

DISCOVER AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE IN THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM

“The ancient ruins within the monument, with their breathtaking vistas and spectacular petroglyphs, provide a link to the past, offering insights into the lives of peoples who once inhabited this part of the desert Southwest...”

---from the Presidential Proclamation establishing Agua Fria National Monument (January 11, 2000)

Remnants of ancient civilizations, the lives of pioneers, and vestiges of past and present Native American religious and cultural practices all can be found in the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). The NLCS is a place to learn about human history in the West and our long relationship with the natural environment.



Canyons of the Ancients NM
[Photo courtesy of the BLM]

Designated in 2000, the NLCS includes 26 million acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in twelve western states. The System’s “landscape” vision is particularly intriguing to historians, archaeologists, and ecologists. The System was designed to protect large areas, not just disconnected islands of land or ruins. For example, the units in the system typically encompass cultural sites as well as the ecosystems that surround them. The result: a hiker, researcher, or other visitor experiences an Anasazi ruin, desert vista, southwestern canyon or a site where Lewis and Clark camped much as those places would have looked to early Native Americans or others who inhabited and traveled there thousands of years ago.

Individual sites in the System, particularly the fifteen National Monuments and 11 National Historic and Scenic Trails (totaling more than 4,000 miles), serve as outdoor museums. The National Monuments of the NLCS, for example, include ancient archaeological treasures, fragile desert landscapes, and more. As a whole, the System protects a living, vibrant record of the many people who have farmed, fished, and foraged in the West

Threats to the Historic and Culture Resources of the NLCS

The Antiquities Act of 1906 and many other statutes, regulations, executive orders, and policies afford federal protection to the historic objects and culturally significant places in the NLCS. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, for example, states that “the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people.”

In practice, however, there are numerous unchecked threats to the rich national heritage—the properties, artifacts, and lands—of the NLCS:

- **Vandalism and Looting:** Vandals remove or damage historic objects in Monuments; some visitors excavate ruins and sell the artifacts on the black market. Colorado's Canyons of the Ancients National Monument, for example, has suffered at least six attacks by vandals in the last two years with several sites defaced by graffiti, garbage, and shotgun holes.
- **Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Use:** ORVs can crush artifacts in addition to scarring landscapes and disturbing surface and subsurface soils. In some NLCS Monuments and Conservation Areas, roads designated for ORV use are too close to cultural and historic sites; the proximity increases vandalism and incidental damage, and most NLCS units can't afford an adequate field presence to adequately monitor ORVs and enforce rules on their use.

- **Minimal Visitor Education:** Many visitors do not understand the damage caused by touching rock art, climbing or walking on dwellings or “midden” sites (prehistoric trash piles) or leaving behind garbage. As NLCS sites become popular places to explore, learn, and hike, visitor education and interpretation is essential to avoid unintentional harm to cultural sites.
- **Inadequate Resource Inventories:** The vast majority of the resources in NLCS units have yet to be surveyed (see table), putting many important historic resources at risk, since management plans cannot provide protection for unknown resources. For example, BLM may decide to permit potentially damaging uses, like roads or grazing, in an area--in turn causing inadvertent harm to yet-to-be-discovered historic sites or ruins.

Caring for Cultural and Historic Resources in the NLCS

Protecting cultural and historic resources in the NLCS requires:

- Increasing the on-the-ground law enforcement presence in Monuments and National Conservation Areas.
- Creating transportation plans that consider how road designations impact historic resources.
- Closing roads and trails that lead to fragile historic properties.
- Educating the public about the significance of the historic resources in the NLCS.
- Providing on-site information for visitors to the NLCS, including signs and information at entrance kiosks.
- Crafting volunteer stewardship programs to help BLM monitor sites in National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, and other NLCS areas. For example, the Southwest Colorado Cultural Site Stewardship Program trains volunteers and educates local communities and individuals about cultural resource protection; stewards help with preservation and conservation and monitor resources for damage caused by vandals and improper visitation.

Undiscovered Treasures in the NLCS

Limited cultural resource inventories make it difficult for BLM to protect resources, or even know what is being lost.

<i>National Monument</i>	<i>Percent of NM surveyed</i>	<i>Number of identified sites</i>
Canyons of the Ancients	less than 7%	20,000
Grand Staircase-Escalante	less than 5%	2,940+
Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mtns	less than 7%	177
Agua Fria	less than 5%	450

Places to explore American history and culture in the NLCS include:

- The **route traveled by explorers Lewis and Clark through Montana**, along the last stretch of the wild, free-flowing Missouri River.
- **Pompeys Pillar National Monument** along the Yellowstone River, a celebrated landmark and observation point for more than 11,000 years. The pillar bears Native American drawings as well as explorer Clark’s inscription from 1806.
- Colorado’s **Canyons of the Ancients National Monument** and its 20,000 prehistoric sites. Sites include Lowry Pueblo--a 1,000 year-old Ancestral Puebloan village--and many other dwellings, petroglyphs, pictographs, agricultural sites, and remainders of the daily life of PaleoIndians who lived here as long as 8,000 years ago.
- Pioneer ranches, fur and trading posts, and forts in the **Grand Canyon-Parashant** and **Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monuments** are a testimony to the challenges faced by those who pushed westward to make a living off the land in the 1700-1800s.
- Painted Rock in California’s **Carrizo Plains N.M.** is a sacred area for the Native American Chumash and Yokut people.
- Trails left by American, Spanish, and Native American explorers, including the **California-Oregon Trails** dating from the 1800s, and the **Juan de Batista trail** dating from the 1600s.

For more information on the National Landscape Conservation System and the coalition that works to protect these special places visit: www.discoverNLCS.org. Or, contact Mike Smith, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 202-588-6031; mike_smith@nthp.org (01/04)