



McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area

National Landscape Conservation System
FY 2007 Annual Manager's Report

- NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM -

FY 2007 MANAGERS ANNUAL REPORT

Site Name: McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (MCNCA)
Total Acres: 123,430 acres, including 75,500 acres in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Area

Key Resources and Values:

- **Outstanding Cultural, Paleontological, Ecological, and Geological Resources**
- **Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness**
- **Diverse Recreational Opportunities**
- **Important Scientific Research Values**

1. Physical Condition of Natural, Cultural and Paleontological Resources

Natural Resources: A land health assessment has been completed on 100 percent of the designated MCNCA, with 89 percent of the acres meeting land health standards and 11 percent of the acres not meeting standards. A land health assessment is scheduled for all acres acquired since the NCA was designated in October 2000.

Substantial progress has been made in controlling non-native plant species, particularly



Mee Canyon on the Colorado River

noxious weeds, tamarisk, and Russian olive. Key accomplishments include treating over 200 acres of invasive species, two new releases of the tamarisk beetle; removal of all Russian olive along the south side of the 22-mile Colorado River corridor, which forms a portion of the northern boundary of the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Area.

Other land health projects include 225 acres of sage grouse habitat improvement on Black Ridge, 200 acres of fuels reduction in the wildland urban

interface area adjoining the Glade Park community, protection of 200 cottonwoods in the Colorado River Corridor, protection of a bald eagle nesting site along the river, plus closure and rehabilitation of unauthorized travel routes.

Fire Management

The human-caused Knowles Fire (May 2007) burned 92 acres at the mouth of Knowles Canyon at its intersection with the Colorado River. Law Enforcement investigated the fire and follow-up action is pending. The fire killed a significant portion of a cottonwood gallery, only one of three galleries along the river.



Early stages of the Knowles Fire

Rehabilitation efforts include replanting cottonwoods, seeding native grass and shrub

species, and treatment of invasive weeds that have flourished since the fire. The rehab work started in the fall of 2007 and will be finished in 2008.

Two fires were managed under wildland fire use (WFU). Several other fires were considered for WFU but were managed under suppression due to ecological parameters, particularly the presence of cheat grass.

Resource and recreation specialists continue to monitor resource condition and evaluate the need for follow-up actions.

Cultural Resources: Cultural resource inventories were completed on 170 acres in 2007.

The results are as follows:

- Sites monitored and stable – 7
- Sites monitored and deteriorating – 3
- Signs installed to protect sites – 1
- Native American consultations – 3

Paleontological Resources: Resource specialists monitor the Trail Through Time, Fruita Paleontological Area, Dinosaur Hill, and Split Rock Paleontological Areas within the MCNCA. Monitoring assistance is also provided by the paleontologist and docents from the Museum of Western Colorado/Dinosaur Journey.

2. Condition of Recreation Facilities, Roads and Trails

Administrative Facilities: The MCNCA is housed with the Grand Junction Field Office and does not have separate administrative facilities.

Recreation Facilities: The general condition of the recreation facilities in the MCNCA is fair to good as documented in FAMS and the 2007 Assets Management Report. The MCNCA maintained 28 recreation sites in 2007. However, annual operation and maintenance was custodial and did not fully meet BLM or user needs. Through cooperative efforts with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the road and parking area at the Loma Boat Launch were graveled and improved. This site is one of the most heavily used access points to MCNCA.



Knowles Canyon Trail

not sustainable and need realignment. The trails mostly met user needs, but annual maintenance did not meet custodial requirements on all trails. While the trails continue to erode and deteriorate, trail maintenance backlog is increasing. The MCNCA staff recognizes the need to close an additional 30 miles of unauthorized trail routes and restore the landscape to its natural condition.

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado partnered with the MCNCA to mark National Public Lands Day with a two day trail maintenance project. Volunteers constructed one-half mile of new trail on the Trail Through Time and rehabilitated a half mile of existing unsustainable trail.

Trail planning: NCA staff completed a trail plan for the Opal Hill area located in the front country recreation management zone (RMZ). The City of Fruita’s Snooks Bottom Open Space city park is adjacent to Opal Hill and was opened in early 2007. The trail plan has two goals: develop a sustainable trail

Roads: The MCNCA has over 80 miles of designated roads. Of these roads, 15 miles are not sustainable and need realignment. An additional 50 miles of unauthorized routes need to be closed and restored to natural condition. Annual maintenance is meeting basic custodial requirements and user needs.

