



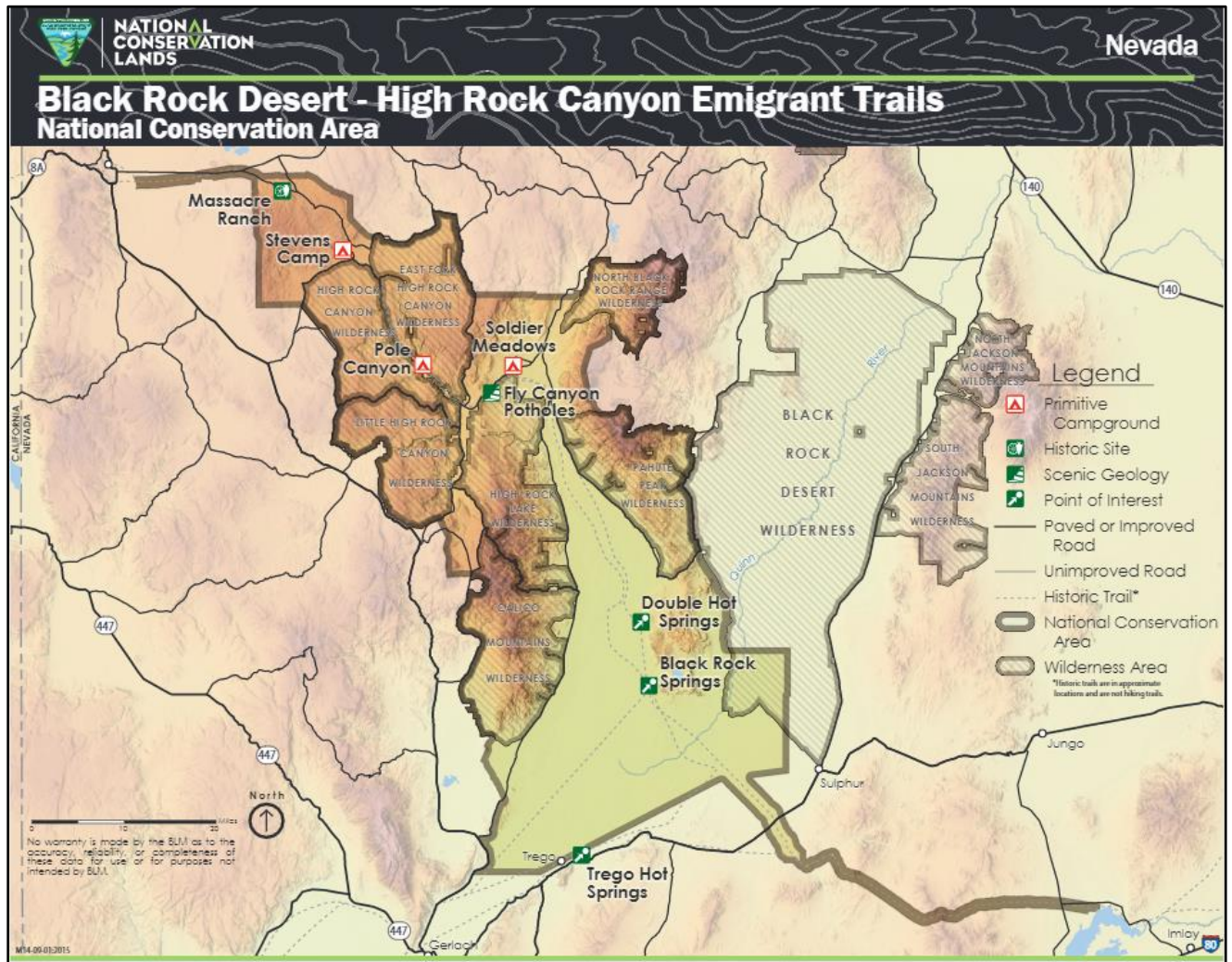
# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

