



America's national parks – the wildlife of Yellowstone, the granite peaks of Yosemite, the grandeur of Grand Canyon, the history of Frederick Douglass' home – are called America's greatest gift. With summer arriving, the National Park Service is preparing to welcome more than a million visitors a day to our national parks. Visitors love time spent in national parks. **More than 96% of visitors say their experiences at national parks are good to excellent.**

This high level of satisfaction comes on the heels of record levels of funding for the National Park Service. **The National Park Service operating budget this year has more funds per employee, per acre and per visitor than at any time in its history at \$1.8 billion. The National Park Service operating budget is at an all-time high.** Since FY 2000, the number of full-time employees has increased 4%. Funds spent on deferred maintenance are up 60% since FY 2000. Thousands of facility and infrastructure improvements have resulted in better trails, accessible campgrounds, rehabilitated visitor centers and better road conditions.

This investment is essential. National parks experienced long-standing neglect in keeping up with the maintenance of buildings, facilities, and roads. Our parks and the millions of Americans who visit them deserve better. President George W. Bush promised increased funding for parks. That promise is being kept. In FY 2004 alone, \$1 billion was provided, up \$341 million since FY 2000, **a 50% increase.**

NATIONAL PARKS IN COLORADO

Colorado's 11 national park units represent the majesty of the American West—soaring Rocky Mountain peaks, streams and rivers, geological formations, and prehistoric ruins. These parks attract more than 5,500,000 visitors each year.

Since FY 2001, the Bush Administration has invested more than \$67 million in more than 180 projects to preserve and protect Colorado's national treasures alone. These projects are completed, underway, or being planned. Once FY 2005 funds are allocated, national parks in Colorado could receive an additional \$15 million.

National Park Service (NPS) operates 388 park units covering 84 million acres in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and several territories. NPS has more than 25,000 employees, 118,000 volunteers and 590 concessionaires. NPS also maintains 20,000 buildings, 29,000 miles of roads and trails, and 1,100 campgrounds.

On August 14, 2001, President Bush visited Rocky Mountain National Park to discuss park maintenance backlog funding and the Healthy Forests Initiative. During his visit he joined YMCA volunteers to help with park trail maintenance and fire fuel reduction projects.

Among these projects are the following:

PARK	# OF PROJECTS	\$ INVESTED
Rocky Mountain National Park	71	33,356,563
Mesa Verde National Park	31	15,645,231
Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park	17	567,875
Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site	11	1,466,037
Colorado National Monument	11	6,372,345
Great Sand Dunes National Monument And Preserve	18	5,371,531
Curecanti National Recreation Area	11	644,959
Dinosaur National Monument	10	3,853,357
Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument	7	429,681

The types of projects underway at these parks include:

- Improved trail accessibility for the disabled
- Restored trails
- Stabilized historic structures
- Removal of dangerous asbestos
- Improved drinking water
- Installation of fire sprinkler systems to make historic structures safer
- Improved museum storage to preserve historic artifacts



Lawn Lake Area, Mummy Mountain
Rocky Mountain National Park

Specifics examples of projects follow:

