



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

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

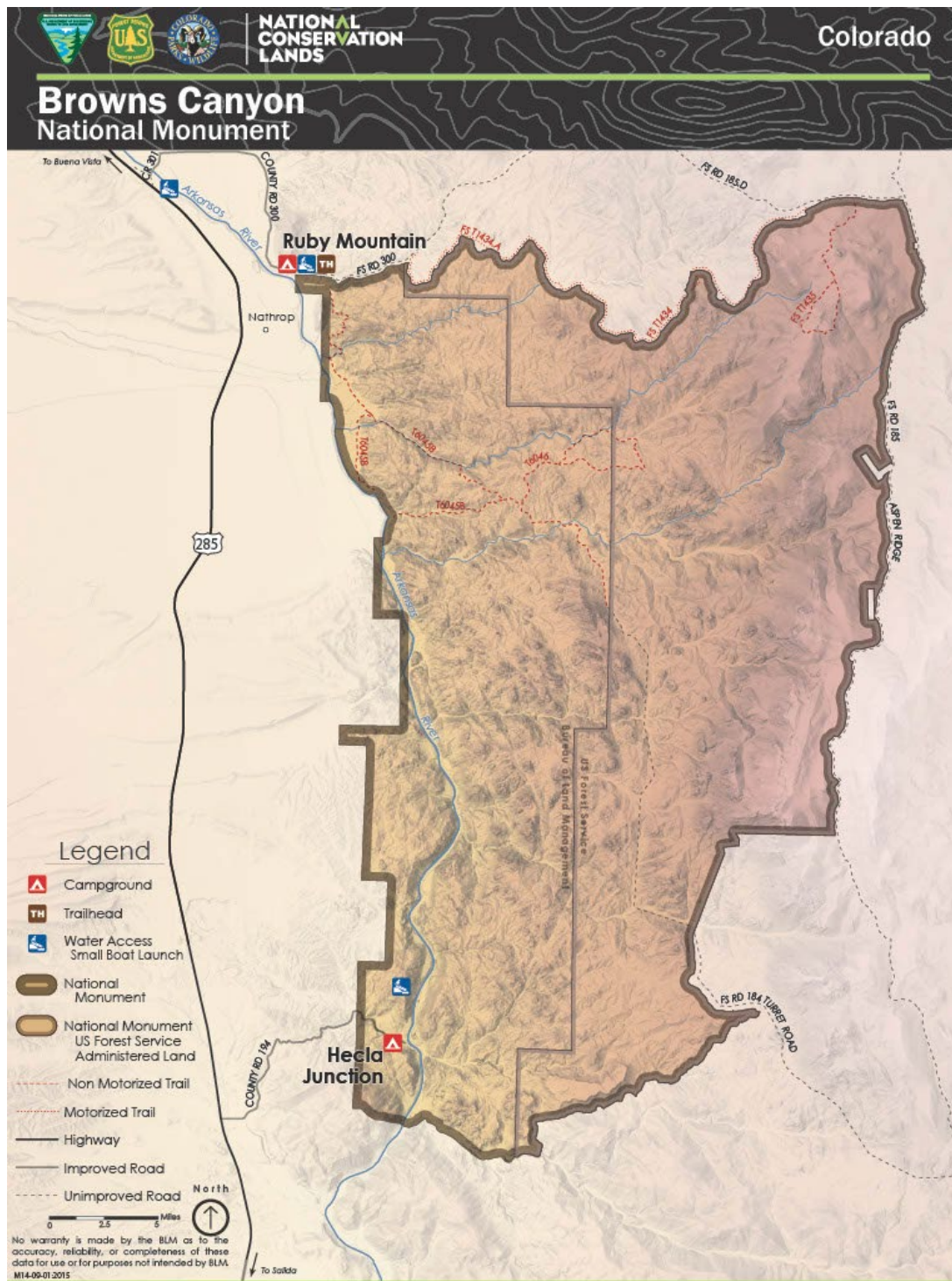
# Browns Canyon

## National Monument





## Map



# Accomplishments

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In Fiscal Year (FY) 24, Browns Canyon National Monument (BCNM) continued on the Ute Ethnography Study to engage with tribal elders and Ute representatives to increase knowledge about cultural resources and their significance, which will aid in improved management of cultural and natural resources.





