



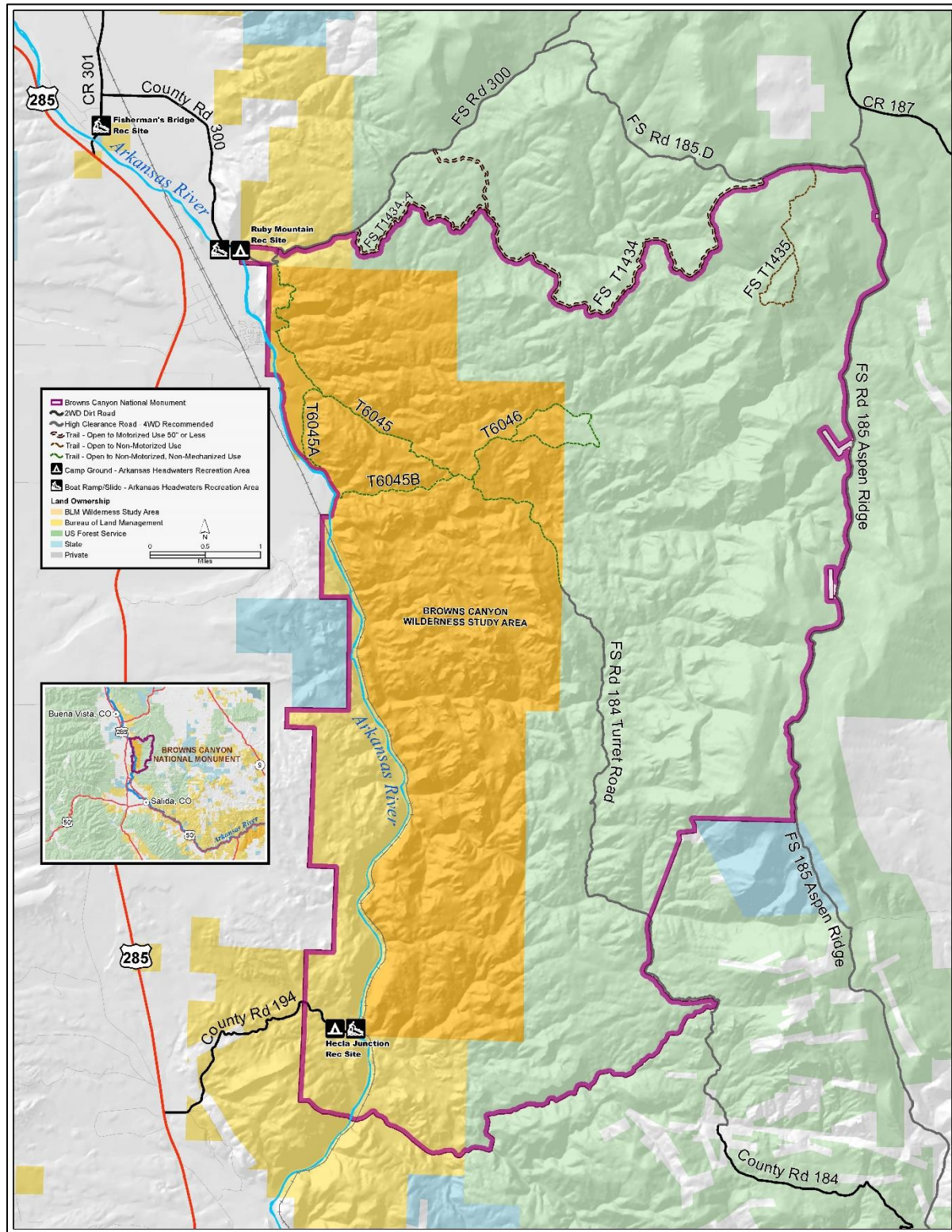
# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Colorado  
2021: Annual Manager's Report

## Browns Canyon National Monument



# Map



# Accomplishments

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Browns Canyon National Monument achieved many accomplishments in 2021. The most important accomplishment was continuing work on the Pilot Ethnography Study in partnership with the Southern Ute Cultural Preservation Department and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Historic Preservation Office. This effort was previously delayed due to COVID 19. In 2021 representatives from the above tribes were able to participate in a field visit to a potentially culturally important site, where photographs and documentation of the site provided background information to tribal elders. Tribal representatives participated in the fieldwork as well as ethnographic interviews and discussion of monument management.



Other accomplishments included a partnership with the US Forest Service and Friends of Browns Canyon where several dispersed campsites were delineated to protect resources and user created routes were rehabilitated. Partners, including Colorado Parks and Wildlife also conducted annual monitoring and clean-up of popular campsites and day-use areas along the river corridor through the monument. While general visitor use was down from levels seen in 2020, use remained high with commercial outfitters who saw record numbers of clients in 2021. Overall, use was still above 2019 levels.