Rocky Mountain National Park

- Rocky Mountain is making road improvements to Bear Lake Road. Bear Lake Road is one of the most popular scenic roads in Rocky Mountain National Park and provides year-round visitor access to a variety of wonderful recreational opportunities. Bear Lake Road was completed in 1928 and no significant improvements have been made in 75 years. Under this \$14.6 million, multi-year project, the upper 4.1 miles of Bear Lake Road from Sprague Lake to Bear Lake will be reconstructed to widen the road two feet and improve the road surface to accommodate park shuttle buses. The project will also correct structural deficiencies in the roadway and improve parking and pullout design. The road is open year-round, so the wider road will help make snow removal operations safer, ensuring more reliable access for park visitors. Annual visitation is 1 million visitors with daily traffic approaching 3,000 visitors.
- The park is using a combination of Recreation Fee Demonstration and Line-Item Construction funds to rehabilitate the Hidden Valley ski Area. The Hidden Valley ski lodge and warming building and all remnants of ski lifts and towers to the downhill ski runs have been removed and natural conditions restored. The lower valley will be rehabilitated to provide a snow play area for sleds and tubes in the winter and will include fully accessible picnic areas for families and larger groups in the summer. Wetlands will be restored and suitable habitat for the endangered green back cutthroat fish established. Completion of Hidden Valley Visitor Use Area project is anticipated by October 2004.
- Recreation Fee Demonstration funds are being used to improve the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center. This project will improve restroom facilities, vehicular and pedestrian safety, and meet the park's obligation to provide fully ADA visitor facilities at the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center. The project consists of the construction of a 2000 square foot fully ADA compliant restroom facility capable of meeting the needs of up to 800 visitors per hour; construction of an interpretive plaza with outdoor `wayside` exhibits and 24 hour/7 days per week safety and visitation information; reconstruction of the existing parking lot to improve circulation and to provide for bus and RV parking; reconstruction and realignment of the entrance road and provision for acceleration and deceleration lanes; and realignment of the parking lot entrance to improve safety and circulation. Current use of the main park visitor center has increased 250% beyond original design capacity (approximately 500,000 visitors/yr).

Mesa Verde National Park

- Mesa Verde is nearly finished with a Line-Item Construction project to reconstruct the park's Raw Water System. The project includes the

construction of a new water intake system on the West Mancos River; reconstruction of secondary intake at Jackson Lake Reservoir; reconstruction of 19,952 feet of line near the intakes; replacement of the West Mancos Upper Canal Crossing; replacement of 16,000 feet of line near Jackson Lake Reservoir, and a water system analysis of additional sites for replacement in future projects. The project replaces an extremely old, rapidly failing, and resource damaging water system, and provides essential services to all areas of Mesa Verde National Park.

- The park is using \$490,000 in Repair & Rehabilitation funds to restore the historic CCC Recreation Hall. The Recreation Hall is highly significant, and is one of only two remaining residential structures used to house CCC enrollees in the state of Colorado. Unfortunately, the building is in a dangerous state of disrepair and is rapidly degrading. In addition, the presence of Hantavirus was confirmed in 1995. This important project will bring the building up to code, preserve the historic fabric, and provide year round training center for the park.
- Although Mesa Verde has a rich history of providing campfire programs, the present facilities and equipment are severely below NPS standards for Audio/Visual and amphitheater facilities. Mesa Verde National Park will celebrate its 100th Anniversary in 2006 and this facility will be invaluable for special events, concerts, campfire, and ranger-led interpretive programs. A Recreation Fee Demonstration-funded project will provided a performance-ready audio system with microphones, playback from recorded sources, mixing capabilities, and full-range weatherproof speakers. The project includes video/computer projection and basic stage lighting. A 10'x10' projection booth and covered stage/screen will be constructed to provide housing and storage for audio/visual equipment.

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site

- Bent's is using \$27,000 in Recreation Fee Demonstration funds to replace and/or repair the adobe block walls and floors, and repair the plastering and woodwork at the reconstructed fort. The project is 70 percent complete and should be completed this summer.

Colorado National Monument

- The Monument received \$5.2 million to rehabilitate and overlay approximately 11-miles of Rim Rock Drive. Rim Rock Drive is the monument's main road and is listed on the National Register of Historic Structures.



Archeological Site, Mesa Verde National Park

Recreation Fee Demonstration Program

In FY 2003, the Recreation Fee Demonstration program, funded through visitor entrance fees paid to parks, contributed \$10.7 million for maintenance backlog projects for Colorado parks. The following are examples of maintenance backlog projects funded with fee demo money.

Rocky Mountain National Park

- Over \$400,000 to replace vault toilets
- \$1.38 million to renovate the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center
- \$1.4 million to improve facilities along Bear Lake Road
- Over \$426,000 to remove structures and rehabilitate Hidden Valley area returning area to a more natural state.

