McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area

National Landscape Conservation System

FY 2008 Annual Manager's Report

-- NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM –

FY 2008 Manager's Annual Report

Introduction, Information, and Statistics

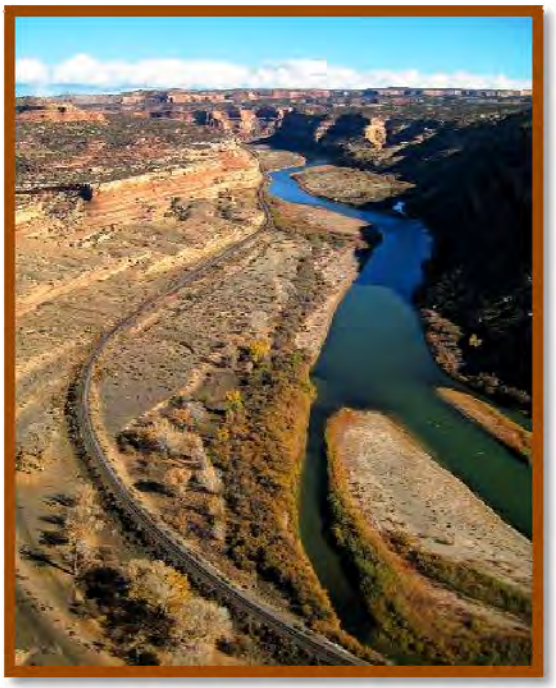
Site name:	**McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area**
Acreage:	**123,430, including 75,500 acres in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness**
Manager:	**Katie A. Stevens**
Address:	**2815 H. Road, Grand Junction, CO 81506**
Phone:	**970-244-3000**
Fax:	**970-244-3083**
Website:	**http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/mcnca.html**
Legislation:	**P.L. 106-353 – *Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000*, October 24, 2000**
Renamed:	**P.L. 108-400 – renamed CCNCA "McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area," January 1, 2005**
Visitation:	**284,136 (FY08)**

Natural and Heritage Resources Conditions

Natural resources trends

Substantial progress has been made in controlling non-native plant species in the Colorado River corridor, particularly noxious weeds, tamarisk, and Russian olive. Key accomplishments by NCA staff and partners:

- More than 1,200 Russian olive trees were cut and treated with focus on the south side of the river in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness
- 25 acres of Russian knap weed were treated on Mee Bench
- Almost 1 acre of tamarisk was cut and brush piled
- 25 new naturally grown cottonwood trees were protected and 30 new potted cottonwood trees were planted. NCA staff is actively managing a total of 255 Fremont cottonwood trees in the Colorado River corridor



The Colorado River from Wild Horse Mesa, Rabbit Valley

- 2.5 acres of white top were sprayed
- Over 250 purple loosestrife plants treated
- More than 1,000 acres of tamarisk have been impacted by the effects of the tamarisk beetle. This biological treatment began in 2005 and the treatment area has grown each year.

MCNCA relied heavily on partner contributions to help accomplish this work, especially the Western Colorado Conservation Corps, the Tamarisk Coalition, the Back Country Horsemen, the Colorado Mountain Club, and Mesa County.

MCNCA staff wraps young cottonwood trees to protect them from trampling and predators

Land Health Assessments

122,300 acres of MCNCA have been inventoried and assessed for meeting land health standards with 89 percent of the acres meeting land health standards and 11 percent of the acres not meeting standards. 1,130 acres acquired since the NCA was designated still need to be assessed for land health.

There continued to be modifications to grazing management within the NCA, generally decreased livestock numbers and early removal of livestock to allow for spring growth. The West Salt and Jouflas allotments generally saw the greatest improvement in perennial plant regrowth. This improvement was partially because of changes in livestock grazing practices as well as increased moisture during the spring growing season.

The NCA (as it was designated in 2000) has been inventoried to determine compliance with land health standards. This inventory is approximately five years old. During the 2007 field season, additional land health evaluations were conducted immediately north of the NCA. This inventory was completed ahead of schedule and allowed the team to re-inventory the area of the NCA north of I-70. This inventory showed that

25 acres of Russian Knapweed were treated on Mee Bench in FY08

land health standards were still not being met, but there were some positive indicators in land health such as increased perennial plant cover and density.

