



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

**Colorado**  
2024: Annual Manager's Report

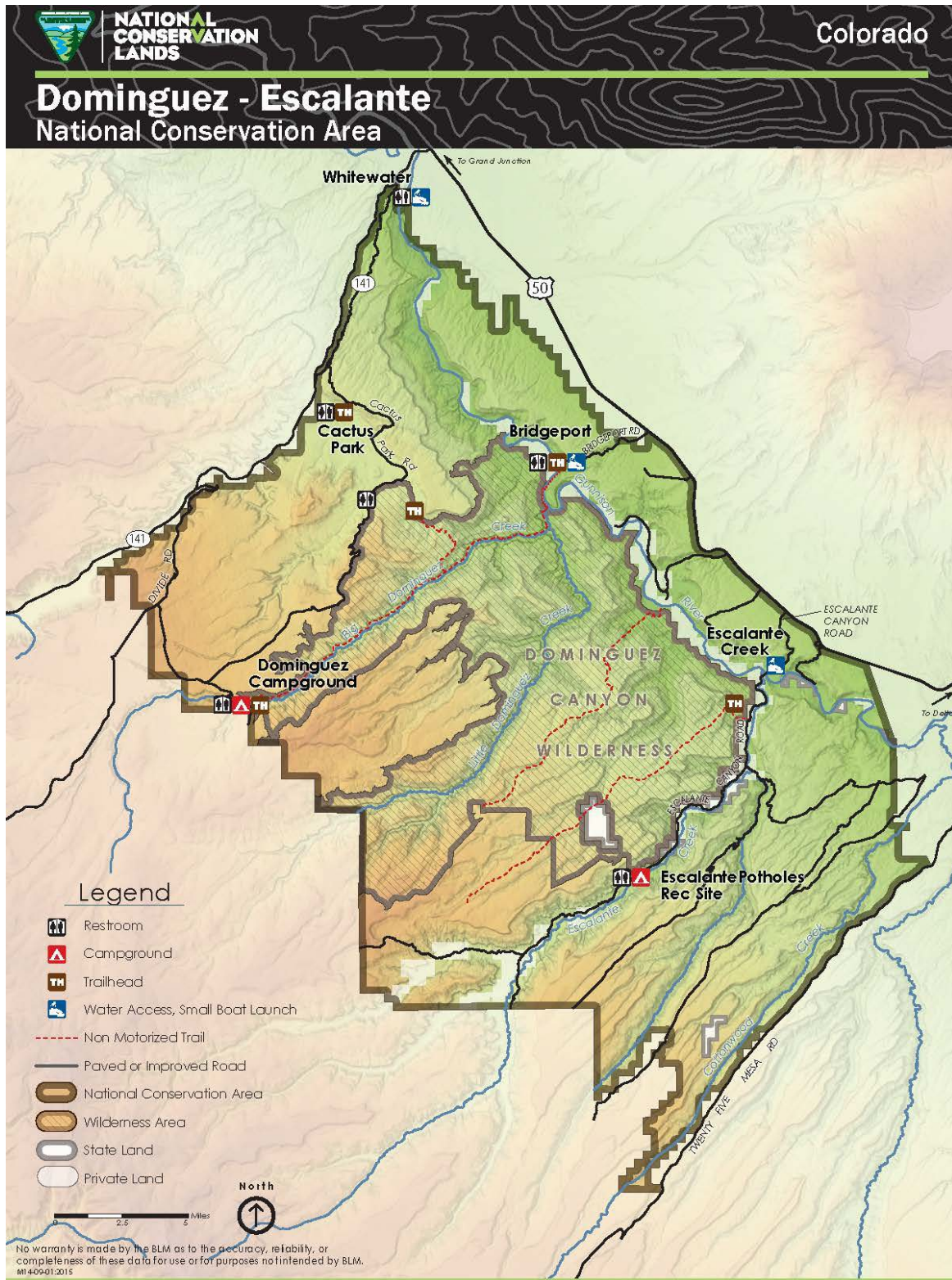
# Dominguez-Escalante

## National Conservation Area





# Map



# Accomplishments

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The two-person Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA) Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) crew funded via a grant from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) OHV Registration program performed extensive route maintenance following heavy rains in the monsoon season. This same crew also devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to better delineate approved routes in the western portion of the Cactus Park Special Recreation Management Area, which is a large expanse of slickrock where even the most familiar and well-meaning visitor was prone to losing the trail.