Curecanti National Recreation Area

- Over \$197,000 in repairs to Elk Creek campground

Dinosaur National Monument

- Over \$113,000 in improvements to Harper's Corner picnic area

Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve

- Over \$444,000 to repair audiovisual facilities
- Over \$463,000 to repair/rehabilitate campground restrooms
- Over \$92,000 to replace trailer for natural resource program with permanent facility

Mesa Verde National Park

- Over \$257,000 to replace phone system
- Over \$148,000 to repair structures in the Chapin Mesa Historic District

These are some of the efforts to make a visit to a national park in Colorado an exciting experience.

Other Park Improvements

Rocky Mountain National Park

Once targeted for demolition, the 115 year-old pioneer homestead now known as **McGraw Ranch**, was given new life through a partnership between the National Park Service (NPS) and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The historic buildings at McGraw Ranch have been rehabilitated to create a campus for visiting researchers drawn from Colorado universities as well as leading institutions around the nation. Individual donations, foundation grants, a grant from the State Historical Fund of the Colorado Historical Society and fee demonstration monies funded the renovation. The Rocky Mountain National Park Associates raised an additional \$102,000 in private funds to rehabilitate two cabins at the ranch.

The Intermountain Region has developed a strategic plan for education and interpretation; established learning centers in Glacier and Rocky Mountain National Parks with another underway at Grand Teton National Park; developed a Ranger-to-Teacher-to-Ranger program to recruit teachers from inner city schools to work in parks and take that experience back to the classroom; and developed a large variety of multi-media presentations to communicate the NPS mission and message.

NATURAL RESOURCE PROGRAMS IN COLORADO PARKS

Natural Resource Challenge Program

Initiated in FY 2000, the Natural Resource Challenge is a systematic effort to provide park managers, researchers, and scientists with the information, expertise, and tools needed to protect our natural resource heritage. This program has been greatly expanded under President Bush. Since FY 2001, the President has proposed cumulative funding increases totaling \$149.5 million. Some examples of projects funded by the Natural Resource Challenge follow:

Rocky Mountain National Park

- National Park Service Research Learning Centers combine the elements of field stations, partnerships, active support of research, and information transfer to fulfill a 1998 science mandate known as the Natural Resource Challenge. As of 2004 thirteen centers have been funded by Congress. Two additional centers are being established with other types of funding. The Continental Divide Research Learning Center manages McGraw Ranch at Rocky Mountain National Park, a year-round residential campus for researchers. In addition to supporting research and science education efforts at Rocky Mountain National Park, the Center also assists Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument and Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve.

Coronado National Monument

- With the purchase of a Sony Nightshot video camera, infrared lights, and other supplies, the Monument was able to perform more intensive and accurate monitoring of a population of the lesser long-nosed bat (federally listed as endangered) at its roost site in a gated abandoned mine. This will be expanded in FY 2004 to include winter surveys for hibernacula.
- Conducted surveys for Mexican spotted owls (federally listed as threatened) according to the established protocol, but none were found in the park.

- Assisted with a 3-year multi-park survey of large cats begun at Coronado, Saguaro NP, Chiricahua NM, and Fort Bowie NHS with BRMD funding. The park purchased three DeerCams (remote cameras) to augment those purchased with project funds. Jaguars (federally listed as endangered) have been photographed at least twice using similar techniques at sites within 100 miles of Coronado. We have already photographed several lions, and DNA analysis is being conducted on hair and scat. Track surveys will begin in FY 2004.