McDonald wash, north of I-70, had been identified as an area not meeting land health standards. Contributing factors include: historical livestock grazing, large wildfires and current grazing management. The range sites are dominated by the annual noxious weeds, cheatgrass and annual wheatgrass. There was a proposal to treat approximately 1,000 acres using straw wattles placed to reduce erosion and encourage regrowth of native species. This project is being changed to herbicide treatments of annuals and seeding, or seeding alone.

Wildland Fire Management

FY08 was a slow fire season for MCNCA: only two fires were reported. Both fires were considered for WFU, but were managed as suppression fires for ecological reasons, particularly for the presence of Bromus tectorum (cheat grass).

- The 28 Hole fire was inside the NCA and outside the wilderness (1/10 acre), and suppression action was taken.
- The French Rose fire inside the wilderness area was a suppression fire put into monitor status, and no suppression action taken (1/10 acre, actually one tree surrounded by rock).

216 acres of MCNCA were treated for hazardous fuels reduction in FY08.

A busy spring day at the Pollock Bench Trailhead – this trailhead provides close-to-home access to the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness

Heritage resources trends

All cultural project work in the NCA in FY08 was conducted under base funding as no special project funding was available. Even with a full work load generated by compliance work in the Field Office, proactive work was occured because of partnerships and projects initiated with the prior year's funding. Archaeological sites in the NCA continue to be used as outdoor classrooms with hikes to rock art in the McDonald Creek Cultural Area and a sheltered camp on the Rabbit Ears trail featured in the Ute Ethnobotany field trips. Without BPS project funding, no new partnership projects were initiated but the deliverables for a previous Colorado Historic Society

grant were received for the walking brochure and interpretive signs in McDonald Creek Trail. Implementation of this will occur in FY09, as funding or partner contributions allow.

Heritage Resource Inventory and Restoration

As a result of conducting a survey in the heavily used area near Fruita, additional heritage sites were recorded. Some of these new discoveries were segments of a historic road and trail that added information to that which was previously gathered on the Colorado National Monument. A site visit was made with Northern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute cultural staff to the Ute Trail in the Rattlesnake Arch area. The lower elevation segment of the trail has already been recorded, but this year's visit led to plans to finish mapping the trail with students from the Northern Ute Tribe assisting in a Heritage Adventure project. No restoration projects were conducted on cultural resources in the NCA during the fiscal year. Site monitoring was conducted and resulted in the addition of another wickiup structure at the Black Ridge wickiup site.

Recreation Facilities, Roads, and Trails Conditions

Overview

The general condition of the recreation facilities in the MCNCA is “fair” to “good” as documented in FAMS and the 2008 Assets Management Report. The MCNCA maintained 28 recreation sites in 2008: however, annual operation and maintenance of these recreation sites was custodial and did not fully meet BLM or user needs.

Construction and Maintenance

In FY08, BLM engineers developed plans for several new facilities within MCNCA. These sites were necessary to provide safe and environmentally sustainable access for MCNCA’s increasing number of visitors. Projects scheduled for completion in FY09 include construction of a new trailhead at Devils Canyon, one of MCNCA’s most heavily visited sites. This new trailhead will consist of a 40 car parking lot, vault toilet, and informational kiosk. A new parking area will also be constructed at the Fruita Paleontological Area, one of MCNCA’s interpretive trails that currently has no designated parking area. This trailhead will

Motorized singletrack trail in Rabbit Valley

MCNCA staff restores an old road identified for rehabilitation in the MCNCA Resource Management Plan

consist of a parking area for 12 cars and 2 busses as well as a vault toilet, informational kiosk, and new trail entrance to the Fruita Paleontological Area.

