

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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To: Field Office Manager, Grand Junction Field Office

From: State Director, Colorado

Subject: State Director Guidance for Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area

Attached is the State Director Guidance for Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area. It provides supplemental direction, in addition to the Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge RMP, for the management of resources of the Conservation Area in the interim period between now and completion of the management plan. This guidance is intended to be dynamic; it may be changed or supplemented to address new issues and/or changes in conditions as needed. The pre-plan will be approved following final National direction. The plan will be completed by October 24, 2003, in full collaboration with the local communities and will provide the long-term guidance for management of the Conservation Area.

Thank you for your assistance and participation in the development of this guidance. If you have any questions, please contact Frank Salwerowicz at (303) 239-3745.

Signed by
Ann Morgan
State Director

Authenticated by
Don Snow
EMS Operator

Attachment

STATE DIRECTOR'S GUIDANCE:

Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area and the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness

With the designation of the new Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (NCA) and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness comes a higher level of resource management responsibility and the need for additional site specific resource planning. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has the 1987 Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (RMP) in place along with the 1998 Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge (RC/BR) RMP. Many of the decisions in the Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge Plan are still valid and will likely be carried forward into the new plan. Therefore, land health restoration, trail construction, recreation management, grazing management, and weed control, along with a host of other activities will continue to occur within the NCA under the current land use planning guidance. The following direction supplements the 1987 Grand Junction RMP and the 1998 RC/BR RMP and provides interim management guidance for the NCA until detailed long term guidance is finalized through completion of a management plan.

Cooperation and Consultation:

Public involvement - All interested publics, both local and national, will have opportunity for input into all significant decision making, including all aspects of the development of the management plan. The plan will be prepared in close consultation with the appropriate federal, state, country, tribal and local agencies. The public will be informed and consulted using all available means including the NCA web site.

Advisory Council - The enabling legislation establishing the Colorado Canyons NCA and the Black Ridge Canyons (BRC) Wilderness requires the establishment of a ten member Advisory Council within six months after enactment of the legislation. (May 1, 2001)

Management plan and time frame - A comprehensive plan will be initiated when a Notice Of Intent is published by December 29, 2000, and completed through a final Record Of Decision by October 24, 2003. A pre-plan will be completed by the Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) and approved by the State Director by April 1, 2001.

Partnerships - The area will be managed in concert with local citizens and volunteers, building on the tradition of local stewardship that is exemplified in the RC/BR plan.

Utah - The NCA manager will work closely with the Moab Field Office (MFO) in Utah concerning that portion of the NCA within the MFO boundary that will be managed by the Colorado NCA Office.

Resource Management:

Scientific, Archaeological and Historic Investigations - will continue in a manner consistent with current policies and management practices. The information gained will contribute to the current level of knowledge and together forms the database for planning for effective future management and protection of the NCA's cultural resources. The pre-plan will identify critical investigations, data gaps and discuss relevance to plan development and NCA objectives. The pre-plan will also include a schedule for acquiring this data in cases where it is critical to plan development and implementation.

Land Health Assessments - Land Health Assessments will be completed by December 15, 2001, in time to be useful for plan development.

Paleontological Resources - of the NCA need to be further evaluated and the data incorporated into the planning process to ensure proper protection of significant values. Until then, the collection of specimens will not be permitted outside the Mygatt/Moore and Fruita Paleo areas, except where intended for legitimate scientific uses for which documentation is provided to the satisfaction of the responsible management official. Scientific use will be conducted under a paleo permit and will allow for survey/reconnaissance or limited excavation work with a minimum amount of surface disturbance. Current excavation and collecting permits will remain in effect.

Travel Management - As provided in the legislation, motorized vehicle use is restricted to designated roads and trails consistent with the Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge Integrated RMP. There are no areas open to cross country travel. Inventory and monitoring of natural and cultural resources will be initiated in critical locations to determine if resources are being damaged by use. If necessary, emergency closures may be initiated prior to completion of the management plan. An inventory of all major existing routes and trails will be completed by June 30, 2001. Final decisions on designated routes for vehicle travel, mountain bikes, horseback and hiking trails will be established through the management plan. Any new construction will be consistent with the existing RC/BR Plan.