Curecanti National Recreation Area

- Disturbed Lands Restoration (GPRA Ia1A): Two restoration projects were initiated during the year on approximately 2 acres.
- Three Restoration Plans were developed for areas to be re-seeded on the South Rim of BLCA, and information was compiled to complete the compliance process for the removal and restoration of the abandoned Elk Creek pump house and extraction site within CURE. This project is scheduled to be conducted in 2004.
- Exotic Vegetation Management (GPRA Ia1B): The Integrated Weed Management team (ecologist, one seasonal biological technician, one VIP intern, and partners) identified, mapped, and treated more than 75 acres of invasive weed species on 170 sites in CURE and BLCA. Most weed species were treated using mechanical methods throughout the summer with follow-up herbicide applications in the fall. Treated species, all of which are on the State of Colorado Noxious Weed List, included diffuse, Russian and spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, musk and bull thistle, black henbane, yellow toadflax, perennial pepperweed, hound's tongue, hoary cress, common mullein, curly dock, marsh elder, field bindweed, cheatgrass, common burdock, Chinese elm, and tamarisk.
- Weed surveys in the Black Canyon resulted in the hand removal of approximately 4,500 yellow toadflax plants before they released seed downstream from the East Portal Campground.
- Native Species of Special Concern (GPRA Ib0B): NRC support enabled park staff to monitor six peregrine falcon eyrie locations between mid-April and the end of July 2003. One previously undiscovered eyrie was located and monitored within CURE during this period. As in previous years, this monitoring information allowed park staff to review climbing activity in the immediate vicinity of active eyries and to implement use restrictions as necessary, affording greater protection to nesting peregrine falcons.
- Since 1999, Curecanti has led a Gunnison sage grouse habitat use study within and immediately adjacent to CURE and BLCA. The goal is to develop science-based strategies that promote sustainable management of the Gunnison Basin Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem in a manner that enhances the Gunnison sage grouse population. The project has been embraced and supported by a number of entities within the Gunnison Basin.
- NRC funding enhanced the park's ability to continue the sage grouse study through 2003. During the period of 1 October 2002 through 30 September 2003, habitat data were collected for approximately 261 sage grouse locations. Habitat data were collected for approximately 635 locations since this project began. From late March through June 2003, eight additional sage grouse were captured and radio-collared.
- NRC support helped the park develop partnerships to assist in carrying out the sage grouse study. Additional funding has been obtained through Fee Demonstration, park cooperating association, and Cooperative Conservation Initiative funding sources.

- Bighorn sheep are an important component of the ecosystem surrounding CURE, but populations have declined throughout the 1900's. Despite attempts by the Colorado Division of Wildlife to translocate sheep into the Curecanti Area, local herds have remained stagnant or suffered declines. As a result of funding provided through the NRC, along with funds from the National Park Service Challenge Cost Share Program and the Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit, the park was able to execute a cooperative agreement with a student and faculty from the University of Washington to study factors limiting population growth of bighorn sheep herds within CURE
- Vegetation Mapping (GPRA Ib01): The vegetation mapping crew completed 96 vegetation sampling plots (bringing the total number of sample plots to 392) and 116 observation points to aid in photo-interpretation and writing detailed local descriptions of the plant communities.

Dinosaur National Monument

- In 2002, Dinosaur NM developed an agreement with the local USFWS office for a 2-year project designed to assess the threat posed by brown and rainbow trout to four species of endangered fish in Dinosaur National Monument. Brown and rainbow trout are considered recreational species and are managed as such by both the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources in the Green River above Dinosaur National Monument. Thus, any non-native trout reduction proposal could prove controversial. However, because recreational use of Lodore Canyon is restricted to permitted raft parties, no significant salmonid sport fishery occurs on the Green River within the monument. If non-native trout in Lodore Canyon are determined to be residents within the Canyon, removal efforts in the Canyon will not impact the tailwater recreational fishery upstream. If trout do move between Browns Park and Lodore Canyon, information on movement patterns and habitat use by trout will provide insight into their probable impacts on bonytail, humpback chub, razorback sucker, and Colorado pikeminnow.
- Dinosaur National Monument pooled resources in 2002 with the Northern Colorado Plateau Network (NCPN) to initiate a 2-year project with Utah State University to map invasive, T & E, and sensitive plant species on 52,000 acres (i.e., the Utah portion of the monument). Weed mapping protocols developed and field tested in Dinosaur in 2002 were employed by other Colorado Plateau parks as their weed mapping projects came on line in 2003. Field work has been completed in Dinosaur, and we expect a final report in December 2003.
- The Colorado Plateau received funding for an Exotic Plant Management Team (EPMT) in 2003. Work conducted in Dinosaur helped other NCPN parks establish consistent weed inventory and data management programs in 2003, helping to improve EPMT efficiency in the coming years.
- In 2002, we developed an agreement with Utah State University to fund a graduate student to develop an integrated weed management and restoration plan for the Cub Creek watershed and another student to study the role of riparian vegetation in determining channel form along the Green River in Dinosaur National Monument
- NRC funds maintained the native grass seed production plots we have established at the Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center in Meeker, Colorado. Grass seed grown at the center (from seeds collected in Dinosaur National Monument) is harvested, cleaned, and stored, to provide a ready supply of native seed for restoring disturbed sites
- In 2003, two seasonal GS-5 park rangers provided education and project supervision for 524 volunteer Weed Warriors in Dinosaur National Monument,