# Challenges

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As in 2023's report, funding for implementing key elements of the management plan and interpretation plan continues to be a challenge for BCNM. Key projects awaiting funding include installation of kiosks with interpretive materials at Ruby Mountain and Hecla Junction recreation sites, developing an ADA accessible trail and interpretive site, and regular monitoring, especially of dispersed camping sites along Aspen Ridge Road.





# Visitors

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In 2024 Browns Canyon National Monument saw approximately 186,000 visitors to the monument either as private boaters (8,200), staying in the developed campgrounds or hiking on the trails of the monument. This is a slight decrease from 2023 levels. Upon reviewing the revised estimates for 2023, the previously reported figure was incorrect; the actual number of visitors was 192,000. Commercial rafting saw 75,000 visitors through commercial rafting or fishing, a 10% decline from 2023. This decline was similar throughout the river corridor and the Colorado commercial rafting industry.

2024 saw very high water on the Arkansas River in the month of June due to good snowpack and late spring storms. Typically, very high water flows increases the number of experienced private boaters looking for more challenging experiences, while beginner boaters and commercial river trips seek calmer and safer water levels.





# Partnerships

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In 2024 Friends of Browns Canyon continued to be a strong partner with their focus on dark sky monitoring and dark sky focused events in their efforts to apply for Dark Sky Park recognition. This included dark sky photography and celestial viewing events. They also continued to monitor impacts from camping and unauthorized motorized use. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), through Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area, continues to be a strong partner in management of the river corridor. They increased their patrols that focused on camping within the monument, and educating visitors about river stewardship. CPW continues to provide outstanding maintenance of recreation facilities within the monument, educating visitors and ensuring visitor safety, especially with 2024's high water flows. CPW also assisted with the annual campsite clean-up and monitoring, providing rafts and experienced personnel for the clean-up. The US Forest Service also continued to be strong agency partners by providing patrols of boundary roads and engaging with Friends of Browns Canyon to identify projects that would assist in improving management of the monument.



# Outreach and Special Events

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In partnership with CPW, three education events were hosted in Browns Canyon in 2024. This included two interpretive hikes and one astronomy program. Additionally, Friends of Browns Canyon hosted three dark sky photography outings in 2024 providing instruction to aspiring dark sky photographers from a professional photographer.



# Staff Topic of Choice

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Receiving Dark Sky Park recognition after several years of hard work was certainly the highlight of 2024. This is largely attributed to tireless efforts of Friends of Browns Canyon volunteers as well as agency partners willing to adjust lighting practices in campgrounds. This designation will kick off training for park rangers and volunteers that will deliver dark sky programming for visitors, bringing greater recognition of dark sky resources and awareness of light pollution.

2025 should also see completion of the Ute Ethnography study and potential engagement with other tribes to learn about their history and cultural values related to the monument and the region. (Tribal?) participation in the study and reading their preliminary draft reports has been both educational and inspiring.

The widening of the road into Ruby Mountain is underway in late 2024 and the early months of 2025. This work is being accomplished through a generous Federal Highways (spell out FLAP or delete 'FLAP') grant awarded to Chaffee County. This project will greatly improve road conditions and public safety for visitors to Ruby Mountain, the primary access point into the monument.

Mid-winter, when these reports are written, always brings hope and handwringing for the snowpack to build up in the mountains that will sustain season-long water throughout the summer that all walks of life depend upon. As I write this report today the weather is warm, dry and sunny. Here's to hoping that the storms continue to roll in and blanket the mountains in snow, and that 2025 will be another great year for public lands and Browns Canyon National Monument.





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**Browns Canyon  
National Monument**

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