Trails: The MCNCA has over 120 miles of designated trails. Of these trails, about 80 miles are

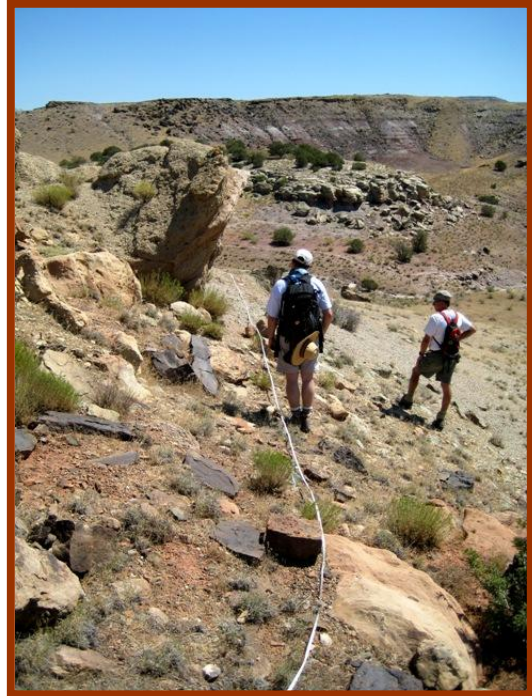


Friends of McInnis Canyons Board Member Whitman Robinson helps with volunteer trail work in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness

system and provide connectivity between Snooks Bottom, Opal Hill, and the rest of the NCA front country trails (Devils and Kodels Canyons). Implementation of this plan will begin in FY08. This coming year will also have NCA staff working on a more broad trail plan covering the entire NCA front country (Devils, Kodels, Flume, and Pollock Canyons) that will have the same goals: more sustainable trails and safer and more enjoyable experiences for visitors.

Implementation Planning: The MCNCA RMP was approved in 2004. NCA staff has been incorporating the guidance from the RMP into implementation plans applying the concept of benefits-based-management into on-the-ground management actions. FY07 saw the completion of a Rabbit Valley Implementation Plan. Rabbit Valley includes three RMZs and is a well-known destination for OHV recreation but also provides outstanding opportunities for hiking, mountain biking and equestrian use as well as offering world-renowned paleontological resources like the Mygatt-Moore Quarry and the Trail Through Time. This new plan provides guidance to NCA staff to help manage the steadily increasing (and occasionally conflicting) use

while continuing to provide the experiences and benefits that our visitors are looking for.



Volunteers help lay out the new alignment for the Trail Through Time

Signs: A GIS-based Sign Plan has been initiated, with 40 percent of the signs inventoried. Portal signs are installed and meet standards.

Trail signing is not consistent throughout the MCNCA. In some cases, people are getting lost as a result of being unable to follow the trail markings. Similarly, travel management signing and directional signing are not consistent throughout the MCNCA. As the need for signs increases, so does the sign maintenance backlog.

3. Environmental Education and Resource Interpretation

A total of 15 educational programs were delivered within the MCNCA in 2007. The following is a summary of the interpretive and education programs delivered:

- Docent/BLM-guided walks at Paleo areas
- 4th grade MCNCA nature walks (Pollock Canyon Trail and Wilderness)
- 5th grade School-to-Career Program
- Middle/high school science classes – MCNCA orientation
- Special hikes – Rattlesnake Canyon Arches

School groups from across western Colorado visit the Trail Through Time, Fruita Paleontological Area, and Dinosaur Hill. Many of these school groups plan annual visits to Dinosaur Journey and then go to the nearby MCNCA to see dinosaur bones in the field.



Children's Paleontological Dig

MCNCA updated several of its brochures in 2007 to provide the most accurate, up-to-date information possible to its visitors while also converting to new BLM brochure design. The Devils, Flume, and Pollock Bench Trail System brochure and the Colorado River (Ruby-Horsethief Canyons) brochure were updated with new maps and photos. The text of the Colorado River brochure was also rewritten to provide boaters with river rules and etiquette as well as Wilderness and wildlife education. Several more brochures will be updated in 2008 as the NCA continues to implement the new brochure guidelines while providing relevant information to its visitors.

