

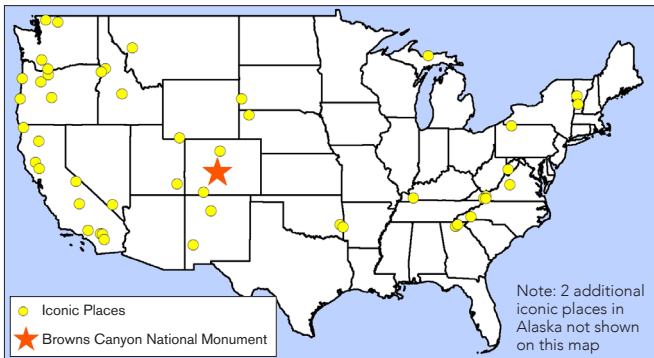


ICONIC PLACES OF THE US FOREST SERVICE

BROWNS CANYON NATIONAL MONUMENT

FACT SHEET 17 • SPRING 2019

The U.S. Forest Service manages specially-designated areas and national monuments, protected either by Congressional legislation or by the President via proclamation under the authority of the Antiquities Act. These areas have been designated for their special characteristics and the unique opportunities they offer. They were protected in perpetuity for a range of ecological and social benefits such as scenic beauty, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and watershed protection. The intent and management objectives for each are distinct and unique. This fact sheet provides an overview of the Browns Canyon National Monument, based on interviews with Forest Service personnel and partnership organizations that work together to manage the area.



BACKGROUND

Browns Canyon National Monument was designated as a national monument in 2015 after decades of interest in preserving the area and support from local non-profits, industries, and citizens. The upper Arkansas River valley that contains Browns Canyon was foundational to the area’s Native Peoples historically and artifacts from the area date back over 10,000 years. In 1972, a US Forest Service Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE I) found that all Forest Service lands within and surrounding Browns Canyon were suitable for wilderness designation. In 1979 the RARE II process identified 23,500 acres of land near Browns Canyon as roadless land. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recommended 11,000 BLM acres in Browns Canyon area as a “primitive” area in 1973, and in 1993 officially designated Browns Canyon as a Wilderness Study Area.

In 1999 Congresswoman Diana DeGette submitted a proposal known as the Colorado Wilderness Act that included Browns Canyon. A bipartisan effort to designate the area followed. Friends of Brown Canyon (FOBC) formed in 2003 and pushed politically for designation. FOBC collected hundreds of letters of support from individuals, businesses, and other organizations and testified in front of a congressional subcommittee. In 2005 Rep. Joel Hefley (CO) along with six other congressional members introduced a stand-alone Browns Canyon Wilderness Bill and Sen. Wayne Allard (CO) introduced companion legislation in the Senate. The effort was eventually halted in the House. In 2012, Senator Udall (CO) again began to push for wilderness designation, and by 2014 transitioned to a push for a national monument. On February 19th, 2015 President Obama used the Antiquities Act of 1906 to designate Browns Canyon as a National Monument co-managed by the Forest Service and the BLM.¹

Browns Canyon National Monument at a glance

- Designation:** February 19, 2015 by Presidential Proclamation
- State:** Colorado
- Nearest Major City:** Colorado Springs, CO
- Population within 25 miles:** 43,824
- Population within 100 miles:** 7,879,147
- USFS Region:** 2—Rocky Mountain
- Part of a national forest:** Yes, San Isabel National Forest
- Size:** 21,586 acres: 11,836 USFS and 9,750 BLM acres
- Reasons designated:** Scenic values; recreation opportunities; natural, cultural, and historical resources



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MANAGEMENT

The Browns Canyon National Monument (BCNM) is located in the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation area (AHRA), which is managed through a collaborative effort of the BLM, Forest Service, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). The three agencies have had a managerial relationship since the 1990s when the landscape was first proposed as a wilderness area. The river corridor is co-managed by the BLM and the CPW. The Forest Service manages the upper lands, which transition from juniper to mixed conifer and aspen woodlands. The upper lands east of the river are remote and primitive, with rugged terrain, limited development, and dispersed recreation opportunities. Although the agencies oversee different lands in the national monument, they manage them together with strong coordination and mutual stewardship. Coordination between the BLM and Forest Service has a long history in the area, and management staff from both agencies emphasize the importance of seeing the area as one landscape with common goals across ownerships.

The process for creating a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for BCNM is underway with BLM and Forest Service coordination on many levels. Initial reports have looked at baseline socioeconomic conditions as well as social landscape and planning criteria assessments for the area. In May 2019, the BLM released a Notice of Intent to prepare a RMP and associated Environmental Impact Statement. A key component of the RMP will be to maintain the “rugged, backcountry feel” of the area’s landscape in balance with the increase in use and user demands.

RECREATION

White-water rafting and kayaking through Browns Canyon is the most popular form of recreation, followed by backcountry hiking, but the area is also popular for fishing, photography, stargazing, and some off-highway vehicle use on one motorized trail. The monument has a small system of non-motorized trails. Access is primarily through the unpaved Aspen Ridge Road which runs adjacent to the monument’s east boundary and Ruby Mountain Recreation Site, which has a campground, toilets, boater put-in to the Arkansas River, and trailheads that lead into the monument.

Site managers report that visitation has grown since the national monument designation, with visitors coming from local areas, across the nation, and internationally. Managers feel that the overall outlook for sustainability is positive. Use of the river, the most popular form of recreation, has a low environmental impact on the area. Informal trails and disturbance to raptor nests are more of a concern. Social media has opened up new places of interest, such as Railroad Gulch, Stafford Gulch, and a feature called “The Reef” that is difficult to access but has greater visitation since designation. Increasing traffic and mitigation in areas like these will be addressed in management plans.

CHALLENGES

Growing visitor use presents the greatest challenges for Browns Canyon National Monument as management seeks to maintain the sustainability and the backcountry essence of the monument. Human waste and garbage are ongoing concerns, and environmental stewardship is an important piece of education for visitors. The rugged nature and limited development of the area can also lead to challenges. Many tourists value the back country conditions but are not prepared for the rough trails and road, and some want improved access and additional trails across the site.

PARTNERSHIPS

Many nonprofits are dedicated to the sustainability of the monument. Friends of Browns Canyon has been pivotal in the designation of and continued management of the area. Other nonprofits assist in maintenance and studies; for example, the Quiet Use Coalition has helped with on-the-ground activities to monitor and mitigate different user impacts. Land stewardship groups including Volunteers of Colorado, Veteran’s Expeditions, Collegiate Peaks Trout Unlimited, and Wild Connections have provided assistance with trail maintenance, restoration, and visitor education in the area. Local tribes have been involved in and will continue to be important in resource management of BCNM into the future.



LEARN MORE

For more information about this project and additional publications, go to:

ewp.uoregon.edu/IconicPlaces

Contact: autumne@uoregon.edu

¹ An in-depth timeline for Browns Canyon National Monument designation can be found at: <http://browncanyon.org/timeline/>.

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