**Nevada**  
2021: Annual Manager's Report

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



# Map



# Accomplishments

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The Black Rock Desert NCA had numerous accomplishments in 2021. In the Spring, employees hosted a gathering called Black Rock Rendezvous where partner groups led small talks and outings with the public. Volunteers built a line of buck and rail fence around an incursion into a culturally sensitive area. The Playa recreation area experienced a large increase in visitation during the summer months, especially during the historical Burning Man time. There was an estimated 20,000 people recreating on and around the Playa from July to early September. BLM hosted NPLD at the end of September in the Solider Meadows Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), helping a T&E species in the Soldier Meadows Hot Springs stream. Based on visitation at developed recreation sites, the Black Rock Desert NCA had an estimated 40,217 visits and 54,824 visitor days in 2021. In 2021, wild horses were gathered in the High Rock Canyon area, with a total of 1,216 horses captured and 1,060 removed. Although the 2020 Artist in Residence (AiR) program was not able to happen due to the pandemic, in 2021 the Black Rock NCA was able to celebrate the 8<sup>th</sup> annual AiR program and hosted two Artists, Lauren Cardenas and Devan Horton.



# Challenges

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In August 2021, the BLM conducted road maintenance within the Soldier Meadows ACEC to help protect critical habitat for the Desert Dace (*Eremichthys acros*), a threatened fish species found only within the Soldier Meadows area. Due to changes in the groundwater table in the Soldier Meadows ACEC, water connected to the Desert Dace habitat has flooded portions of the road network. Motorists have created new, unauthorized roads to bypass the flooded areas which has caused damage to habitat for the Desert Dace, sensitive spring snails, and sensitive plants. The road maintenance project reinforced water crossings to aid motorists travelling through the Soldier Meadows ACEC and protect the sensitive habitat.



Many members of the public along with the Nevada Department of Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have expressed their concerns about the flooded areas and the habitat damage. They have engaged the BLM to help find a solution. To help repair the damage, BLM partnered with volunteers during 2021 National Public Lands Day to remove signs of the unauthorized routes and install barriers to prevent future habitat degradation.

# Visitors

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Black Rock NCA visitation decreased in 2021 with an estimated 40,217 visits and 54,824 visitor days, most likely due to COVID-19 and the cancellation of the Burning Man Event. Many Black Rock NCA visitors enjoy short stays while they camp. The NCA sees its highest levels of visitation during the summer when permitted events attract visitors from many parts of the state and from around the world. The activities that take place on the Black Rock Playa each year usually include art festivals, amateur rocketry, land sailing, weddings, and casual off highway vehicle use. The decreased visitation this year was due to the absence of special recreation permits (SRPs); these events cumulatively draw tens of thousands of visitors a year.

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 Black Rock 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, and hot spring use are also common activities throughout the Black Rock NCA.



# Partnerships

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The Black Rock NCA has several long-standing partnerships with three non-profit organizations. They are Friends of Nevada Wilderness, Friends of Black Rock-High Rock, and Nevada Outdoor School. They all received BLM funding through cooperative agreements that are managed by NCA staff members. A big push was made in 2021 to have NCA recreation staff trained as agreement program officers to better administer and manage our cooperative agreements. 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 Leave No Trace principles.

- Friends of Black Rock-High Rock
  - AmeriCorps staff conducted routine clean-ups around the playa during the summer months
  - 2021 Artist in Residence Program hosted two artists to create NCA inspired art
- Friends of Nevada Wilderness
  - On, July 30, 2021, a small crew utilized vertical mulching techniques to disguise a wilderness trespass route
  - On Sept. 10-12, 2021, a field crew removed unneeded fencing around the Soldier Meadows ACEC
- Nevada Outdoor School
  - Leave No Trace talk given at annual NCA event



# Science

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The Black Rock NCA had several research projects in 2021. The Desert Research Institute completed its second set of pollen cores taken from the Soldier Meadows ACEC. While these cores did not have as much “time depth” as the first set of cores, they did confirm that over approximately 500 years or so, the major vegetation genera/species have been stable with changes occurring primarily after 1970.

The air quality out on the Black Rock Playa was also monitored for the second straight year. The goal of this research is to examine the levels of particulate matter in the air attributed to recreation activities on the playa. It is well known that when thousands of people are on the playa during large events or busy weekends, the surface is broken up and hazardous levels of particulate matter able to be blown into the air. Air monitoring studies were done when less people were out on the playa to see if a particular level or type of use could be attributed to designated hazardous levels of particulates.