The MCNCA and its neighbor, the Colorado National Monument administered by the National Park Service (NPS), continued to use a shared "Visitor Guide" that assists visitors in understanding the mission of each agency and the recreation opportunities available. The popular Guide is in a newspaper format with great maps and photos.

4. Status of Science program

Paleontology: There were five active paleontological resource use permits issued for work in the MCNCA in FY07:

1. Carnegie Museum of Natural History continued micro-invertebrate excavations at the Fruita Paleontological Area. This is where a new mammalian fossil, *Fruitafossor Windscheffeli*, was recently recovered, described, and published.

2. Museum of Western Colorado (MWC) received permission to expand the Mygatt-Moore Quarry and subsequent excavation. With expansion of the quarry, more information has been recovered about the paleo-environment and extinct plants and animals that once lived there.

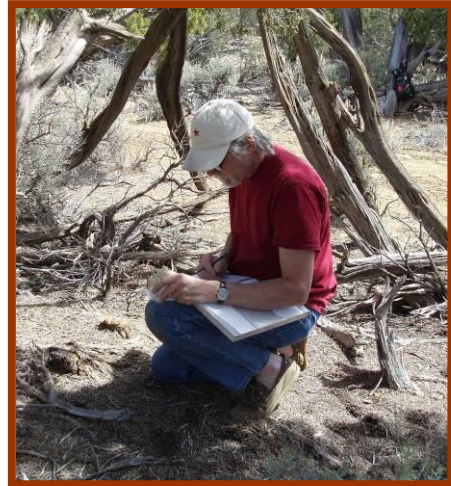


Museum of Western Colorado excavation at Mygatt-Moore Quarry

3. MWC collected fossil surface samples inside the MCNCA but outside the Wilderness—an activity report will be ready in FY08

4. MWC received a permit for excavations at Dinosaur Hill to complete collection of flying dinosaur reptile bone

5. MWC received a permit for excavations at the Twin Juniper Quarry in Rabbit Valley, where a large dinosaur pelvis and other associated bones were collected.



**Land health assessment in
McInnis Canyons NCA**

Crews from the MWC worked at the Mygatt-Moore Quarry under a BLM excavation Special Recreation Permit from May through mid-September this year. More than 340 expeditioners from around the United States and the world participated in the digs, resulting in 100 new specimens collected this year alone.

Two other scientific efforts have been initiated this year. Forty dinosaur teeth, originally from the Mygatt-Moore Quarry, are undergoing isotope studies at Colorado College. The purpose is to look for isotopic dietary differences in what dinosaurs ate from species to species. After studies are complete, the teeth will be returned to Dinosaur Journey Museum.

Another scientific effort underway is geologic research on the Morrison Formation for the purpose of studying tectonic activity. The Geology and Geophysics Department at Boston College collected samples of the Morrison Formation at four sites, two of which are located in the MCNCA.

Heritage/Cultural:

The BLM continues to collaborate with the U.S. Forest Service, MWC, the Colorado National Monument, and the Northern Ute Tribe on the Ute Ethnobotany Project. New partners include the Colorado Council of the Arts and the Colorado State University Agricultural Extension Service.

Under the guidance of project staff, students continue to collect plants for their tribal herbarium. The herbarium will be used by students working with elders to identify plants, learn the Ute names for the plants and how they were used by their ancestors.

This project was chosen in 2007 as one of the best collaborations within NLCS and was featured in a poster session at the NLCS Managers Meeting.

The Colorado Wickiup Project, funded by a Colorado Historical Society Grant and directed by the Dominguez Archaeological Research Group (DARG), revisited and recorded the Black Ridge Wickiup Site and conducted a reconnaissance survey that resulted in the identification of a new wickiup site within the NCA. DARG launched the Colorado Wickiup Project in August 2003, and they continue to coordinate this long-range effort to record, compile, and disseminate “preservation-quality” documentation of wickiups and other aboriginal wooden structures in the state of Colorado.