Roads and Trails

MCNCA has more than 80 miles of designated roads and 120 miles of designated trails. Annual road maintenance is meeting basic custodial requirements and user needs. Annual trail maintenance, however, is not meeting the needs of BLM or our users. MCNCA relies wholly on volunteers for trail construction and maintenance projects. Over the past few years, we have focused these efforts on trail reroutes, rehabilitation and restoration. These volunteer efforts are not enough to perform adequate annual maintenance on all of the MCNCA trails. In addition to this need, focusing volunteer projects on trail maintenance has created a backlog of new trail construction needs in the NCA. MCNCA's RMP approved development of four miles of new non-motorized trails in the Mack Ridge zone and the NCA has not yet been able to build these trails although the first of these trails will be constructed with volunteers in early FY09.

MCNCA staff is working to solve this trail maintenance backlog by securing outside grant funding to hire trail crews to perform much of this work. In FY08, MCNCA was awarded more than $100,000 in outside grant funding for both motorized and non-motorized trail projects. Some of this funding will be used to hire an eight-person trail crew for 14 weeks in FY09 for trail maintenance on public lands in Rabbit Valley and the Fruita area. In addition to ongoing trail maintenance, MCNCA staff is constantly facing the challenge of rehabilitating illegal user-created routes. There are at least 20 miles of unauthorized routes that require restoration and rehabilitation.

Trail Planning

MCNCA staff is working on a comprehensive trail management and implementation plan for the front country area of MCNCA adjacent to the City of Fruita and the Colorado National Monument. This plan will establish a sustainable trail system in this area (there are currently more than 25 miles of routes) while improving access and developing additional connections between MCNCA and adjacent public lands. A similar, smaller trail plan was developed in FY07 for the Opal Hill area of MCNCA and will be incorporated into this larger plan when it is completed in FY09.

Signage

MCNCA initiated a GIS-based sign plan in 2007. Currently, approximately 40 percent of all signs have been inventoried. At this time, travel management and directional signing are not consistent throughout MCNCA. Existing signs are being updated as time and funding allows. As new signs are needed, they are designed and installed to maintain a consistent look and feel throughout the NCA.

All primary NCA access points have standard portal signs installed, and all developed trailheads have informational kiosks. Many of MCNCA's more popular areas have several panel kiosks and our staff is working with volunteer and user groups to develop relevant kiosk information and to maintain the kiosks.

New trailhead signage at the McDonald Creek Trailhead

Outreach, Environmental Education, Interpretation, and Volunteers

Outreach

MCNCA staff consists of the NCA manager, an outdoor recreation planner, and three park rangers. Our park rangers make a tremendous number of contacts in the field on a year-round basis. During high-use summer weekends in the Colorado River corridor, our river ranger contacts more than 350 visitors per day. During the spring and fall, our park rangers contact hundreds of people daily on our mountain bike trails on Mack Ridge (the Kokopelli Trail) as well as in our motorized areas of Rabbit Valley. Due to the addition of the third park ranger in 2008, MCNCA staff is able to cover a wide area on busy weekends to ensure that we make as many educational contacts as possible.

NCA staff is interviewed for a television news segment about the NCA, Mygatt-Moore Quarry, and the Trail Through Time

There are several significant recreation planning projects underway in MCNCA this year, and the staff spent a significant amount of time in FY08 conducting informal outreach to increase public participation in this process. MCNCA's Outdoor Recreation Planner gave 12 presentations in FY08

ranging from informal updates, to the Friends of McInnis Canyons, to on-site project specific presentations for the public to increase awareness of the upcoming facility improvements.

Visitor Centers

MCNCA is not associated with a BLM visitor center. NCA staff, however, does work closely with the Colorado Welcome Center and the Grand Junction Visitor and Convention Bureau to provide information to visitors to these facilities. At the end of FY08, the City of Grand Junction was beginning planning for a redesign of its visitor center located immediately off one of the more heavily used exits of Interstate 70. MCNCA staff has been involved in the redesign of the public lands exhibits at this site.

