement and feedback. Due to increasing popularity in the shoulder seasons, need for patrols, and to discourage no shows, the RAC recommended that BLM extend the season fees are charged for camping on the Colorado River to include April and October.

The biggest effort, was planning for camping in Rabbit Valley. In the case of Rabbit Valley, the demand for camping is higher than the current 19 developed campsites, and current campgrounds are not designed for large RVs and toy haulers. There are 84 user-created campsites - almost double the number in 2007. These user-created campsites often result in vegetation loss, soil compaction, proliferation of fire ash and human waste, damage to archaeological sites, visitor conflicts, and degradation of the recreation setting.

We developed a proposal to build campgrounds and charge fees, and limit camping to the developed campgrounds. To ensure we had a good proposal we beat the bushes  
*Manager's letter (continued)*

to get public feedback. We received 69 comments during the comment period and we reviewed all of them in detail. I have to say I was very impressed with the thoughtful and substantive comments we received. The public's feedback really helped us refine our proposed action, and to better understand how much support there was for our



proposal, and how it might negatively impact some folks.

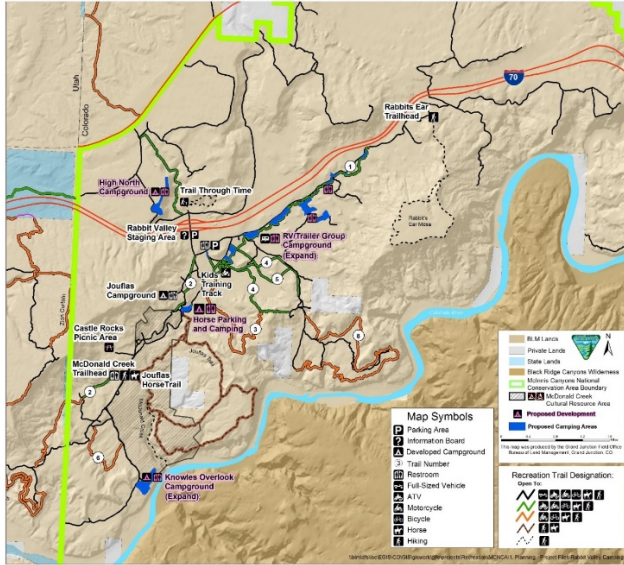
The vast majority of the comments (54) were in favor of the project. Even so, this was not a vote, and some folks are not in favor of the project, and I can certainly relate to their concerns. However, as the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel pointed out in its April 23rd Editorial about this project, as an area becomes more popular, and more and more user created campsites proliferate, there comes a point where land managers are forced to limit use to protect resources and to protect the recreation experience. I take some solace in the fact that there is still undeveloped camping throughout most of the surrounding area in Colorado and Utah, but recognize that as recreation on public lands becomes more popular, it is likely that land managers will need to consider similar measures in other places.

The RAC recommended we implement the plan, so in an effort to meet increasing demands for camping activities, protect resources, prevent further deterioration of the recreation setting, enforce existing requirements, and enhance information and education, we decided to implement the Proposed Action with modifications in response to public comment. This project expands campgrounds, builds new campgrounds, and limits camping to campgrounds in Rabbit Valley, and a permit will be required to camp in Rabbit Valley. These campgrounds will be designed to protect the undeveloped experience as much as practicable, with wide spacing between sites.

It will take us years to implement this project, so don't expect to see big changes overnight; but whether you were in favor of this project or not, I hope you will choose to take advantage of these new amenities, because Rabbit Valley is really a wonderful place to ride, hike and camp; and will remain that way for present and future generations as a result of this decision.

We accomplished a lot, including some major planning for future recreation growth. My sincere thanks go out to all of the groups and individuals that helped guide the management of the NCA during 2019.

- NCA Manager Collin Ewing



Rabbit Valley Camping project Map



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

# **McInnis Canyons**

## **National Conservation Area**

Southwest District Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
Grand Junction Field Office  
2815 H Rd.  
Grand Junction, CO 81506  
Phone: 970-244-3000

11/21/2019

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