Rock Art in Sieber Canyon

5. Partnerships, Friends, and Community Connections

Friends Group: The Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA was incorporated as a Colorado non-profit on February 28, 2005 and received its 501(c)(3) in May 2006. The Friends Group has participated in several MCNCA projects in 2007, contributing 820 hours of volunteer time at a value of almost \$15,000. In addition to this volunteer service, the Friends have also provided more than \$25,000 in cash and in-kind match.

Advisory Council: The Advisory Council held three meetings in fiscal year 2007, and conducted a field trip to Rattlesnake Arches. The Council provided advice on issues and agency projects to the NCA Manager. The Council Charter expired in June 2007 and was renewed in October 2007.

Cooperative Efforts with Local Governments: The MCNCA has an outstanding relationship with the City of Fruita. Staff worked with Fruita on subdivision planning adjacent to the MCNCA and collaborated on such things as grant proposals, cooperative road maintenance, interagency visitor services, and marketing the MCNCA. The MCNCA has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Fruita to develop an annual operating plan for joint projects and to hold semi-annual meetings to discuss items of mutual interest.

The City of Fruita has also been an important partner to the NCA in the planning of a new trail system in the Opal Hill and Snooks Bottom area. Fruita also provided support to the NCA in applying for Colorado State Parks non-motorized trail grants for implementation of the Opal Hill and Snooks Bottom trail plan.

MCNCA also worked with Mesa County on law enforcement, a county trail plan, road maintenance, and land use planning adjacent to the MCNCA.

Another important partner for the MCNCA is the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Cooperative management of the Loma Boat Launch, management of the Black Ridge Desert Bighorn Sheep herd, protection of bald eagle nests on the river, and cooperative management of public access between the Horsethief State Wildlife Area and the MCNCA are important outcomes of this collaborative partnership.

Other key partnerships:

- Close working relationship with the Dinosaur Diamond National Scenic Byway (MCNCA sites are featured on along the Byway).
- The Museum of Western Colorado, a key partner, provides curation of all cultural and paleontological materials collected on public lands.
- The Colorado Mountain Club (CMC) has partnered with MCNCA to adopt the Flume Canyon trail. CMC held several trail construction and maintenance projects in FY07 as well as performing ongoing social and physical impact monitoring.
- The Colorado Environmental Coalition (CEC) has partnered with MCNCA to adopt the Rattlesnake Arches trail and access to the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness (BRCW). This partnership is new in FY07 and got off to a successful start on National Trails Day with a trail maintenance project that restored almost a half mile of unsustainable social trails in the BRCW.



Colorado Environmental Coalition volunteers learn about trail maintenance on the Rattlesnake Arches Trail

MCNCA has had great success in recruiting and working with local and state non-profit groups on a wide variety of projects. These projects vary from major trail construction and maintenance to trail patrol to interpretive presentations. Cooperators that MCNCA has been fortunate to work with in the past year include:

- Arabian Horse Club
- Backcountry Horsemen
- Boy Scouts of America Western Colorado Council
- City of Fruita
- City of Grand Junction
- Colorado Department of Wildlife (CDOW)
- Colorado Environmental Coalition (CEC)

- Colorado Mountain Club (CMC)
- Colorado Mountain College
- Colorado National Monument
- Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition (COHVCO)
- Colorado Outdoor Training Initiative (COTI)
- Colorado State Parks
- Colorado Welcome Center
- Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA)
- Delta Correctional Facility
- Dinosaur Diamond
- Friends of McInnis Canyons
- Fruita Rotary Club
- Grand Junction Visitor and Convention Bureau
- Grand Mesa Jeep Club
- Grand Valley Bike Patrol (GVBP)
- Mesa County
- Mesa State College
- Museum of Western Colorado
- Sierra Club
- Tamarisk Coalition
- Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC)
- Western Slope ATV Association
- Wilderness Society



Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado work on the Trail Through Time in Rabbit Valley

Volunteer Activities: Volunteers supported many projects in MCNCA during FY2007. Volunteers provided a total 8,399 hours of service valued at \$151,435. This volunteer service was complemented by more than \$100,000 of cash and in-kind donations to the NCA. Some volunteer highlights from FY07:

- National Public Lands Day was a huge success with 80 individuals from Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC) contributing more than 1,400 hours to complete build a half mile of new trail to reroute around the original unsustainable trail. VOC also closed the old trail and restored it to its natural condition.
- The Tamarisk Coalition volunteered 1096 hours to eradicate tamarisk in Devils, Flume, and Pollock Canyons.
- COPMOBA and the Grand Valley Mountain Bike Patrol volunteers put in more than 900 hours working in and patrolling the MCNCA. Volunteers came out in force in

November to build more than a quarter of a mile of new trail on the Troy Built loop on Mack Ridge. GVMBP was also a key partner in removing almost 400 old tires from the Kokopelli Trail.

