



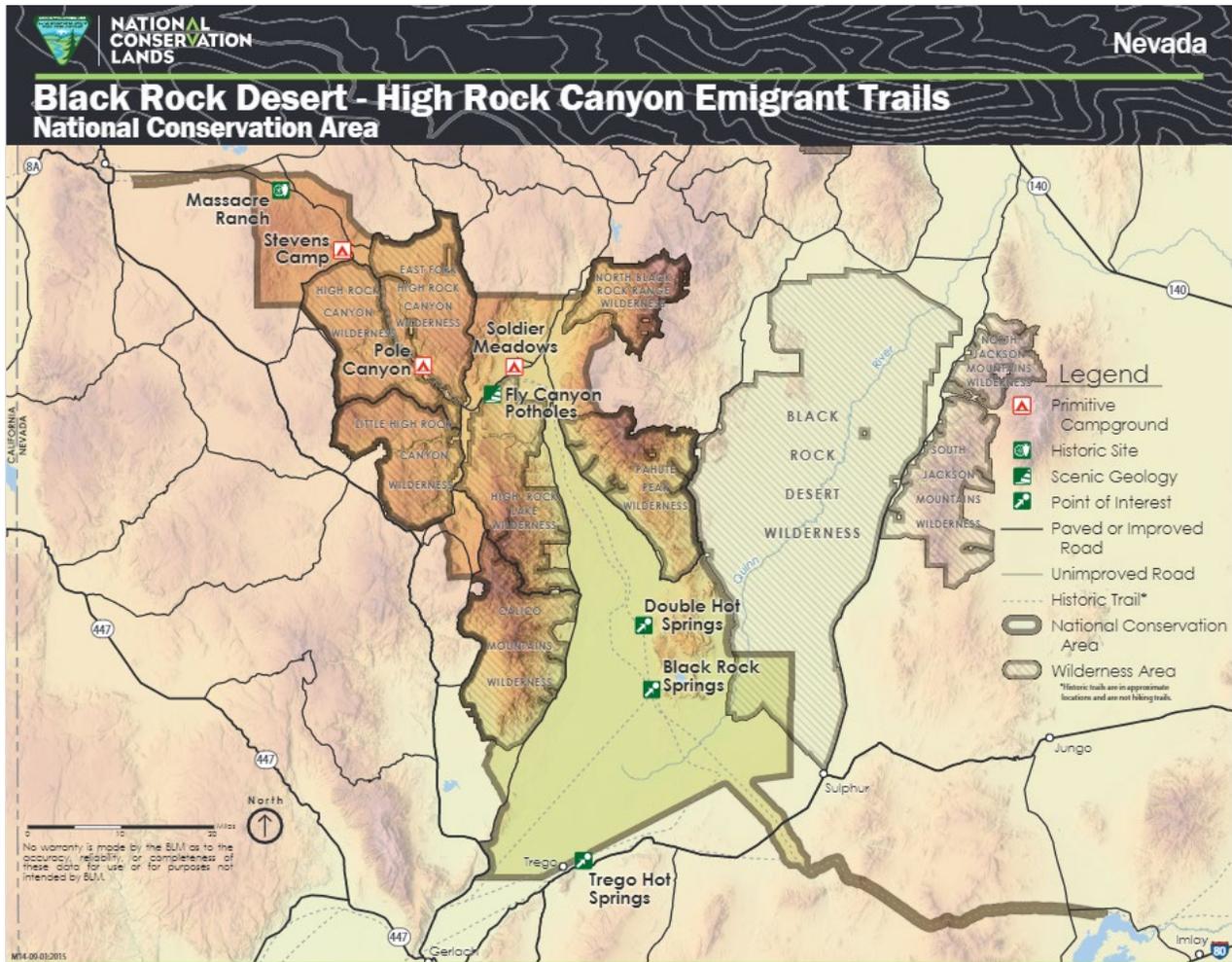
NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Nevada
2024: Annual Manager's Report

Black Rock Desert – High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

In 2024, the Black Rock Field Office (BRFO) achieved notable accomplishments across various fronts. BRFO successfully issued and oversaw special recreation permits (SRP) within the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area (NCA) that encompass a diverse range of activities, including professional and hobbyist rocket launches, outfitter and guide operations such as guided tours, and research projects facilitated by local colleges. The BRFO also issues the Burning Man SRP, the largest SRP within the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Although the world-renowned art and culture event increases in complexity every year, the BRFO continues to meet the challenge to ensure all public safety and compliance monitoring responsibilities are met.

The BLM, volunteers, and local partner groups collaborated on projects aimed at supporting resource protection within the NCA. These stakeholders pooled their expertise, resources, and passion to address diverse challenges facing public lands and undertook a spectrum of activities ranging from habitat restoration and invasive species management to trail maintenance and educational outreach. Numerous fences were repaired, leading to improved visitor experience and wildlife safety.