who contributed 2,929 person-hours removing invasive tamarisk and perennial pepperweed from riparian habitat along the Green and Yampa rivers in Dinosaur.

Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve

- In cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation, The Nature Conservancy, and the San Luis Valley Cooperative Weed Management District, developed and implemented two multi-year cooperative agreements with the Natural Resource Conservation Service for propagation of native (park collected) seed for use in restoration of disturbed sites and/or sites where exotic species have been treated and removed.

Cooperative Conservation Initiative

Initiated by President Bush in 2003, the Cooperative Conservation Initiative is designed to remove barriers to citizen participation in the stewardship of the nation's natural resources and to help citizens take conservation into their own hands by undertaking projects at the local level. The federal government provides grants to match partner contributions and fund projects to restore habitats important to fish and wildlife and accomplish other on-the-ground conservation projects. The Cooperative Conservation Initiative has helped fund the following projects in the National Park Service:

2003 Cooperative Conservation Initiative Natural Resource Projects:

- A CCI grant of \$105,000 to Rocky Mountain National Park was matched with \$106,000 from Colorado State University to fund the vegetative restoration of four disturbed areas and provide for revision of the vegetation restoration management plan.
- Managers at Bent's Old Fort are restoring native shortgrass prairie through a CCI grant of \$9,200, and matching funds of \$9,214 from the Otero Jr. College, Colorado Boys Ranch, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife.
- Curecanti National Recreation Area and Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park partnered with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to restore habitat for sage grouse populations. The Colorado Division of Wildlife contributed \$76,245 toward this \$145,245 project.
- Rocky Mountain National Park received a \$61,870 CCI grant which was matched with \$67,500 from the University of Colorado to determine and establish appropriate source populations for restoration of native trout subspecies in the park.
- Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve is matching \$8,750 in partner dollars with \$8,750 in CCI funds to create a native plants seed bank. Partners include the San Luis Valley Noxious Weed Committee, The Nature Conservancy, Friends of the Dunes, and the Continental Divide Research and Learning Center.

2004 Cooperative Conservation Initiative Natural Resource Projects:

- Four Colorado parks, including Rocky Mountain, Bent's Old Fort, Great Sand Dunes, and Florissant Fossil Beds, are working with park volunteers to implement a network volunteer effort to manage exotic plants and achieve restoration goals. The project is valued at \$31,800.