- Forty members of the W.A.T.E.R Club assisted with the cleanup of Ruby Canyon, contributing 300 hours.
- The Motorcycle Riders Association and Bookcliff Rattlers Motorcycle Club (22 members combined) contributed 352 hours to various off-highway vehicle projects in Rabbit Valley.
- A local Boy Scout troop joined NCA staff in planting 30 young cottonwood trees at the mouth of Mee Canyon on the Colorado River. These trees were part of the continuing rehabilitation effort from a 2005 human-caused wildfire.
- The Friends of McInnis Canyons contributed 820 hours of time to MCNCA this year. The Friends support ranged from public outreach and awareness programs to on-the-ground trail maintenance projects. They also contributed \$25,000 in in-kind donations to the NCA.

6. Business Practices

Annual Expenditures and Work Years:

MCNCA spent \$597,484 in FY07 (99.7 percent of allocated funds):

- Labor costs were \$411,386 (69 percent) 6.5 work years.
- Operations costs were \$186,098 (31 percent).

\$84,830 of the labor costs were paid for 1.1 work years of specialist's support from the Grand Junction Field Office.

Two long-tenured employees retired in 2007:

- GS-11 Outdoor Recreation Planner
- GS-11 Interpretive Specialist

MCNCA filled these positions in 2007:

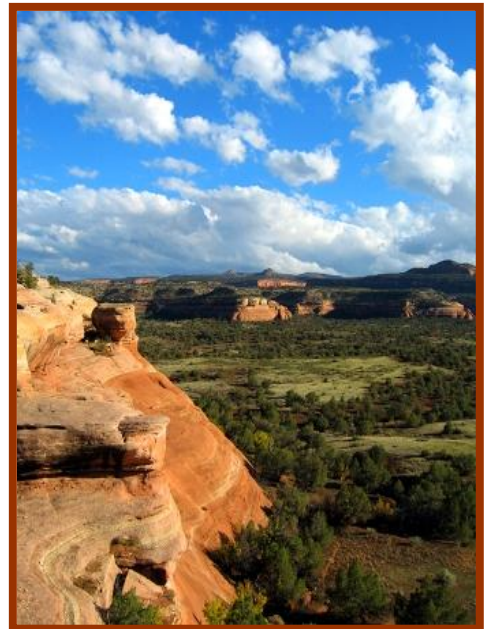
- One Career Seasonal Park Ranger
- Selected a Law Enforcement Ranger, who will officially fill the position once security clearance is complete, circa December 2007.

MCNCA currently has two vacant positions:

- 1 Interpretive Specialist
- 1 Career Seasonal Park Ranger

Receipts from 24 Special Recreation Permits:

- \$12,855.89



**Flume Canyon, Black Ridge Canyons
Wilderness in the MCNCA Front Country**

Leveraged funds used for operational expenses:

- Cash \$57,500
- In-Kind \$46,947

Other Discussion Items from the Unit Manager:

Visitation: The MCNCA received 306,000 visits, a 3 percent increase over 2006. MCNCA has four interstate exits and is the first stop on Interstate 70 coming from Utah into Colorado. The MCNCA adjoins the Fruita city limits and is impacted by urban interface challenges.

Resource Management Plan, Adaptive Management, and Benefits Based Management: The McInnis Canyons NCA Resource Management Plan, signed on October 28, 2004, is based on Adaptive Management and incorporates Benefits Based Management. The MCNCA actively monitors social and physical settings to determine the need to adapt management practices.

Report Compiled by: Matt McGrath, Outdoor Recreation Planner
 Aline LaForge, Archaeologist
 Melodie Lloyd, Public Affairs Specialist
 Paul Peck, MCNCA Manager

Report Compilation Time: Staff invested 30 hours to prepare this report.



Rattlesnake Arches Trail in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Area