The Tamarisk Coalition discusses Invasive species issues and treatment with the Friends of McInnis Canyons

Environmental education

MCNCA actively partners with the Museum of Western Colorado (MWC) and Dinosaur Journey to provide environmental education opportunities to local youth. MWC has science and recreation permits to maintain an active dig site at the Mygatt-Moore Quarry located in Rabbit Valley near the Trail Through Time. This year, MCNCA worked with the Museum for BLM's "Take it Outside" program during which 42 local at-risk youth spent three days on a dinosaur discovery adventure called "Digging for Clues." These kids had the opportunity to conduct their own dinosaur fossil dig, collect a real fossil, and make a cast of it as a souvenir they could take home with them.

In addition to our partnership with the Museum of Western Colorado, MCNCA is also seeking to develop partnerships with volunteer groups, other agencies, and Mesa State College to improve our ability to deliver environmental education programs.

A Dinosaur Diamond interpretive sign at the Trail Through Time

Interpretation

Due to its location and easy access from four exits off of Interstate 70, McInnis Canyons NCA sees visitors from all 50 states and several foreign

MCNCA river rangers contact more than 400 visitors on busy summer days

countries. Many of our visitors are relatively new to public lands, and our primary interpretive message is one of public land stewardship with an emphasis on Leave No Trace principles.

MCNCA also has site-specific messages being delivered in different areas. For example, the primary message in the Rabbit Valley motorized area is a focus on responsible riding and camping practices because those are the primary issues in that area. Similarly, the main message in the Colorado River corridor

Public participation in the unit's interpretive program

MCNCA staff focuses primarily on informal interpretive opportunities. Our river rangers stop and visit with every group they encounter camping along the Colorado River (frequently more than 300 people a day) and talk about low-impact camping practices and fire safety. In addition to this field work, MCNCA staff frequently attends user group and volunteer group meetings to make presentations about the NCA and to build a sense of community and cooperation between these groups and the BLM.

MCNCA also maintains several interpretive trails. The Trail Through Time in Rabbit Valley leads visitors on a walk through an active dinosaur quarry and provides them with the opportunity to view actual dinosaur fossils and learn about the natural history of the area. More than 30,000 people visit the Trail Through Time annually. These visitors come from all 50 states and more than 10 foreign countries. In addition to the Trail Through Time, MCNCA also has interpretive paleontological trails at Dinosaur Hill and the Fruita Paleontological Area. These interpretive sites are both located immediately adjacent to the City of Fruita and are popular with both local students, families, and tourists.

"Stay the Trail" educational trailer at the Rabbit Valley Staging Area

Volunteers

Volunteers contributed more than 1,200 hours of service in FY08 or roughly the equivalent of ½ of a full time employee's work. These projects involved a wide variety of service ranging from one-time volunteer efforts to ongoing projects such as trail design assistance and

invasive species treatment. An in-depth description of MCNCA's volunteer program is available on the attached spreadsheet.

Science

Overview of scientific work in MCNCA

- Mesa State College: MSC students in a Restoration Ecology course prepared a restoration strategy for the Opal Hill area of MCNCA. Students developed new techniques for environmental rehabilitation and restoration in one of the more highly impacted areas of MCNCA. This project supplemented a trail plan that MCNCA completed in FY07 and will be utilized during the implementation phase of that plan in FY09 to restore a popular recreation area to the most natural state possible.

- Museum of Western Colorado (MWC): MWC holds several scientific permits for paleontological study within MCNCA. These projects are detailed in the attached spreadsheet. In addition to these projects, MWC also holds a Special Recreation Permit to lead supervised digs in the Mygatt-Moore Quarry in Rabbit Valley. Each year, hundreds of people spend from one day to one week working in the quarry under the close supervision of Museum paleontologists.

The Museum of Western Colorado conducts a paleontological dig at the Mygatt-Moore Quarry in Rabbit Valley

In addition to its permitted activity within the NCA, the Museum of Western Colorado is also an educational partner with the NCA. In FY08, 42 at-risk youth from the Mesa County Partners program enjoyed a three-day dinosaur adventure as part of BLM's "Take it Outside" project. During these events, these kids spent a day digging the Mygatt-Moore Quarry and had the opportunity to find their own fossil. They were then able to take that back to the Museum to make a cast of the fossil which they were able to take home with them as a souvenir. This project would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Museum and Mesa County Partners.