Challenges

BRFO experienced significant turnover in staff during FY24. Fiscal Year 2024 saw the Field Office's entire leadership team, consisting of Field Manager Mandy DeForest and Assistant Field Manager Andy Boerighter, leave to explore retirement and other opportunities, respectively. Additionally, the team also lost five specialists in areas such as Wilderness, Natural Resources, and Archaeology. Despite the losses, the BRFO team is pleased to welcome six new team members: one archaeologist, one Biologist, a Rangeland Management Specialist and Range Tech, and two new Outdoor Recreation Planners. The majority of our new teammates are new to the BLM, the Winnemucca area, and Federal service.

In addition, BRFO documented instances of careless motorized recreation, if left to continue, could cause irreparable damage to resources. Some of these user-related impacts included littering, vehicle abandonment, unauthorized modification of stream crossings to facilitate vehicle crossings (see Figure 1), and vehicular trespass into sensitive areas including dunes, streams, and wilderness.

Despite the challenges posed by staffing shortages and turnover, BRFO remains committed to serving the American people and the NCA. BRFO's goal is to provide opportunities for a wide range of recreation experiences while also protecting the cultural and ecological resources of the NCA. As part of the response to protect the Black Rock Desert NCA's many sensitive resources, the BRFO partnered with groups such as Friends of Black Rock-High Rock, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, and Stewards of the Black Rock Desert, along with many members of the public to help maintain facilities, rehabilitate trespasses routes, and install signs to protect sensitive areas from future trespass.



Figure 1 Unauthorized modification of a stream channel to aid vehicle crossing.

Visitors

Visitation to the National Conservation Area more than doubled over the past year. The NCA hosted 279,073 visits and 1,064,677 visitor days in 2024. Even removing visitation directly associated with the Burning Man event, visitation increased 60% over 2023 numbers.

Many NCA visitors enjoy short stays while they camp, explore the high desert, or pursue other opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Individuals use the Black Rock Desert playa to access the NCA's largest area for dispersed camping and OHV use, where visitors generally stay a few days to two-weeks. The NCA is also a popular destination for hunters seeking small and large game animals such as bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, mule deer, mountain lion, quail, and chukar. Off-roading tours, rock hounding, star gazing, and hot spring soaking are also common activities throughout the NCA.

Owing to the remote location and relatively low number of paved roads, the NCA sees its highest levels of visitation during the late spring to late summer when roads are more passible. Special recreation permits administered by the BRFO attract visitors from across the country and around the world. While the Black Rock Desert playa—with its art festivals, rocketry tests, and OHV use—has historically been the center of visitor use in the NCA, the BRFO is seeing an increase in guided tours of the more remote places in the NCA, such as High Rock Canyon and its surroundings.



Figure 2 Black Rock Rendezvous 2025. Image courtesy of Meg Tait, Friends of Nevada Wilderness

Partnerships

The BRFO partners with non-profit organizations in order to expand our capacity to manage the NCA according to the goals outlined in its designation, while still meeting the BLM's multiple use mission elsewhere in the BRFO. Our partnerships with outside organizations improve the NCA through stewardship projects and educational experiences. This year, each of our partners participated in a host of events and activities that focused on improvements to recreation sites, habitat preservation, and educating the public about the NCA.

Friends of Black Rock-High Rock

- In 2024, Friends of Black Rock-High Rock completed 3 stewardship projects.
- Co-hosted the 2024 Artist in Residence Program to support two artists to create NCA inspired artwork.

Friends of Nevada Wilderness

- In 2024, 182 volunteers completed 6 projects and dedicated 1,422 volunteer hours as part of their partnership.
- Assisted with the Whitebark Pine project to help monitor health of threatened species and surveyed non-motorized trails and user-created resources in the NCA.
- Co-hosted the Interpretive Camp at the 2024 Burning Man Event along with the BLM and the California Trail Interpretive Center.

Stewards of the Black Rock Desert

- Started a new partnership with the BRFO focused on responsible recreation on the Black Rock Playa and surrounding areas.
- Participated in Black Rock Rendezvous and National Trails Day.

Science

Nevada Division of Natural Heritage:

In 2024, Nevada Division of Natural Heritage (NDNH) conducted rare plant surveys and seed collection in the Nevada. NDNH found that three of those species' surveys reside in the NCA: Soldier Meadows cinquefoil (*Potentilla basaltica*), smooth stickleaf (*Mentzelia mollis*), and Black Rock wild cabbage (*Caulanthus barnebyi*). Soldier Meadows cinquefoil is only found within the boundary of the Soldier Meadows Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), which falls within the NCA. All occurrences were successfully relocated and surveyed, and there was no significant change in occupied area between 2009 and 2024. There are five known occurrences of smooth stickleaf within the NCA near Double Hot Springs, north of Black Rock Hot Springs, as well as within the Pahute Peak Wilderness. However, plants were not observed in 2024, and there have been no records of visits to any of the occurrence sites since 2005. NDNH plans to conduct additional surveys and re-surveys for smooth stickleaf in the NCA in 2025. There are 18 known occurrences of Black Rock wild cabbage in Nevada, including occurrences within the NCA. Plants were successfully located in the Calico Mountains Wilderness, on Steamboat Mountain, and within the Petrified Canyon.



