



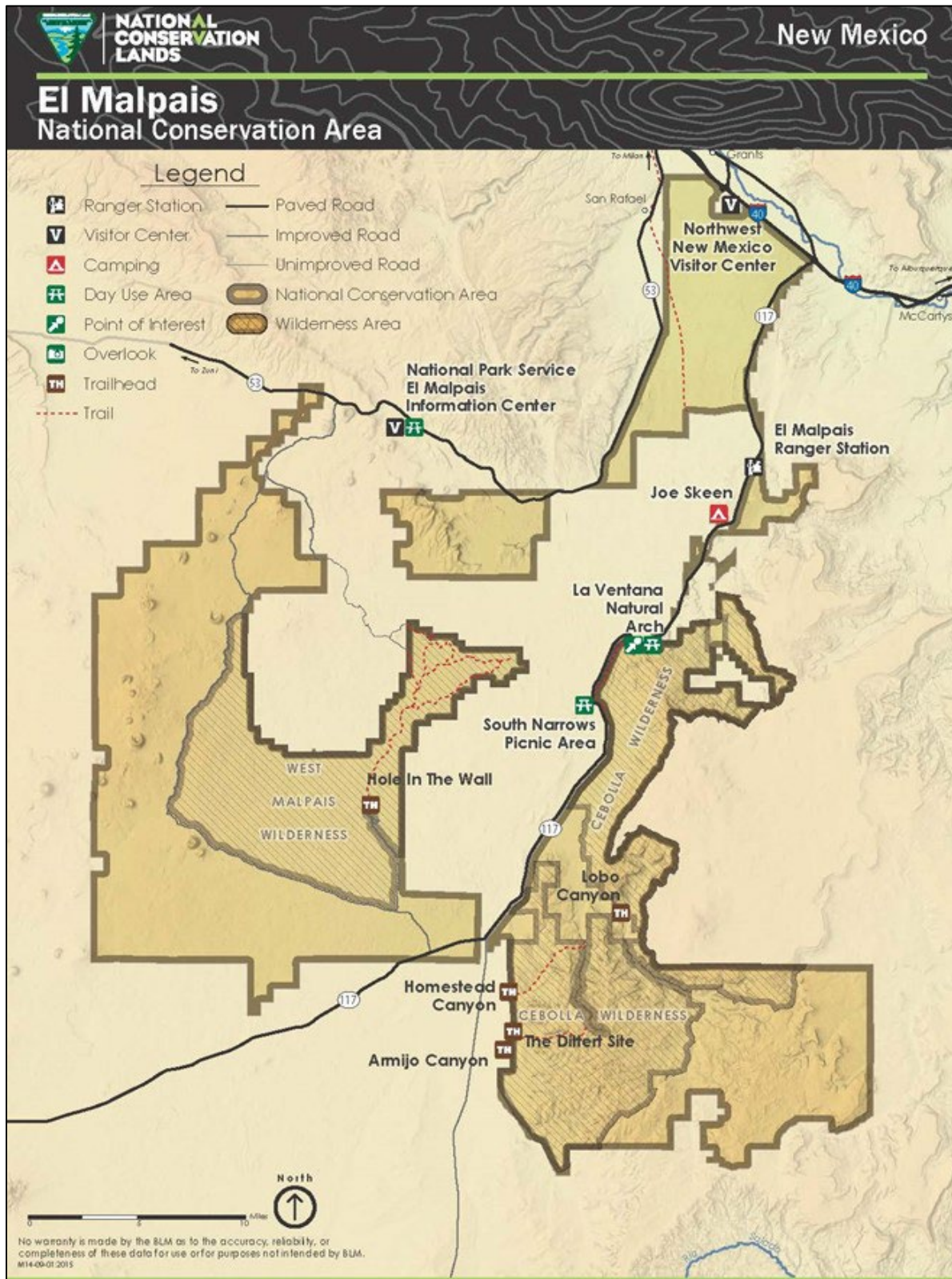
NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

New Mexico
2022: Annual Manager's Report

El Malpais National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

In Fiscal Year (FY) 22, the Public Lands Interpretive Association (PLIA) and the Bureau of Land Management Rio Puerco Field Office (RPFO) invited artists from El Malpais' surrounding areas to participate in a unique collaboration. The project is called the Community Art Program. It focuses on highlighting the stewardship, history, culture, and land conservation of El Malpais National Conservation Area (Conservation Area). It celebrated local artists in showcasing the area and its communities for generations to come. Through this project, we hope visitors to the area can enjoy art while gaining knowledge about the importance of resources of this unique area of the New Mexico Landscape.

The first round of artist selections was in early 2022, when a panel of local art connoisseurs, PLIA representatives, and RPFO representatives reviewed 10 submissions and selected the first piece to be featured. "Triboelectricity", a sculpture by Walter Torrez was selected for its connection to the land and indigenous ties to the landscape. It is currently being created on site at the Ranger Station so visitors can enjoy the creation of the piece in real time. The reveal of this piece will be in FY 23.



"Triboelectricity" creator, Walter Torrez, explaining his art to Amanda Keith, Executive Director of PLIA, while visitors gather for a live demonstration.

Throughout FY22, El Malpais park rangers conducted several interpretive programs. One of the programs included information on petroglyphs, historic culture, and their tie to the landscape. Discussion also included message on leave no trace principles, recreation opportunities, and wildlife in the area.



Interpretive program participants viewing images of petroglyphs found in the NCA.