## Challenges

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Camping management continues to be a challenge within the monument in 2021. Users camped in new sites along Aspen Ridge Road, especially during the busiest weekend of the year for the area, Memorial Day Weekend. This resulted in new (unapproved) rock fire rings and trampled vegetation, which if not addressed, could result in increasing degradation to resources and eventual vegetation loss. The portion of Browns Canyon NM managed by the US Forest Service continues to address this concern through the installation of signs, barriers, monitoring and education. Cultural resource inventories conducted in 2021 indicate that camping may be having an impact to a recently discovered cultural site. Partners intend to sign for antiquities, increase patrols and develop a strategy to address the concern.



# Visitors

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In 2021 Browns Canyon National Monument saw approximately 110,000 visitors through commercial rafting. An additional 200,000 visitors to the monument were documented either as private boaters, staying in the developed campgrounds or hiking on the trails of the national monument. This is down significantly from 2020 levels (400,000 visits) but up significantly from 2019, pre-pandemic levels (126,000 visits).



# Partnerships

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BLM-USFS cooperative management of the monument continued in 2021. This work included coordination in the development of an interpretive and education plan as well as ongoing day-to-day management. This work also included Friends of Browns Canyon and Greater Arkansas River Nature Association. The partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife in management of the river corridor continued as well. This partnership provided visitor contacts and overseeing visitor safety and maintenance of the Ruby Mountain and Hecla Junction Recreation Sites. Colorado Parks and Wildlife also assisted with the annual campsite clean-up and monitoring. Through a partnership with Living Heritage Research Council, BLM hosted a visit from tribal elders to record reflections and history for a pilot tribal ethnography study.



# Science

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There were no science activities scheduled for 2021 in Browns Canyon National Monument. BLM's wildlife biologist made significant progress on developing a science plan for the monument focusing on interactions between wildlife and recreation, which is one of the primary drivers for change related to habitat. Partners also conducted the annual campsite inventory in 2021. This annual monitoring has been occurring since the early 1990's.



# Climate Impacts

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Mountain snowpack plays an important role in Colorado, not only for the farmers, ranchers and municipal water providers but also the outdoor recreation industry who rely on consistent flows for commercial white-water rafting. Snowpack in winter of 2021 was slightly below average, with a quicker than average melt-off. A Voluntary Flow Program is comprised of a coalition of water managers and water users. This coalition works together in optimizing water releases for all water users. This effort, added to an unusually high precipitation monsoon season, allowed the commercial rafting season to

gain record numbers of users, largely due to consistent river flows. If drought years continue, the ability to selectively transfer water will become increasingly difficult, which will ultimately strain this outdoor recreation industry, which provides a major source of economics for the local communities.



## Climate Resiliency

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Now that the monument management plan has been recently completed, resource staff are beginning to develop monitoring and research within the monument, including documenting climate resiliency. Plots for Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) are being planned, to include examining the limited riparian areas and springs within the monument.

## Social and Environmental Justice

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During 2021, work continued on the Browns Canyon National Monument Pilot Ethnographic Study. Representatives from the Living Heritage Research Council, BLM, US Forest Service, Southern Ute Cultural Preservation Department, and Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) held a May 2021 fieldwork tribal scoping



visit (May 3-7th) to BCNM to confirm fieldwork locations and a field activity plan. They also discussed culturally appropriate and accessible protocols, conducted initial ethnographic interviews, hiked to two additional areas of cultural interest, and received feedback to inform future field visits with tribal representatives selected by the two THPO Offices.

On August 9th and 10th, LHRC, BLM, and Southern Ute representatives backpacked into a potentially culturally important site to photograph, briefly document, and gather drone footage of the site. This information will provide additional background information for tribal elders. Representatives from the Ute Mountain Ute THPO, Southern Ute THPO, and five Ute Mountain Ute representatives selected by the THPO and Elder's Committee participated in fieldwork, ethnographic interviews, and management discussions in and around Browns Canyon National Monument from August 10th-13<sup>th</sup>.



## Events

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In partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, five education events were hosted in Browns Canyon in 2021. This included evening program talks at the developed campgrounds, a roving education table focused on river ecology, and a range hike on the Turret Trail. Partners also hosted a National Public Lands Day event where volunteers focused on delineating campsites along Aspen Ridge Road. No competitive or commercial events were hosted in 2021.



## Words from the staff

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Overall, 2021 was a great year for Browns Canyon National Monument. The monument manager was in their second year on the job and was able to focus on becoming familiar with the less visited areas of the monument, partnership development and outlining priority work. Many of the campsites of concern on Aspen Ridge are now delineated for more appropriate use and partners will shift their focus to determining effective messaging and signing as well as working on finalizing an Interpretation and Education plan. All of this took place while managing increasing recreation use. Field Office resource staff have additional monitoring scheduled following the decisions outlined in the management plan and are looking forward to gaining more knowledge about this area.





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LANDS**

## **Browns Canyon**

### **National Monument**

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