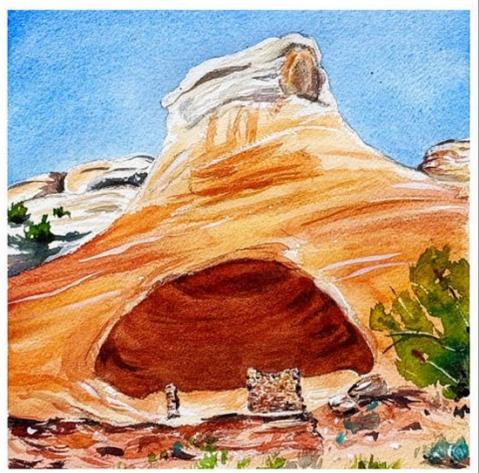




NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Colorado
2024: Annual Manager's Report

Canyons of the Ancients National Monument



Accomplishments

Canyons of the Ancients National Monument (CANM) is a multiple use national monument. Over 81% of the monument is leased for oil and gas development to a dozen different operators and corporations. One of the largest CO₂ fields in the world is found under the McElmo Dome within the boundaries of the monument. Almost 500 billion cubic feet of CO₂ is extracted from within the monument and sent via high-pressure pipeline to the Permian Basin in west Texas where it is used to enhance petroleum production. This CO₂ production business is the largest source of tax revenue for both Montezuma and Dolores Counties.

Approximately 160,000 of the monument's 177,000 acres are also available for livestock grazing, including 23 grazing allotments allowing for 6,400 animal use months of grazing use. Additionally, the monument is open to small and big game hunting following Colorado state hunting and fishing laws. The monument also contains 190 miles of motorized vehicle routes open for public use including off-highway vehicles.

The proclamation designating the area states that the monument has the densest concentration of cultural sites found in our country with an estimated 30,000 sites. Twenty-six modern day tribal nations are affiliated with the cultural sites and landscape of Canyons of the Ancients.



Kinder Morgan's Sandstone CO₂ Compressor Station located on public lands within the boundaries of Canyons of the Ancients National Monument.

Challenges



Over 85% of the monument is available for livestock grazing.

In 2024, monument and field office staff completed a multiple year effort to create a programmatic agreement which considers the effects to cultural resources of a proposal to re-introduce grazing on two vacant allotments. The agreement, which was also signed by the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office and the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, uses a novel approach to identify and mitigate impacts to sensitive cultural sites from allowed future grazing activities. The next step will be to complete an environmental assessment or other planning process to consider impacts to other resources from the proposal.

These two allotments have been vacant for over 20 years and abut both the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and Navajo Nation reservations. Use of the area by unpermitted, domestic horses has increased over the past two decades causing concern with damage to cultural and natural resources. Current estimates put the population at about 200 animals.

Visitors

2024 Canyons of the Ancients NM visitation:

- Visitor Center and Museum. 25,000
- Lowry Pueblo. 44,000
- Sand Canyon Trail System. 36,000
- Sand Canyon Pueblo. 24,000
- Painted Hand Pueblo. 13,000
- Dispersed recreation throughout the remainder of the monument. 114,000

Total visitation: 157,000

Visitation at the visitor center and museum over the last several years has been constant and slightly below pre-pandemic levels. Visitation through the remainder of the monument has been increasing over the last ten years.

Visitor Programs

- Special Events/Tours. 44 events. 1275 participants.
- Interpretive Programs. 1006 movies and other programs. 1771 participants.
- Education Programs. 43 programs. 1104 participants.



CANM staff partnered with the Saguaro National Park Trail Crew to create a new accessible trail at Painted Hand Pueblo.

Partnerships

Cultural Site Steward Program. The monument Cultural Site Stewardship Program (MSSP), in its 23rd year, is administered by the BLM and the Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance and utilizes sixty-two volunteers to monitor 117 prehistoric and historic archaeological sites. These volunteers contributed approximately 861 hours of time and drove 11,938 miles, for an estimated BLM volunteer value of \$28,835.

Ancestral Lands Program – Stabilization Crew. The monument and the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps have entered into the fifth year of an assistance agreement to employ Native American youth historic preservation specialists within CANM. Over 20 members of descendent communities have participated as fully trained and experienced site preservation technicians, well-versed in the methods and techniques necessary for the successful stabilization and preservation of Prehistoric Puebloan masonry habitations. This past season, five tribal members from the Pueblo of Zuni initiated a masonry repair project at Lowry Pueblo National Historic Landmark.

