

McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area

Colorado River – Ruby and
Horsethief Canyons

MCNCA Advisory Council – July 16th, 2009

About McInnis Canyons NCA

- Designated by Congress in 2000
 - 123,430 acres
 - 75,000 acres in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness (basically everything on river left in Ruby-Horsethief)
- Resource Management Plan (RMP) completed in 2004
 - Four primary planning zones, each with a working group to assist BLM with plan development
 - Ten recreation management zones (RMZs), each with a specific recreation management objective
 - Zone 6 – Colorado River Corridor

Colorado River Corridor

RMP objective

“manage this zone to provide opportunities for visitors to engage in Overnight flat-water boating for social group and family affiliation in a naturally-appearing red-walled river canyon”

Colorado River Corridor setting prescriptions

- Physical: the corridor is natural in appearance, although there is a railroad track within it. The corridor is presently unimproved with potential for low key improvements.
- Social: group size up to 25; expect 15-29 encounters per day and eventually in the 30+ during peak use times
- Administrative: info is posted at the launch site. Nothing is available past the launch site. Agency presence is randomly present.

Colorado River Corridor

RMP actions

- Portable toilets are mandatory for overnight use
- All open fires must be contained in a fire pan (no fire rings)
- No wood cutting or wood gathering
- Dispersed campsites not designated unless monitoring shows unacceptable impacts
- Moratorium on issuing new commercial permits for guided river tours will continue until an acceptable carrying capacity is determined
- Continue voluntary campsite reservation system at launch site as long as practical

Colorado River Corridor visitation

- Preliminary results have reaffirmed last year's estimate of 17,500 visits
 - This is the number of people who floated Ruby-Horsethief and doesn't account for the number of days each person was there
 - Approximately 25,000 nights spent camping last year
- so far in 2009 we're pretty close to 2008 numbers (but both have had somewhat high river volume which delays/reduces recreational use)
- Slight increase over the past few years
- Big increase compared to 10 years ago

Colorado River Corridor

about our visitors

- 24% from Mesa County, 71% from Colorado (outside Mesa County), 5% from out of state
- 14% are here for the 1st time, 40% have been here a few times, 33% come every year, 11% come at least once a month
- 5% are on day trips, 56% are camping for one night, 37% are camping for two nights, 2% are camping for three nights
- 52% would like to keep the voluntary system (or something close to it), 47% would like a permit system (most of those prefer a non-limited, self-issued system)
- Average group size = 11

Colorado River Corridor

issues and concerns

- Physical impacts
 - Human waste; dog waste
 - Fire (removal of live vegetation; fire scars; campfires getting out of control)
 - Campsite expansion; development of new campsites
- Social impacts
 - Visitor conflict; competition for campsites
 - Crowding (at some point there are just too many people in too small an area)

Colorado River Corridor current registration system

- Two page registration sheet (changed out each week)
- Voluntary, not required
- We ask visitors to sign up for a campsite at the Loma boat launch at the time of their launch
- Camping not restricted to designated sites, although we do recommend them
- A campsite registration system has been in place since 1992; this system is in its 4th season

Colorado River Corridor problems with current system

- Voluntary, not required
- Cannot accurately count visitor use
- Cannot guarantee contact between visitors and BLM
- It is not a reservation, nor does it grant exclusive use of a site
- Some use it to their advantage
- Difficult to manage on the ground
- Requires a river ranger to be at the Loma boat launch during peak use periods
- Sign up sheet gets confusing when people cross out names and start drawing lines to other boxes
- Unable to handle large number of visitors (>300/night)
- Conflict likely to continue to occur and accelerate with increase in use