- Rocky Mountain National Park is working with the Rocky Mountain Nature Association and Wildlands Restoration Volunteers to restore 2 park wetlands sites. The federal grant is \$12,000 and the partners are contributing \$32,500.
- Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site is partnering with a number of groups to use native plants propagated in a greenhouse for prairie and riparian habitat restoration. The partners, including the Colorado State Forest Service, Division of Wildlife, and Dept. of Corrections, 3 private landowners, the Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes, the Boy Scouts of America, and others are equally invested in this \$95,400 project.
- The Colorado Mountain Club (Shining Mountains Group, the Wildlands Restoration volunteers, and the Rocky Mountain Nature Associates are joining with Rocky Mountain National Park to restore the Roessler unit at the park. The partners are contributing \$6,300 to match the CCI grant of \$6,000 to accomplish this project.
- Colorado National Monument received a CCI grant of \$21,800 to match \$24,600 in contributions from Mesa State College, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Mesa County Natural Resources Conservation Service and Western Colorado Conservation Crew to conduct native plant restoration and site rehabilitation projects at the Monument.
- Rocky Mountain National Park is working with Colorado State University on a \$201,600 project to control Cheatgrass and restore native plant communities. Colorado State University matched the CCI grant of \$100,800.
- The Colorado Division of Wildlife has contributed \$110,000 to match a \$92,500 CCI grant to Curecanti National Recreation Area to continue Gunnison sage grouse habitat restoration efforts.
- Great Sand Dunes is working with the Nature Conservancy, the San Luis Valley Noxious Weed Committee, the Continental Divide Research and Learning Center, and the Friends of the Dunes to control exotic plants on new lands. The project is valued at \$24,600, with costs split evenly between the federal government and the contributing partners.

Healthy Forests

The National Park Service is an active partner along with other federal agencies in implementing the National Fire Plan and President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative. Through these efforts, fire management planning will help identify strategic areas for treatment to reduce wildland fire risks to both adjacent properties and developed areas in our nation's parks. Some examples of work under the fire plan from Rocky Mountain National Park follow:

Rocky Mountain National Park

As part of the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership with the United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Colorado State Forest Service, the

following actions were initiated in 2003, or will be started in 2004 within the urban interface at Rocky Mountain National Park.

- Manual treatment of fuels and/or slash pile burning on 521 acres
- Prescribed burns treating 151 acres

Begun in Oct-Nov 2003, and tentatively continued in May 2004, Rocky Mountain will use fire and mechanical treatments on 477 acres of timber. This is a WUI project and will protect the following communities: Estes Park, Estes Park YMCA of the Rockies, Glen Haven, Grand Lake.

Private Public Partnerships Improve Colorado's National Parks

Local friends groups of national parks are vital partners in improving national parks. For example, over the last four years, the Friends of the Dunes raised nearly \$500,000 for Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve. These funds have been used to:

- Conduct an archeological survey of the Monument and Preserve and adjacent lands
- Conduct oral history interviews
- Provide support for the production of a new park film

At Rocky Mountain National Park, the National Trust for Historic Preservation over the past four years raised \$800,000. These funds have been used to:

- Restore and adaptively reuse the historic McGraw Ranch as the Continental Divide Research Learning Center. The Ranch has been renovated as a "research campus" that opened for use by visiting researchers in May, 2003.

At Rocky Mountain National Park, the Rocky Mountain Nature Association (RMNA) has provided aid and services to the park for years. RMNA has nine outlets in the park that generated \$1,093,329 in sales. Aid to the National Park Service (part of the profits from sales of RMNA publications in NPS bookstores) was \$119,969. Of that \$67,019 were wages paid to RMNA sales clerks who operated visitor center bookstores. The remainder, or \$52,950, was used to support interpretive and educational services such as park newspapers, Jr. Ranger program, volunteer recognition functions, and park publications in parks throughout the region.

Rocky Mountain National Parks Associates, a sister organization to RMNA, generated over \$660,000 in funds to assist with such projects as the reconstruction of the Mills to Black Lake Trail, Endo Valley picnic area rehabilitation (to be done in 2004), and creation of the Daniels Fund/RMNA/RMNP Conservation Corps. The corps was made up of six college students and a RMNA work leader who tackled trail work three days per week, a day of resources management activities and a day of educational activities. One

week was spent on the west side and one week in the backcountry. The program ran from June 14 to August 15. The corps was made possible through a \$50,000 donation. The park provided housing (paid for by RMNA) and two vehicles.