Ancestral Lands Program - Native Lands, National Trails (NLNT). CANM is hosting an NLNT intern in 2024/2025. The intern is conducting an Indigenous mapping and research project. She will prepare and present a suite of resources designed to inform the public and help National Trails and their nonprofit organization partners to advance the National Trails System’s knowledge of Indigenous ancestral Lands through partnership and collaboration with Indigenous communities along National Scenic and Historic Trails

Other partners: Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance, San Juan Mountains Association, Crow Canyon Archeological Center, Jagiellonian University, Maryland College Institute of Art, University of Denver School of Architecture, and Sci-Arc.



CANM Native Lands, National Trails Intern Tiana Cachini, from the Pueblo of Zuni

Science

The BLM Assessment Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) program represents a significant advancement in the management of public lands, emphasizing systematic data collection, adaptive management, and stakeholder engagement to ensure the ecological integrity of resources for future generations. The BLM began collecting AIM data on CANM in 2011. Today there are 94 AIM plots on CANM, from which ecological data has been collected. A variety of ecological indicators are used by the AIM program to assess the health of ecosystems, such as bare ground, vegetation cover, species composition, and soil stability. Our AIM crew collects data on 50-60 randomly selected Tres Rios Field Office (TRFO) plots each season, with a 4:1 revisit rate (~12 new plots each year). This data is used to guide management decisions, such as permitting for grazing and recreation, and to determine whether we are meeting goals and objectives set out in the CANM Resource Management Plan.



Two AIM crew members standing above a gully, collecting line point intercept data along a transect.

Outreach and Special Events

Four Corners Indigenous Art Market

On June 15th, Canyons of the Ancients National Monument (CANM) hosted their second annual Four Corners Indigenous Art Market highlighting Native artisans and musicians from across the region. The event welcomed a diverse group of guests with close to 450 people stopping by throughout the day to shop, watch, and learn from the Native communities represented. The Four Corners Indigenous Art Market would not have been possible without the Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance (SCCA), which supported and collaborated with CANM on the event.

3rd Annual Star Party

In partnership with the Society for Cultural Astronomy in the American Southwest, San Juan Mountains Association and Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance, Indigenous perspectives of the night sky were shared by Bertram Tsavadawa, from the Hopi Tribe, and Mary Weahkee, from Santa Clara Pueblo. Presenters, visitors and BLM staff shared constellations through their telescopes while Ric Alling, retired from ASU School of Earth and Space Exploration, also shared his love of the night sky.



In partnership with Mesa Verde National Park, Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance and San Juan Mountains Association, Canyons of the Ancients hosted its first annual Luminaria Event. Partners provided cookies and cocoa and roved the trail leading visitors to the top of the museum hill to Escalante Pueblo.

Staff Topic of Choice

Curation and NAGPRA. The museum collections of the Bureau of Land Management-Canyons of the Ancients Visitor Center and Museum focus on the artifacts and archives from permitted archaeological activities in the Northern San Juan Region.

CANM curates over 2 million objects and over 100,000 archives and is by far the largest of three BLM Curation facilities nation-wide. New Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) regulations promulgated January 13, 2024, and a new BLM NAGPRA Action plan prioritized the need to consult with descendent Tribal communities to identify NAGPRA Cultural Items held by the museum. Tribal consultation efforts began in October 2024, and we expect to host consulting Tribes in 2025 to review objects and move towards repatriation.

The CANM Curation Program leads the BLM for migration to the DOI ICMS National Museum database system. The data migration has been in place for three years and CANM is implementing live data imports and hope to complete the process by 2026.



Canyons of the Ancients NM hosted a multi-agency, multi-tribe consultation meeting in April 2024. Tribal representatives and agency staff visited Cannonball Pueblo during the first afternoon of the four-day meeting.



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Canyons of the Ancients

National Monument

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Cover Photo: Monument staff partnered with the Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance in 2024 to re-vitalize the monument's Artist in Residence Program. The cover photo is a montage of photos and prints created by 2025 artist in residence, Lisa Spangler.

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