# Challenges

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While D-E NCA is fortunate to have a Good Management status with CPW which funds a two-person OHV Crew to manage and maintain OHV trails and trailheads within the NCA, proliferation of user created trails continues to be a problem. With limited capacity within the Interdisciplinary Team to develop a comprehensive trail plan through an Environmental Assessment via the National Environmental Policy Act, coupled with a shortage of law enforcement presence due to massive demands on three Law Enforcement Officers responsible for nearly three million acres of resource protection, there is little to stop users from traveling off trail. Such impacts are occurring within the Hunting Grounds Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA) and the Ninemile Hill ERMA.

The 2022 Gunnison River Camping Management Plan, DOI-BLM-CO-G030-2022-0001, was planned to be implemented in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 but has since been delayed until the 2026 boating season. The delay was due to complications in onboarding the reservation system to the online platform, recreation.gov.



# Visitors

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Visitation data was gathered via deployment of seven TRAFx counters and Individual Special Recreation Permits on the Gunnison River. This same combination of methods for gathering visitation data has been consistent for several years in the NCA. FY24 saw a new high visitation level of ~155,000 visits, a 7.6% increase over FY23. The increase in visitation was evenly spread across the majority of the NCA, with a slightly above average increase in visitation to Dominguez Canyon Wilderness via the Bridgeport Trailhead.





# Partnerships

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Colorado Canyons Association (CCA), BLM-Colorado's friends' group for the three NCAs in the state – Dominguez-Escalante, Gunnison Gorge, and McInnis Canyons NCAs – continued their excellent work in stewarding the area and educating youth in the NCA. In FY24, CCA continued expanding on the scope and number of offerings of their Dias del Agua y Tiera, a bilingual riparian and upland overnight experience for youth aimed at exposing them to the cultural, ecological, scientific, and recreational importance of the NCA (pictured below).

This is the fifth consecutive year that CCA worked to staff an information table at the Bridgeport Trailhead on busy spring weekends in April and May. This effort helps educate visitors about the importance of visiting the NCA with respect. CCA also provided “WAG -bags” to help visitors comply with the rules of the area to remove all waste, including human waste. “WAG” stands for Waste Activation and Gelling powder that is contained within a portable bag. The powder helps degrade virulent pathogens found in human waste such as hepatitis strains, E-coli and more. The “bag” is used to contain and facilitate packing out human waste – which is especially important in desert environments where human waste does not degrade quickly.



Another important partner this fiscal year was The Conservation Fund. On July 15, 2024, The Conservation Fund purchased the historic Escalante Ranch, over 4,000 acres of which are within D-E NCA, and continue to hold title to the land until the BLM can purchase the land from them with Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife is another partner critical to the success of D-E NCA. The CPW OHV Grants, which fund a two-person crew to maintain OHV opportunities in the NCA as well as the heavy equipment grant which funds the operation and maintenance of trail dozers and mini excavators, are essential to providing visitors with quality recreation experiences.

# Science

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## Pollinator Studies

A Presidential memorandum dated June 20, 2014, created a strategy to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators directing the BLM to research whether sagebrush restoration impacts pollinators and their habitats. The National Landscape Conservation System Management Studies Support Program funds research on public land activities which effect pollinators and their habitats. D-E NCA created a strategy to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators; this is an ongoing project.



# Outreach and Special Events

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As mentioned above, CCA helped staff an information table the Bridgeport Trailhead for the 5<sup>th</sup> year in a row. This trailhead is the avenue for access by ~90% of all visitors to Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. As such, there is a heightened need for all visitors to adhere to good outdoor etiquette to preserve the setting which attracts them and others there to begin with. During the information table events, CCA and BLM staff provide wag bags, maps, and Leave No Trace education and materials to visitors that promote compliance with practices that protect the national conservation area for present and future visitors.

This past year D-E NCA also posted a business plan for public comment from August 26 to September 25 on the BLM Headquarters Business Plan website. This constituted the final stage in which the public could provide comment on the proposed plan to charge fees in the NCA. None of the 10 comments received during this period triggered reconsideration of the plan as proposed. The business plan proposes that BLM may assess fees via Individual Special Recreation Permits for Special Areas, as required per the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004 and as required in BLM Handbook 2930. Many of the D-E NCA sites and campgrounds provide amenities as required by FLREA.







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