Another private sector effort to improve Colorado's great national parks involves the congressionally chartered National Park Foundation that has raised money for a number of projects in the parks. For example, donations have been raised to:

- Preserve the Cliff Dwellings at Mesa Verde National Park.
- Rehabilitate the high-maintenance wood seating in Morefield Amphitheater at Mesa Verde National Park with sustainable and durable reinforced plastic lumber.
- Fund programs to support nature and outdoor photography at Rocky Mountain National Park.

The Foundation also manages both the investment and disbursement of funds for the following organizations:

- Florissant Fossil Beds Fund
- Hovenweep National Monument Fund
- Mesa Verde Foundation Fund
- Mesa Verde National Park Save America's Treasures Fund
- Rocky Mountain National Park Fund
- Rocky Mountain Greenhouse Endowment
- Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site Fund

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site

La Junta

www.nps.gov/beol

William and Charles Bent, along with Ceran St. Vrain, built the original fort on this site in 1833 to trade with plains Indians and trappers. The adobe fort quickly became the center of the Bent, St. Vrain Company's expanding trade empire that included Fort St. Vrain to the north and Fort Adobe to the south, along with company stores in New Mexico at Taos and Santa Fe. The primary trade was with the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians for buffalo robes.

For much of its 16-year history, the fort was the only major permanent white settlement on the Santa Fe Trail between Missouri and the Mexican settlements. The fort provided explorers, adventurers, and the U.S. Army a place to get needed supplies, wagon repairs, livestock, good food, water and company, rest and protection in this vast "Great American Desert." During the war with Mexico in 1846, the fort became a staging area for Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny's "Army of the West". Disasters and disease caused the fort's abandonment in 1849. Archeological excavations and original sketches, paintings and diaries were used in the fort's reconstruction in 1976.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

Montrose

www.nps.gov/blca

The Black Canyon of the Gunnison's unique and spectacular landscape was formed slowly by the action of water and rock scouring down through hard Proterozoic crystalline rock. No other canyon in North America combines the narrow opening, sheer walls, and startling depths offered by this canyon.

Colorado National Monument

Fruita

www.nps.gov/colm

Colorado National Monument consists of geologic features including towering red sandstone monoliths, and deep, sheer-walled canyons. A variety of wildlife lives in the area, including bighorn sheep, golden eagles, mule deer and mountain lions.

Curecanti National Recreation Area

Montrose

www.nps.gov/cure

Three reservoirs, named for corresponding dams on the Gunnison River, form the heart of Curecanti National Recreation Area. Panoramic mesas, fjord-like reservoirs, and deep, steep and narrow canyons abound. Blue Mesa Reservoir is Colorado's largest body of water, and is the largest Kokanee Salmon fishery in the United States. Morrow Point Reservoir is the beginning of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, and below Crystal Reservoir is the site of the Gunnison Diversion Tunnel, a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark. Recently discovered dinosaur fossils, a 5,000 acre archeological district, a narrow gauge train, and traces of 6000 year old dwellings further enhance the offerings of Curecanti.

Dinosaur National Monument

www.nps.gov/dino

This National Monument contains 210,000 acres of some of the most rugged and beautiful mountain and canyon country in the West. The Dinosaur Quarry exhibit includes a display of dinosaur bones, as well as replicas of dinosaurs. Exhibits help visitors appreciate the world the dinosaurs lived in 150 million years ago, and technicians can be watched as they work on fossils in the paleontology laboratory.

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument

Florissant

www.nps.gov/flfo

A beautiful mountain valley just west of Pikes Peak holds spectacular remnants of the earth's prehistoric life. Huge petrified redwoods and incredibly detailed fossils of ancient insects and plants reveal a very different Colorado of long ago. Almost 35 million years ago, enormous volcanic eruptions buried the then-lush valley and petrified the redwood trees that grew there. A lake formed in the valley and the fine-grained sediments at its bottom became the final resting- place for thousands of insects and plants. These sediments compacted into layers of shale and preserved the delicate details of these organisms as fossils.

