



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

Utah

2022: Annual Manager's Report

John Wesley Powell

National Conservation Area



Map

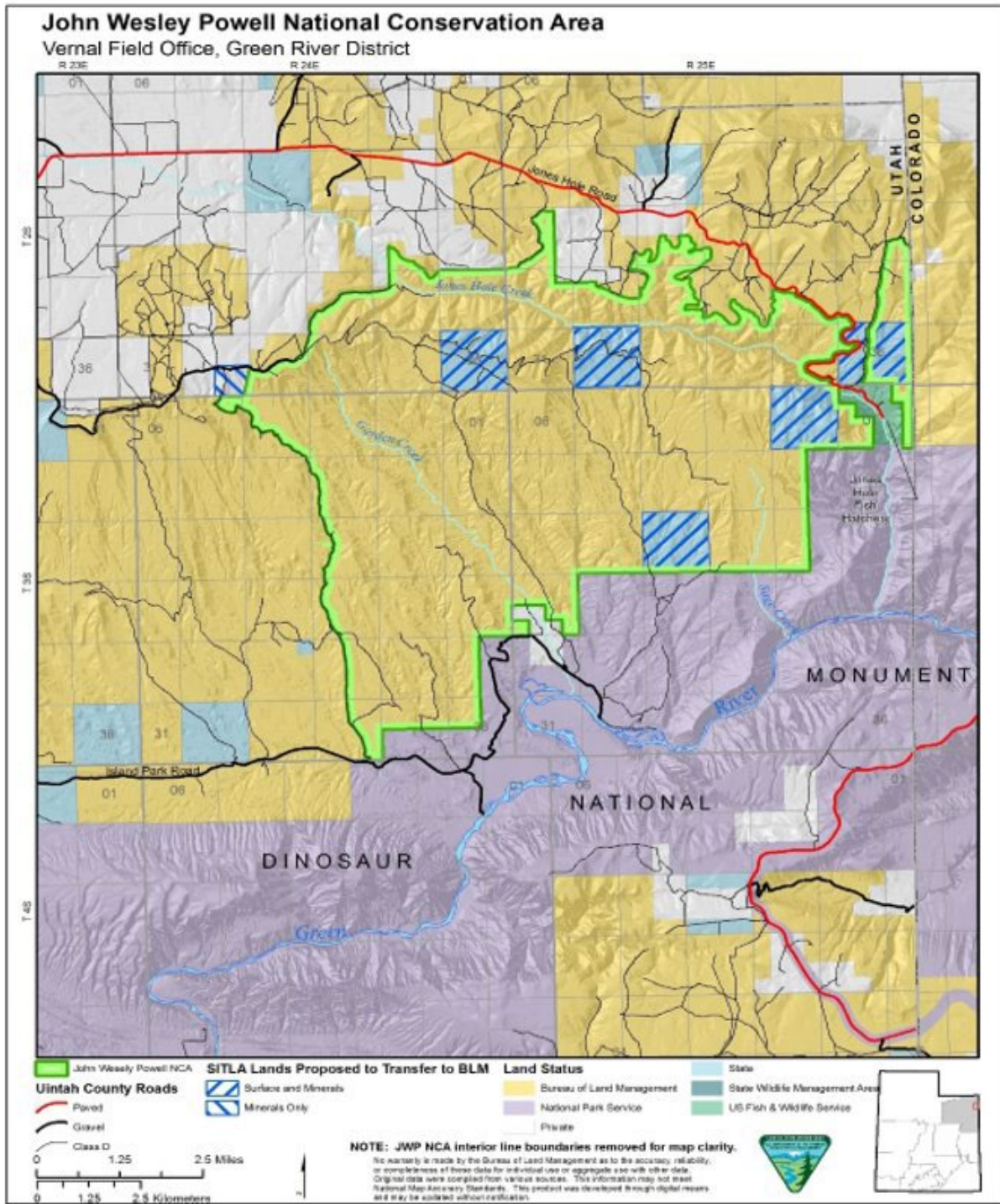


Figure 1: Map of John Wesley Powell NCA.

Accomplishments

The John Wesley Powell National Conservation Area (NCA) saw several accomplishments in 2022, the majority pertaining to the initial and ongoing data collection and planning for the new NCA. Some of these accomplishments include inventorying baseline data through monitoring, contracts, and on-the-ground efforts that will be used to inform the creation of a management plan for the NCA. In October 2021, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) published a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* announcing the initiation of a Resource Management Plan (RMP) amendment and public scoping period to address new designations within Public Law 116-9, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, one of which was the John Wesley Powell NCA. The public was invited to participate in scoping meetings and provide comments in November 2021.