# Climate Impacts

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The Black Rock NCA landscape continues to show responses to prolonged drought conditions, which have been pervasive in the west over the past several years. These responses include vegetation changes, such as earlier spring “green-up”, as well as earlier summer desiccation. These vegetative changes also have the potential to alter the frequency, severity, and timing of wildfire within the Black Rock NCA. Similarly, reductions in winter snowpack associated with drought conditions are also resulting in lower stream flows, higher summer water temperatures, the drying of springs, and reductions in adjacent meadow flora. These environmental changes also adversely impact the various types of fauna found within the NCA through reduced forage and water availability.





# Climate Resiliency

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In 1985, the Desert Dace was federally listed as a threatened fish species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, due to it being a rare species only found within the Soldier Meadows region in Northern Nevada. The BLM designated the Soldier Meadows ACEC in part, to help protect Desert Dace critical habitat. From the 1980s to present, BLM has implemented restoration actions to reduce threats to this species, including designating roads to avoid sensitive habitat and creating campgrounds and bathing pools to prevent future habitat disturbance. Based on fish surveys conducted by wildlife agencies from 2014 – 2021, Desert Dace populations within the Soldier Meadows ACEC are stable or increasing in size and have two or more age classes. This data also shows that the populations of Desert Dace within the area are meeting part of the recovery criteria identified in the 1997 Recovery Plan for the Rare Species of Soldier Meadows developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Despite expansive drought conditions observed over the past decade, this species and habitat has shown a high level of resiliency to shifting climatic conditions.



# Social and Environmental Justice

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The withdrawal of the applications for the Burning Man Event in 2020 and 2021 have brought forth the opportunity for the BRFO to educate the public at large on their public lands and how they are open for a variety of dispersed recreation activities.



## Events

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### **Black Rock Rendezvous - May 26-30, 2021**

This event spanned five days of both virtual and in-person events that were almost all coordinated and organized by our partner groups. Virtual events included a trivia night, NCA presentation, and scavenger hunt. BLM staff organized a stewardship project for Trego Hot Spring that included 30 volunteers installing fencing and signage, raking out tracks from unauthorized OHV use, and a clean-up of the area. Following the in-person project work, two lectures were given by guest speakers representing two groups of recreation users unique to the NCA: amateur rocketry and rock hounding. The last day of the event concluded with a short, morning hike and a 13-mile guided bike tour.

### **National Trails Day - June 5, 2021**

This year, the event was held at Steamboat Mountain trailhead with the help of two partner groups and 13 volunteers. Roughly 2,000 feet of trail was resurfaced to better delineate the trail and prevent unnecessary routes from forming. Volunteers also lined the start of the trail with rocks and installed a metal sign-in box near the parking area.

### **National Public Lands Day – September 25, 2021**

The goal of this annual event was to conduct projects for the benefit and recovery of the federally listed Desert Dace (*Erecmichthys acros*), a minnow like fish dependent on warm thermal springs (ranging in temperature from 64 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit) only found in this part of the world. In total, 31 volunteers travelled to the remote location to participate in this year's NPLD event. BLM, partners, and volunteers worked together on different projects directed at improving the area. These projects consisted of installing protective barriers around Desert Dace habitat, re-naturalizing trespass routes, removing obsolete fencing, and cleaning up the Soldier Meadows Public Cabin.

## **Words From the Staff**

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In 2021, five new specialists joined the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA staff: two Outdoor Recreation Planners, a Wildlife Biologist, an Archaeologist, and a seasonal Biological Science Technician. Together, we support the Black Rock NCA's many unique resources, including managing for habitat, monitoring rangeland conditions, protecting sensitive cultural resources, and issuing permits for valid and existing rights. As we move into 2022, the Black Rock NCA staff will pursue new projects to help celebrate the NCA such as promoting new partnerships to focus on the High Rock Canyon area, protecting sensitive cave resources, and creating National Historic Trail displays. We encourage the public to visit the Black Rock NCA and safely experience the wide-open playa, responsibly camp in the wilderness, and drive on designated routes to enjoy the unique landscape. Feel free to call us and ask about road conditions, camping opportunities, or to get involved with future public events. Enjoy your public lands!

- The Staff at the Black Rock NCA





# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

## Black Rock Desert – High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails

### National Conservation Area

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Bureau of Land Management  
Black Rock Field Office  
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