Sample campsite registration sheet

Campsites	Site size	# sites available	Monday	# in group	Tuesday	# in group	Wednesday	# in group	Thursday	# in group	Friday	# in group	Saturday	# in group	Sunday	# in group
			6/1		6/2		6/3		6/4		6/5		6/6		6/7	
Mee 3 Double Site. A or B	15	A									Cottam 11		Sorman 15			
	15	B									Cottam		Plum 2			
Mee 4	20	1									Loe 7		Loe 17			
Mee Canyon	15	1									Sheehan 7		Loe 17			
Black Rocks 1 Double Site. A or B	15	A	Sullivan 11								Labelle 2		Weaver 15		Stoner 12	
	15	B									Labelle 5		Sheehan 7			
Black Rocks 2	15	1				Mat Best 2					Whony 5		Hill 7		Palms 2	
Black Rocks 3	15	1	Riddell 4						Edg		Nahn 10		Nahn 15			
Black Rocks 4	15	1				Torone 7					Clare 15		Clare 15		Sullivan 10	
Black Rocks 5	15	1							Erwin 8		Erwin 8		Erwin 8		Erwin 8	
Black Rocks 6	15	1									Erwin 8		Erwin 8		Erwin 8	
Black Rocks 7	15	1	CLOSED								CLOSED					
Black Rocks 8	15	1							Altman		Erwin 8		Erwin 8		Erwin 8	
Black Rocks 9 Double Site. A or B	12	A				Leavis			Leavis		Markel 10		Markel 10		Markel 10	
	12	B							Markel 10		Markel 10		Markel 10		Markel 10	
Knowles 1 Double Site. A or B	12	A				Bocker 3			Bocker 3		Miller 15		Miller 15			
	12	B							Bocker 3		Miller 15		Miller 15			
Knowles 2 - burned in 2007	15	1							Erwin 8		Erwin 8		Erwin 8		CABIN 4	
			6/1		6/2		6/3		6/4		6/5		6/6		6/7	

PLEASE try to get it right the first try. Scratching out your ^{name} NAME / Robinson really makes it difficult for another party to sign for that spot. Cam

Colorado River Corridor potential alternatives

1. Modify existing system, require all visitors to register and select a campsite at Loma
2. Advanced distribution permit system

1. Modify existing system, require all visitors to register

- Pros

- Relatively easy to manage (administratively)
- Maintains spontaneity for visitors
- More accurate visitor use counts
- Ensures a point-of-contact between visitors and BLM
- May reduce conflict because all visitors must stop, register, and learn the rules of the area

- Cons

- Does not deal with the problem of overuse
- Moderately difficult to manage on the ground
- Requires a river ranger to be at Loma during all peak use periods; on-river ranger spends most of his time dealing with camping issues
- Sign up sheet gets confusing when people cross out names and start drawing lines to other boxes

2. Traditional permit system, advanced reservation

- Pros

- Ensures contact between visitors and BLM
- Accurate visitor use counts
- Greatly reduce conflict between visitors
- Allow BLM to regulate and limit use, if desired

- Cons

- Administratively difficult to manage; expensive
- Permit systems are frequently inefficient with high numbers of no shows; need secondary distribution system
- Extremely inefficient early in the season when visitor use is low
- Greatly reduces flexibility and spontaneity for trip planning
- Would need to determine a commercial/private split for permits (RMP says we need to determine carrying capacity)

Ruby-Horsethief Fee Proposal

BLM policy:

- “Cost recovery covers all federal activities that convey special benefits to recipients beyond those accruing to the general public”
- The purpose of cost recovery is to have individuals or groups that are clearly the beneficiary of an activity on BLM public lands shoulder the costs associated with providing, administering, and monitoring that activity.

River management expenditures

Position	weeks	hours/week	total
Supervisory Park Ranger	20	20	\$14,132
Park Ranger (CS)	20	30	\$14,610
Park Ranger (S)	26	40	\$15,922
Natural Resource Specialist	3	40	\$5,215
			\$49,879

Operational expenses	Average costs
Invasive Species treatment (BLM 3-person weed crew, equipment, supplies)	~\$20,000/yr
Recreation Management (training, equipment, fuel, shuttles, raft maintenance, cottonwood trees, etc.)	~\$10,000/yr

Average annual expenditures for the Colorado River Corridor = **\$75,000-85,000**

Other rivers

River	Office	Use limits	Permit	Fee (per person)
Colorado River (Westwater Canyon)	BLM Moab	150 people per day (75 private, 75 commercial)	Advance permit; available by phone two months before trip	\$7
San Juan River (Sand Island-Mexican Hat-Clay Hills)	BLM Monticello	6 launches per day (Sand Island)	Advance permit; lottery in early February; unfilled slots available by phone	\$6 for SI to MH; \$12 for MH to CH; \$18 for SI to CH
Gunnison River and Wilderness	BLM Gunnison Gorge NCA	No limit	Self-issued, non-limited permit available on site	\$3 for day use; \$10 for 1 night; \$15 for 2 nights
Rio Chama River	BLM Taos	16 launches per weekend	Advance permit for May 1 through Labor Day (lottery in Feb.); self-issued during off-season	\$5

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