ROW grants - Within the existing utility corridors of I-70, Black Ridge, the Black Ridge Communication Sites, and the Federal Aviation Agency Communication Site, rights-of-way will continue to be processed pursuant to existing policies and practices. Outside of these corridors, or within the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness, no new rights-of-way or ancillary facilities will be processed, except for rights-of-way necessary for access to private or state inholdings.

Special recreation permits (SRP) - No new commercial permits will be issued, nor will any expansion of existing permits be granted, unless they fill a need identified in the RC/BR Plan and meet established SRP guidelines. There were four SRP applications filed before the NCA designation. They may be granted if they fill a need identified in the RC/BR plan and meet established SRP guidelines. Permits will be managed consistent with the RC/BR Plan and permits may be adjusted during the interim period if unacceptable resource impacts are occurring or Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) standards are not being met.

Colorado River Issues - Recognizing that the NCA does not include the river corridor, BLM will work with the State of Colorado and the Fish and Wildlife Service to try and manage use

consistent with management plans for surrounding lands. BLM will manage public lands outside the NCA and the bed of the river in coordination with the State. Motorized boating and jet ski issues will be addressed in the final NCA management plan.

Livestock Grazing - is permitted, pursuant to the terms and conditions of existing permits and leases. Appropriate best management practices will be followed to protect rangeland resources, and where necessary, to mitigate any conflicts with other NCA uses and values. Administrative actions will be implemented under existing regulations to assure compliance with existing permit/lease requirements, monitoring and supervision of grazing use, and enforcement of unauthorized use.

Livestock, Watershed and Wildlife Developments - Maintenance of existing projects can occur in the same general manner and degree as they have been in the past. New projects will only be constructed where detailed NEPA assessment demonstrates that they would not have an adverse impact on NCA resources protected by the legislation. Nonstructural alternatives will be implemented whenever possible in lieu of structural projects.

Animal damage control - will only be conducted with State Director approval when: (1) the animal control measure targets the specific offending animal(s) and (2) the NCA manager determines health and safety is not an issue.

Wilderness Area - will be managed under the Wilderness Management Policy. The NCA Management Plan will include the required Wilderness Management Plan. The RC/BR plan has established environmental and social management standards through the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) process. If these standards are exceeded, management actions outlined in the RC/BR plan will be implemented to correct or mitigate those problems, until LAC standards can be re-assessed as part of the NCA management plan.

Water rights - The NCA legislation gives no federal reserved water rights. Through normal processes, BLM will start collecting baseline hydrologic, biologic, and water use information. In order for the BLM to hold or obtain any new water rights, all procedural requirements of the Colorado State Water law will be followed.

Mining claims - Begin the validity exam process on the eleven (11) claimants who have filed in a timely manner. There are no known leases within the NCA. The NCA is withdrawn from all forms of entry, location and patent under the mining laws and the operation of the minerals leasing, minerals materials and geothermal leasing laws subject to valid existing rights.

Weeds/tamarisk control - Ongoing weed inventory control and monitoring efforts will be increased. The priority areas will be trail heads, trails and the river corridor. If required funding is received, an NCA weed crew will be assigned this task. In addition, a fuels management team will remove tamarisk to reduce fire hazards.

These activities are consistent with the RC/BR plan and Weed Control in WSA's EA # CO-076-9-103 (5/2/2000) and Weed Management for West Desert to Baxter/Douglas EA3 CO-076-8-44 (4-27-98), and the GJFO Integrated Weed Management EA.

Land health restoration - Actions to address significant land health issues, such as erosion control, riparian condition and desired plant communities, were identified in the Grand Junction RMP and the RC/BR Plan. The priority areas for FY 2001 include Devils Canyon, Horse Thief Bench, Knowles Canyon, Pollock Bench, Rabbit Valley and the Colorado river corridor. In FY 2002-03, the results of the Land Health Assessment will be used along with the RC/BR Plan to direct future land restoration efforts. Management actions in these areas should not wait until completion of a new plan in three years, but should continue in order to stabilize these areas and restore them to a naturally functioning condition as soon as possible.