In FY22, the Conservation Area hosted five volunteers whose hard work and efforts contributed to memorable experience for visitors. Volunteers worked on trail and facility maintenance, and vegetation removal in the developed recreation sites and at the Ranger Station.



Conservation Area Volunteers with Park Ranger at La Ventana Natural Arch.

One volunteer contributed 437 hours to the BLM in the summer. Kimberlee Arce came on board June 2, 2022, as a volunteer displaying a high degree of, integrity, responsibility, ambition, and leadership. Her care for the public lands, our visitors, and role as a volunteer were instrumental in meeting some of the goals for the Conservation Area in FY22. Special projects included organizing the interpretive shed with an inventory of all the interpretive items, updating local campground information, creating volunteer and events flyers. She also prepared a geologic interpretive event outline for the Ranger Station. She was a great asset and is an example of the great volunteers working in the Conservation Area.



Volunteer working at the Narrows Picnic Area

On September 24th, 2022, RPF0 held a National Public Lands Day event at El Malpais NCA Ranger Station. The event had a total of sixteen participants including twelve adults and four minors. Two benches were installed at the rim of the Ranger Station Nature Trail. In addition, 1.25 miles of trail was maintained, and weed and grass trimming occurred in the parking lot, driveway, picnic area, and around the Ranger Station premises.

Challenges

As all units have experienced change in visitation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, El Malpais staff have had to adapt their on-the-ground visitor interactions and facility maintenance techniques. To protect resources and prevent resource degradation, field staff is needed on the ground with the increased of visitation. Off-road driving and user-made campsites are increasing within the wilderness areas in the Conservation Area. The Conservation Area Park Rangers are a big part in stewardship outreach to public. A priority in FY23 is to fill a supervisory park ranger position to assist with El Malpais' day-to-day operations and two seasonal park ranger positions. Interpretive programs have been minimized throughout the past three years due to COVID-19 and FY23 allows the continued opportunity to create more in-person ranger-led visitor experiences.



Visitors enjoy a Ranger-led hike to Lobo Canyon Petroglyphs.

Visitors

In FY22 the El Malpais NCA Ranger Station has been open three days per week (Friday through Sunday) and has received steady visitation throughout the year. The Ranger Station received 1,787 visitors and the overall El Malpais NCA received 213,814 visitors in FY22. Historically, visitor use numbers recorded in the database are collected through a variety of methods including estimates made by recreation staff based on data from the nearby National Park Service's El Malpais Visitor Center and El Malpais' special recreation permits. Recreation staff deployed new TRAFx vehicle counters in FY21 with more installed in FY22. In the Recreation Management Information System (RMIS), the past estimated annual visitation reported was less accurate than data that TRAFx counters now provide. Visitation in the NCA is steady throughout the year with the highest overall use from spring to summer. Elk and pronghorn hunting are popular in the Conservation Area with open seasons from August through December. BLM expects that visitation to the Conservation Area will continue to increase over the years due to population increase and increased interest in outdoor activities.



Visitors enjoy an early morning hike at La Ventana Arch

Partnerships

Partnership continues to strengthen with the staff of the neighboring El Malpais National Monument which is operated by the National Park Service (NPS). Partnership and collaboration with the NPS includes working on shared sign plans, interpretation projects, and a reroute of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT).

The CDT traverses the Conservation Area and the National Monument for more than 40 miles. This Conservation Area section of the trail winds among the Chain of Craters and passes through piñon, juniper, ponderosa pine, and a variety of shrubs and grasses. It is approximately 20 miles long, however a large majority of visitors bypass this section by using Hwy 117 as a more direct route to hike north. For the past several years, the BLM New Mexico State Office and RPO have been working on a land exchange with Acoma Pueblo to facilitate a more direct route for CDT hikers near Grants, NM. This exchange is in line with the Trail's mission to keep hiker routes off highways. The BLM, the Trail administrator, the Continental Divide Trail Coalition, Park Service, the State of New Mexico, and local Forest Service districts are coordinating routes, improvements, easements, and acquisitions in the area and throughout the state.

A Visitor Guide (front page pictured below) with safety information, recreation opportunities, resource information, and tribal perspective was completed under an agreement with the PLIA. Printing was scheduled for FY 22 and has been delayed until FY23.



Science

The 5-year update on Wilderness Character Monitoring began in FY22 for West Malpais Wilderness and Cebolla Wilderness. The West Malpais Wilderness 5-year update was completed in FY22, and Cebolla Wilderness is to be completed in FY23. A wilderness intern is planned for FY23 to support these efforts.

Events

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The NCA also hosted the swearing in ceremony for the new BLM Albuquerque District Office Manager, Sabrina Flores, on August 26, 2022. The event hosted twenty-five visitors including the BLM New Mexico State Director, Melanie Barnes.

Words from the Staff

Dear Friends of the El Malpais National Conservation Area,

The Bureau of Land Management, El Malpais NCA staff, and our partners at PLIA look forward to continuing our Community Art Program in FY23. In Spring of 2023, we will announce another call for artists from communities surrounding El Malpais NCA to showcase their pieces in our Ranger Station. The selected pieces will be revealed in August 2023.

Staff continues to update and create new interpretive materials for our visitors. Park rangers continue to strive for excellence through their on-the-ground visitor interactions, and we continue to strengthen our communication with partners. We look forward to welcoming two seasonal interpretive park rangers to continue to enhance our outreach efforts.

Thank you for being stewards to your Public Lands!





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El Malpais

National Conservation Area

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