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

Mosca

www.nps.gov/grsa

Nestled in southern Colorado, North America's tallest dunes rise over 750 feet high against the rugged Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The wind shaped dunes glow beneath the rugged backdrop of the mountains. This geologic wonderland, containing 30 square miles of dunes, became a national monument in 1932. With the passage of the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000, resources now also include alpine lakes and tundra, six peaks over 13,000' in elevation, ancient spruce and pine forests, large stands of aspen and cottonwood, grasslands, and wetlands--all habitat for diverse wildlife and plant species.

Mesa Verde National Park

Mesa Verde

www.nps.gov/meve

Mesa Verde, Spanish for "green table", offers an unparalleled opportunity to see and experience a unique cultural and physical landscape. The culture represented at Mesa Verde reflects more than 700 years of history. From approximately A.D. 600 through A.D. 1300 people lived and flourished in communities throughout the area, eventually building elaborate stone villages in the sheltered alcoves of the canyon walls. Today most people call these sheltered villages "cliff dwellings". The cliff dwellings represent the last 75 to 100 years of occupation at Mesa Verde. In the late 1200s within the span of one or two generations, the Ancestral Pueblans left their homes and moved away.

The archeological sites found in Mesa Verde are some of the most notable and best preserved in the United States. Mesa Verde National Park offers visitors a spectacular look into the lives of the Ancestral Pueblo people. Scientists study the ancient dwellings of Mesa Verde, in part, by making comparisons between the Ancestral Pueblo people and their contemporary indigenous descendants who still live in the Southwest today. Twenty-four Native American tribes in the southwest have an ancestral affiliation with the sites at Mesa Verde.

Rocky Mountain National Park

Estes Park

www.nps.gov/romo

Established by Congress on January 26, 1915, the park exhibits the massive grandeur of the Rocky Mountains. Trail Ridge Road crosses the Continental Divide and looks out over dozens of peaks that tower more than 13,000 feet high. Longs Peak, the highest peak in the park, is 14,259' in elevation. The high point on Trail Ridge Road is 12,183'. Almost 90% of the park is managed as wilderness.

Elk, mule deer, big horn sheep, moose, coyotes and a great variety of smaller animals call the 416 square miles of the National Park home. During the winter months snowshoeing and cross-country skiing are very popular. Hiking is available on over 359 miles of trails. Many trails can be hiked any time of the year. June and July are the best months for seeing wild flowers. In the fall, viewing the elk rut (mating season) is a wonderful opportunity to see and learn about these magnificent large animals.

Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site

Kiowa County

www.nps.gov/sand

On November 29, 1864, Colonel John M. Chivington led approximately 700 U.S. volunteer soldiers to a village of about 500 Cheyenne and Arapaho people

camped along the banks of Big Sandy Creek in southeastern Colorado. Although the Cheyenne and Arapaho people believed they were under the protection of the U.S. Army, Chivington's troops attacked and killed about 150 people, mainly women, children, and the elderly. Ultimately, the massacre was condemned following three federal investigations.

The Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site was authorized on November 7, 2000. The purposes of the Act are to recognize the national significance of the massacre in American history, and its ongoing significance to the Cheyenne and Arapaho people and descendants of the massacre victims. The Act authorizes establishment of the national historic site once the NPS has acquired sufficient land from willing sellers to preserve, commemorate, and interpret the massacre. Acquisition of a sufficient amount of land has not yet occurred. Currently, the majority of land within the authorized boundary is privately owned and is not open to the public. The NPS is working in partnership with The Conservation Fund, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, and the State of Colorado towards establishment of the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site.

Yucca House National Monument

Cortez

www.nps.gov/yuho

Yucca House National Monument is a large, unexcavated Ancestral Puebloan surface site. Yucca House is located in Southwest Colorado between the towns of Towaoc and Cortez. The name "Yucca House" was selected for the monument because the Ute Indians called Sleeping Ute Mountain by a name meaning yucca, for there is an abundance of the yucca plant growing on the mountainsides.

The National Park Service does not recommend travel to this monument for the casual visitor. There are currently no facilities at the monument. The dirt road to Yucca House is impassable in wet weather.