Partnerships and Collaborative Relationships

FMC board member Ben Watkins joins with CEC for trail restoration in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness

Overview of partnerships – McInnis Canyons NCA is proud to have a tremendous amount of community support as well as partnerships and collaborative relationships. A few of the more notable partnerships:

- Friends of McInnis Canyons (FMC): FMC is committed to enhancing personal and community stewardship of natural, cultural, and heritage resources within MCNCA. The Friends Group has participated in several MCNCA projects in 2008, contributing 301 hours of volunteer time at a value of almost $6,000. In addition to this volunteer service, the Friends have also provided more than $28,000 in cash and in-kind funds.

- Advisory Council: The MCNCA Advisory Council held three meetings in fiscal year 2008 and participated in discussions on NCA management ranging from visitor use in the Colorado River corridor to camping issues in Rabbit Valley. The Council provided advice on issues and agency projects to the NCA Manager and is a valuable link between BLM and the public. The Council Charter was renewed in October 2007 and will expire at the end of FY09.

- Grand Valley Mountain Bike Patrol (GVMBP): the GVMBP spent more than 224 hours patrolling mountain bike trails in the Mack Ridge/Kokopelli Loops area in FY08. In addition to patrol work, several GVMBP members assisted MCNCA staff in the design, layout, and construction of 0.6 miles of new singletrack trails on Mack Ridge.

- Tamarisk Coalition: the Tamarisk Coalition's mission is to provide education, technical assistance, and coordinating support for the restoration of riparian lands. Tamarisk removal is among the most difficult project work within MCNCA, and the TC spent more than 630 hours removing tamarisk from the canyons of the MCNCA front country in FY08.

- Colorado Environmental Coalition: CEC is a citizens' group committed to conserving clean air, water and open spaces and has adopted the Rattlesnake Arches area of the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness. In FY08, CEC spent more than 250 hours on trail maintenance, rehabilitation and environmental restoration within the BRCW.

- Western Colorado Conservation Corps: WCCC is a branch of Mesa County Partners, and offers employment and education opportunities for local mainstream youth. The program is designed to employ youth, ages 14-25 on conservation minded projects

while developing life skills and career-oriented education. In FY08, WCCC members spent three weeks working on invasive species treatments in the Colorado River corridor.

WCCC members plant young cottonwood trees in the Colorado River corridor

- Cooperative efforts with local governments: The MCNCA has an outstanding relationship with the City of Fruita. Staff worked with Fruita on subdivision planning adjacent to the MCNCA and collaborated on such things as: grant proposals, cooperative road maintenance, interagency visitor services, and marketing the MCNCA. The MCNCA has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Fruita to develop an annual operating plan for joint projects and to hold semi-annual meetings to discuss items of mutual interest. MCNCA staff is participating as members of the City of Fruita Parks and Recreation technical advisory committee. This group is helping the City prepare a new Parks, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan in FY09.

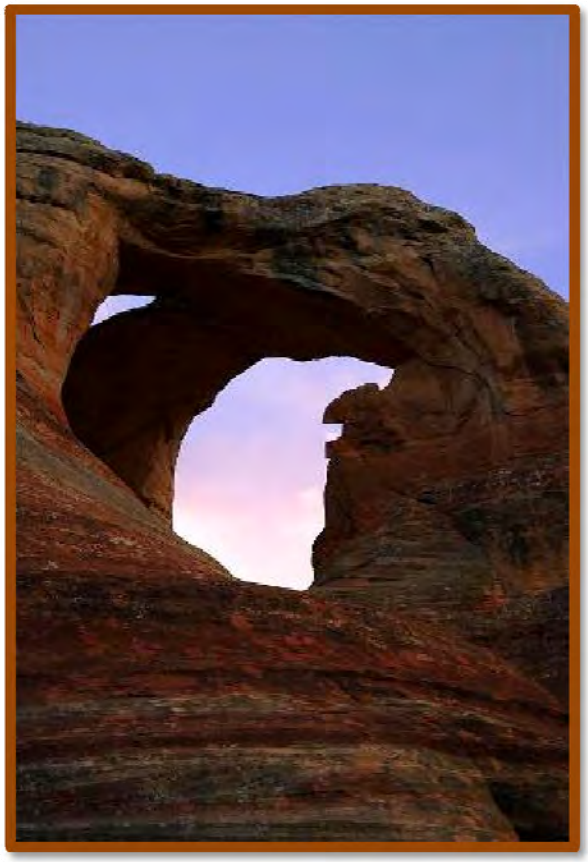
- Colorado Division of Wildlife: MCNCA works with CDOW for cooperative management of the Loma Boat Launch, management of the Black Ridge Desert Bighorn Sheep herd, protection of bald eagle nests on the river, and cooperative management of public access between the Horsethief State Wildlife Area and the front country area of the NCA.