Figure 3 Soldier Meadows cinquefoil. Photo courtesy of Ellen Brecke, BLM

Archaeology:

BRFO is pleased to be working with Jackson Mueller, a Ph.D. candidate from the Department of Anthropology, University of Nevada, Reno. Mr. Mueller is using data from sites in the NCA to conduct a landscape-scale obsidian sourcing study of projectile points in the area. He wants to determine if “Windust” projectile points in the Great Basin are markers of bison-hunting groups who expanded westward from the Great Plains approximately 11,000 to 7,000 years ago.

Lahontan Cutthroat Trout:

In 2023, the Western Region of Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) conducted stream surveys on Colman Creek within the NCA. They found all fish were 100% pure Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT), with upwards of 1,000 individuals. Colman Creek is a remote, but pure and robust LCT stream.

Riparian Monitoring:

In 2024, the BRFO conducted Multiple Indicator Monitoring (MIM) on multiple creeks within the field office, including Colman Creek within the NCA. This is done for riparian-area management in creeks that are grazed and impacted by livestock. There are several standards that must be met at the end of the grazing season, including requirements for Lahontan cutthroat trout. Colman Creek within the Soldier Meadows Allotment met all of the standards and requirements for a healthy stream for the LCT.



Figure 4 Colman Creek. Photo by BLM

Outreach and Special Events

National Trails Day 2024

On Saturday June 1, 2024, the Black Rock Field Office, and various partner groups, hosted the annual National Trails Day event at Steven's Camp Recreation Area. During the event, volunteers used fallen trees to maintain the Upper High Rock Canyon Trail. Volunteers also maintained the cabin at Steven's Camp, rehabilitated an authorized vehicle route and cleaned graffiti from rocks on the roadside. During the evening, volunteers participated in a star gazing party, along with a dark sky talk.



Figure 5 Volunteers working in the Black Rock NCA, Trails Day 2024. Photo courtesy of Meg Tait, Friends of Nevada Wilderness

Black Rock Rendezvous

Over Memorial Day Weekend, the Black Rock Field Office, along with Friends of Black Rock /High Rock and Friends of Nevada Wilderness, hosted the annual Black Rock Rendezvous. This is an annual event to encourage the public to enjoy their public lands and to encourage the public to visit and explore the NCA. At the event, staff and volunteers were able to repair fencing around Trego Hot Springs, repair fencing and signage around Coyote Dunes, install multiple trail registers and rehabilitate unauthorized routes. There were also various educational talks from researchers, partners, and a former Artist in Residence. One of the favorite events is the Dutch oven cook-off.

Burning Man Interp Camp

In August of 2024, the Black Rock Field Office staffed its annual Burning Man interpretive camp. Along with staff from the field office, we also had staff from Friends of Nevada Wilderness and the California Trail Interpretive Center in Elko. During the event, we were able to contact over 8,000 people. At the camp, we provided Burning Man participants with information and activities about the Black Rock NCA and surrounding area. We include exhibits about the local geology, wildlife, history, archaeology, plants as well as the playa itself and its origin. This past year, we had a special focus on the life cycle of fairy shrimp. The staff from the California Trails Center had numerous hands-on activities that also provided insight into the experiences of settlers as they passed through the harsh environment of the Black Rock Desert.



Figure 6 Representatives from BLM and Friends of Nevada Wilderness staffing the 2025 Burning Man Interpretive Camp

National Public Lands Day 2024

Held over Labor Day Weekend, National Public Lands Day was a huge success in 2024! We had support from various partner groups, including support from a BLM Lovelock Wildland Fire engine. The event was hosted in the Soldier Meadow Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Last year's event included desert dace (and endemic and threatened fish species) habitat monitoring, installing fire pits, removing obsolete fences, trail work and improving the public cabin. After dinner, we had education presentations from BRFO staff, Friends of Nevada Wilderness and Friends of Black Rock/High Rock.



Figure 7 National Public Lands Day 2025. Photo courtesy of Meg Tait, Friends of Nevada Wilderness

Black Rock Playa Rocketry Program

Permitted amateur rocketry provides a unique recreation opportunity on public lands. Amateur rocketry permits are managed under SRPs on lands administered for public use by the BLM. The Black Rock Desert playa has been recognized as a unique resource that combines the features necessary for safe, reliable launch sites that can accommodate the needs of various recreational, academic and professional rocket scientists throughout the world. Hobby rocket launching from the playa has been ongoing since 1970, and as an authorized SRP by the BLM since 1989. The BRFO has issued SRPs annually for amateur rocketry and vending groups associated with rocketry since 1998.



Figure 8 A participant observes a rocket test on the Black Rock playa

In total, BRFO hosted over a dozen launch events in 2024. Participants included hobbyist groups such as the Utah Rocket Club and Tripoli Rocketry Association, as well as institutions including the United States Military Academy at West Point. Some launch events hosted up to 400 attendees. Recently, the BRFO has seen increased interest in testing from government contractors.



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