Ongoing visitor use tracking measures have begun to provide visitation information to the NCA which will be used to track and analyze trends and other indicators. Efforts have continued with key grazing permit holders for the purposes of developing a grazing facilities inventory within the NCA. These efforts have proven to be informative and will play a role in the continued use and maintenance of grazing improvements. The short narrated informational video about the John Wesley Powell NCA that showcases the scenic landscape, ecological diversity, and recreation opportunities within the NCA that was developed as part of an interpretive contract is in the final stages of review before being released to the public.



Figure 2: Looking east towards John Wesley Powell NCA at sunset.

Other contract-related accomplishments include the completion of the second phase of a special status plant and noxious weed inventory that has already provided key data for the future management and botanical health of the NCA; the second data collection phase was completed in late 2022 and final deliverable is scheduled to be completed in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023. An ethnographic study was completed this year and produced valuable information about the modern history specific to the NCA. Other contracts pertaining to the NCA have progressed and are in various stages of completion, including a class II predictive model cultural survey. The on-the-ground cultural inventory work was completed in FY 2022, and consultation is scheduled for FY 2023. Additional accomplishments include work to develop the management situation analysis which establishes baseline conditions and helps determine tradeoffs between resource protection and uses. As mentioned above, many of the accomplishments pertain to the data collection needs for the ongoing management planning and RMP revision process.

Challenges

The need to gather baseline data specific to the NCA in order to make management decisions has continued to be a challenge. As mentioned above, several efforts are being made to establish and acquire the data needed to make meaningful, responsible, and sustainable decisions that would establish the future management of the NCA. The remote location and relative low visitation of the NCA mean that there are currently no developed recreation sites and designated trails for the public to utilize. Visitor use facilities will also be addressed through the planning process. Overall, good progress is being made with the data collection and planning process. Once these planning documents are in place, activity level planning and implementation of the management plan will follow.



Figure 3: Sunset on slopes leading to the crest of John Wesley Powell NCA.

Visitors

The NCA offers remote, rugged, and primitive recreation opportunities such as hiking, hunting, sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, camping, backpacking, off-road vehicle use on existing roads, and equestrian riding. Although current visitation to the NCA is relatively low, it is anticipated that with the new designation of the NCA and future outcomes-based planning, visitation will increase. Visitation has been and will continue to be considered, tracked, analyzed, and planned for in future implementation level activities.



Figure 4: Hunting is one of the popular activities in John Wesley Powell NCA.

Partnerships

Currently, the BLM has cooperative agreements with educational institutions for on-the-ground assistance with data gathering, monitoring, and surveying in the NCA. The BLM anticipates that with the growing awareness of the new NCA, friends' groups or other dedicated user groups and/or organizations may be interested in pursuing formalized partnerships.



Figure 5: Mule deer herds are particularly prominent within the John Wesley Powell NCA.

Science

Several science-based management support efforts were completed including an ethnographic study, class II predictive model cultural inventory, special status plants survey, and noxious weeds inventory field work. Other ongoing in-house data collection efforts made possible by cooperative agreements with educational institutions include: the ongoing monitoring of raptor nesting routes and known nest sites, a continuation of surveys for previously identified white-tailed prairie dog populations, monarch butterfly and bumble bee surveys completed in previously identified populations of milkweed, hundreds of camera trap days on 20 sites, and small mammal trapping surveys. One noteworthy finding has been the identification of a new population of the Flaming Gorge Evening Primrose; this plant is an endemic species to the east Uinta Mountains and that occurs in small, isolated populations. The population identified the NCA is the most southerly known population in Uintah County and was discovered within the NCA through Phase II of the Special Status Plant and Noxious Weed Inventory contract. This new discovery is an example of the ecologic diversity and value within the NCA.



Figure 6: A new population of Flaming Gorge Evening Primrose was recently found within the John Wesley Powell NCA.

Climate Impacts and Resiliency

The John Wesley Powell NCA continued to be affected by persistent severe drought in FY22, as was the rest of Utah and the Intermountain West. Pertaining to air quality, the majority of the NCA occurs within the Uinta Basin Non-Attainment Area for ozone. As part of the planning process, general conformity will be assessed for all implementation-level projects by analyzing probable emissions as needed in order to stay within the non-attainment threshold.

Management decisions regarding actions within the NCA and future implementation level actions will take climate resiliency into account as part of the National Environmental Policy Act and land use planning processes.



Figure 7: John Wesley Powell NCA looking south towards the Green River and the Yampa Plateau.

Social and Environmental Justice

Social and environmental justice considerations for under-represented groups and tribal consultation will be considered and analyzed as part of the land use planning process.

Events

A John Wesley Powell River Week Festival was held in late July 2022 to celebrate Powell's historic exploratory expedition through this area. The event was held in the local community, and the Vernal Field Office helped support this event by providing the public with information about the NCA during the event, which proved to be an effective way to educate and inform interested members of the public about the newly designated NCA.



Figure 8: John Wesley Powell NCA at sunset.



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National Conservation Area

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