- Mesa State College: MSC students in a Restoration Ecology course prepared a restoration strategy for the Opal Hill area of MCNCA. Students developed new techniques for environmental rehabilitation and restoration in one of the more highly impacted areas of MCNCA. This project supplemented a trail plan that MCNCA completed in FY07 and will be utilized during the implementation phase of that plan in FY09 to restore a popular recreation area to the most natural state possible.

Business Practices

Planning

MCNCA's Resource Management Plan was approved in October 2004. The Grand Junction Field Office is currently beginning the revision of its 1987 RMP. It was decided that the MCNCA will not be revised during this process as it remains relevant and suitable to management of the area. Site specific implementation plans are being developed throughout MCNCA as necessary.



Early morning through an arch in Mee Canyon

Budget

An overview of the FY08 MCNCA budget:

- Summary of BLM allocations (base and one-time)
    - Base FY08 budget allocation to MCNCA was $499,000 with one-time funding of $119,500.

- Contributions (including contributed funds, value in-kind support, and totals
    - MCNCA hosted more than 1,200 volunteer hours at a value of $82,000 and outside groups gave more than $40,000 in cash and in-kind donations. MCNCA also received more than $120,000 in outside grant funding in FY08.

- Receipts from recreation and other activities
    - MCNCA does not currently have any fee sites. It collected $11,894 in receipts from Special Recreation Permits on public lands.

- Cost recovery from all sources and uses of those funds
    - MCNCA had one cost recovery project in FY08 for a competitive mountain bike race event in Rabbit Valley. MCNCA collected $3,122 in cost recovery from this event. These funds were used for permit administration as well as trail improvements in Rabbit Valley.

- Major expenditures (travel, office supplies, equipment, vehicles, and contracts/agreements) and totals:

MAJOR EXPENDITURES	
Item	$ Cost
Labor	$320,000
Travel	$7,500
Supplies/Materials	$172,000
Vehicles	$50,000
Contracts, Services and Agreements	$69,000
TOTAL Expenditures	**$618,500**

- Labor expenses – work months and funding for the unit's permanent staff, non-unit FO staff funded by the unit, and totals

STAFF & WORK MONTHS		
Work Months and Funding (10 wms = 1 work year)	**Work Months**	**Funding ($ K)**
McInnis Canyons NCA staff		
NCA Manager GS-13	8	$73,354
Outdoor Recreation Planner GS-11	10	$54, 087
Park Ranger GS-9	10	$58,038
Park Ranger GS-7	9.5	$37,624
Park Ranger GS-7	10	$60,655
Seasonal Recreation Technician GS-4	4.5	$11,200
Total for MCNCA Staff	**52**	**$240,871**
Grand Junction Field Office staff Support Funded by McInnis Canyons NCA		
Ecologist	0.75	$6,150
Range Management	0.75	$5,565
Hydrologist	0.75	$3,969

Special Recreation Permit administrator	2.5	$11,821
Realty	2	$15,171
Weeds	0.75	$5,310
Engineering	0.75	$4,896
Geologist	0.75	$5,195
Archaeologist	2.5	$18,504
Totals for GJFO	**11.5**	**$76,581**
TOTAL Staff & Work Months	**63.5**	**$317,452**

Storm Clouds over Mee Canyon and the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness.