



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

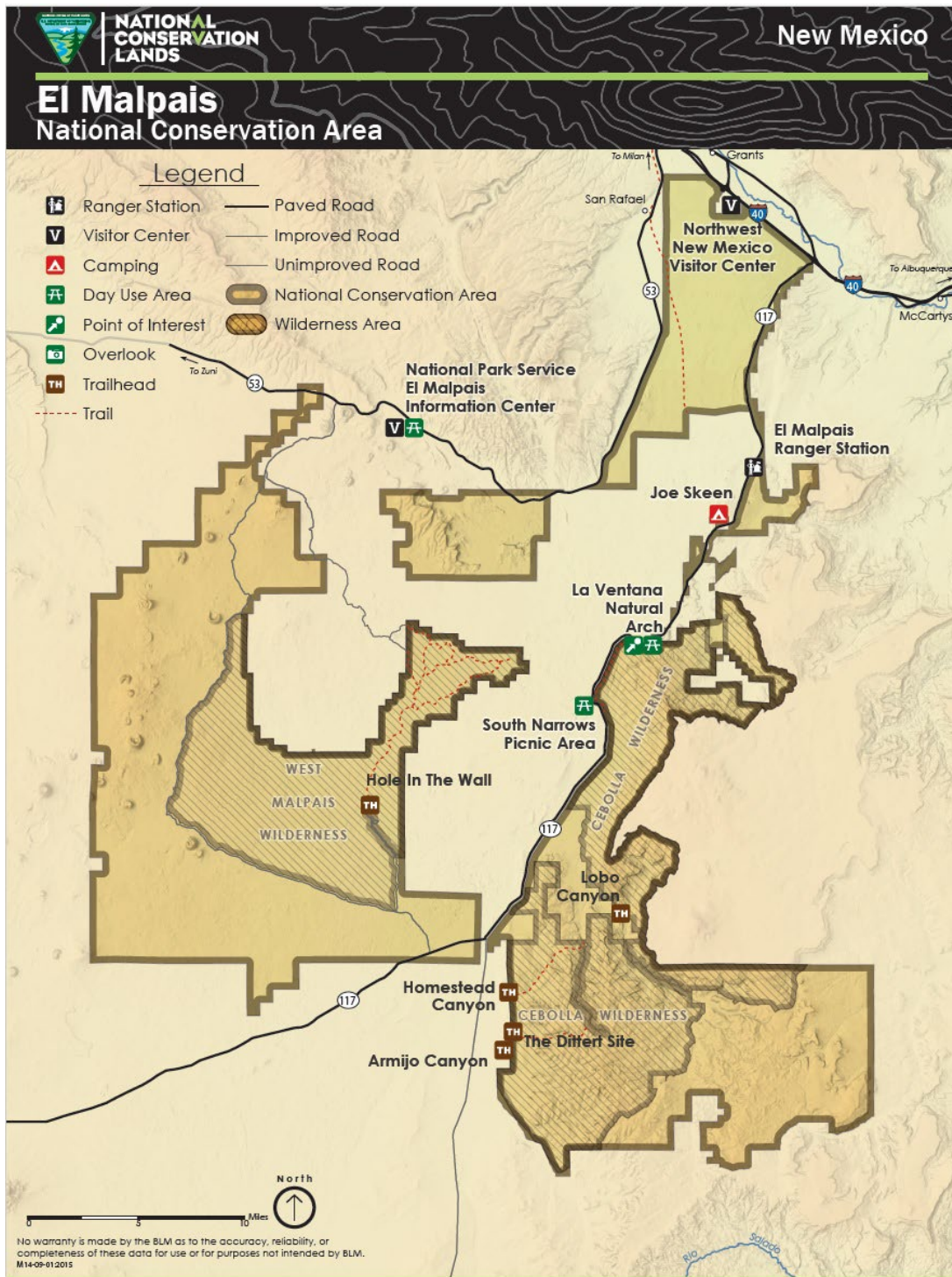
New Mexico
2024: Annual Manager's Report

El Malpaís

National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024 was a busy one for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Rio Puerco Field Office and El Malpaís National Conservation Area (NCA) staff. Throughout the year, BLM focused on day-to-day operations, strengthening partnerships, improving visitor services, enhancing trails, and working with volunteers. One accomplishment that stands out was BLM's collaboration with NASA to recover a payload that had landed in the Chain of Craters Wilderness Study Area (WSA), located on the western boundary of the NCA. Working alongside NASA personnel, BLM staff located the device. BLM provided the necessary authorization for NASA to recover the payload and assessed the area for any potential damage to El Malpaís' resources caused by the landing.

Thankfully, there was no significant damage to any resources, and BLM staff were able to be adaptive and quickly respond to support NASA in managing the incident.



Area affected by payload landing.

Volunteers

In September 2024, the National Public Lands Day event at La Ventana Arch in El Malpaís NCA had a great turnout. A dedicated group of 16 volunteers came together to help install two benches at the iconic arch.



Volunteers on National Public Lands Day.

Challenges

In Fiscal Year 2024, the most significant challenges at the NCA primarily centered around the Ranger Station. In June 2024, the pump that supplies water to the Ranger Station failed due to corroded electrical lines. And in July of 2024, the security and fire alarm system at the Ranger Station also malfunctioned. Both technical challenges persisted past the end of fiscal year 2024 but were resolved before the end of calendar year. During the water outage at the Ranger Station, visitors had access to a portable toilet with a handwashing station in the parking lot. Meanwhile the rangers conducted daily fire safety checks until the fire and security alarm systems were restored.



Failed safety alarm panel.

Visitors

Visitation in the NCA is steady throughout the year, with the highest overall use occurring from spring to summer. Elk and pronghorn antelope hunting are always popular during open seasons from August through December.

In Fiscal Year 2024, El Malpaís' Ranger Station was open five days per week (Thursday through Monday). It received steady visitation throughout the year, though there was a decline in numbers during the time the Ranger Station lacked running water. The Ranger Station received 2,809 visitors, and overall, the NCA received a total of 113,587 visitors during the fiscal year. Historically, visitor use numbers have been gathered using a variety of methods. These methods include collecting data from nearby National Park Service's (NPS) El Malpaís National Monument's Visitor Center and the NCA's special recreation permits. Recreation staff also deployed new TRAFx vehicle counters in Fiscal Year 2021, with additional installations in Fiscal Year 2022. In the Recreation Management Information System (RMIS), past estimates of annual visitation were less accurate compared to the data now provided by TRAFx counters. BLM anticipates visitation will continue to grow due to El Malpaís' rising popularity and the overall increasing interest in outdoor activities.



Visitors Enjoying El Malpaís National Conservation Area

Partnerships

In Fiscal Year 2024, partnership with the staff of the neighboring El Malpaís National Monument (National Monument), operated by the NPS, remained central to the operations of the NCA. Partnership and collaboration with NPS in Fiscal Year 2024 included working on shared sign plans, developing interpretation projects, collaborating on construction projects on NM Hwy 117 (which will impact the ability of visitors to come to the Ranger Station), and a reroute of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT). Construction on NM Hwy 117 will impact access to the ranger station by potentially limiting or restricting visitor travel along the route.

One of the unique resources in the NCA that requires strong partnerships is the management of the CDT. The CDT traverses through the NCA and the National Monument for more than 40 miles. This NCA section of the trail is approximately 20 miles and winds through the Chain of Craters in an environment of piñon, juniper, ponderosa pine, shrubs and grasses. However, a large majority of visitors bypass this section by using Hwy 117 as a more direct route to hike north into Grants. For the past several years, the State Office and Rio Puerco FO have worked on a land exchange with the Acoma Pueblo to facilitate a more direct route for CDT hikers near Grants. This exchange is in line with the CDT's mission to keep hiker routes off highways. The BLM, the CDT Administrator, Continental Divide Trail Coalition, NPS, State of New Mexico, and US Forest Service are coordinating routes, improvements, easements, and acquisitions in the area and throughout the state of New Mexico.



Hikers visiting the NCA.

Science

In 2019, Rio Puerco completed the El Malpaís Science Plan which is meant to guide the direction of scientific research in the NCA. No new scientific research took place within the NCA during Fiscal Year 2024. The 5-year update on Wilderness Character Monitoring Evaluation began in Fiscal Year 2022 for West Malpaís Wilderness and Cebolla Wilderness. West Malpaís Wilderness 5-year update was completed in Fiscal Year 2022, and Cebolla Wilderness was completed in Fiscal Year 2023.

Outreach and Special Events

In Fiscal Year 2024, the Public Lands Interpretive Association (PLIA) and Rio Puerco Field Office continued inviting artists from surrounding communities to participate in the El Malpaís Community Art Program. This year's call for art showcased a sculpture by local Acoma Pueblo artist Mr. Walter Torres. Mr. Torres' sculpture highlights the power that comes from unity of Native people with the El Malpaís. By continuing to celebrate local artists, while highlighting the area and its communities, generations of visitors will be able to connect to the art and land. Through this project, BLM hopes visitors will gain a better understanding of El Malpaís and its surrounding communities, while relating to the culture and history of this unique New Mexico landscape.

Mr. Torres' art was chosen due to its beautiful connection to El Malpais' cultural importance and beautiful scenery. This piece is featured on a pedestal outside the Ranger Station. Rio Puerco Field Office is proud and humbled for Mr. Torres' sculpture to join the growing collection of art at the Ranger Station. Although Mr. Torres' sculpture did not arrive at the Ranger Station until shortly after the end of Fiscal Year 2024, the preparation for installing it was a primary focus for the NCA team during the fiscal year.



"TriboElectricity" by Mr. Walter Torres of the Acoma Pueblo

A Hearty Thank You!

Dear Friends of the El Malpaís National Conservation Area,

The Bureau of Land Management, El Malpaís NCA staff, and our partners at PLIA look forward to continuing our Community Art Program in Fiscal Year 2025. In Spring of 2025, we hope to announce another call for artists from communities surrounding El Malpaís NCA to showcase their pieces in our Ranger Station. We hope to reveal the selected pieces in late summer of 2025, helping once more to connect community, tradition, and our public lands.

Our Rangers have had a lot of turnover in Fiscal Year 2024 and we look forward to our new team members continuing to update and create new interpretive materials for our visitors. Our dedicated Park Rangers, whether new to El Malpaís or long-time veterans, continue to strive for excellence through their on-the-ground visitor interactions and strengthen our communication with partners.

Thank you for being stewards to your Public Lands!





**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

El Malpaís

National Conservation Area

Albuquerque District Office
Bureau of Land Management
Rio Puerco Field Office
100 Sun Ave
Suite 330
Albuquerque, NM 87109
Phone: 505-761-8700

Report compiled by: John Klinkel, El Malpaís NCA Manager

The mention of company names, trade names, or commercial products does not constitute endorsement or recommendation for use by the federal government.