

2023

Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area Annual Report



2023 Overview.....	1
Water and Visitation.....	1
Revenue Comparison.....	1
Visitation Within the AHRA.....	2
Special Activity Agreements (SAAs).....	2
AHRA Work Sections.....	3
Full-Time Employees.....	3
Temporary Employees.....	3
Administration.....	4
Community Events.....	4
Volunteer Hours.....	5
Special Activity Permits.....	5
Commercial Special Activity Permits by Type.....	6
Rationed Days by Section.....	6
Law Enforcement.....	7
Investigated and Reported Incidents.....	9
Citations Issued.....	9
Maintenance - Facilities.....	10
Maintenance - Construction.....	10
LE/Management.....	11

2023 OVERVIEW

A recap of park activity for the period of January 1 through December 31.

Water and Visitation

The Arkansas River saw sustained average flows that provided quality extended recreational opportunities this year.

AHRA and partners continued the education effort to disperse boaters from heavily used sections and encouraged them to boat in less used sections.

Revenue Comparison

	2023	2022	% of Change
Camping	\$ 456,592.80	\$ 485,922.15	-6.04%
Commercial Agreements	\$ 1,081,220.94	\$ 1,131,923.16	-4.48%
Donation / Special Projects	\$ 13,889.34	\$ 11,455.47	21.25%
Gift Certificates	\$ -	\$ 80.00	-100.00%
Park Passes	\$ 217,053.38	\$ 284,023.36	-23.58%
Registrations	\$ 35,280.43	\$ 37,840.03	-6.76%
Penalty Assessments	\$ 139.50	\$ 205.00	-31.95%
Licenses	\$ 19,828.51	\$ 13,176.12	50.49%
Search and Rescue	\$ 174.00	\$ 54.00	222.22%
Special Activities	\$ 1,260.00	\$ 1,508.00	-16.45%
	\$ 1,825,438.90	\$ 1,966,187.29	-7.16%

Visitation Within the AHRA

	2023 People	2022 People	% of Change
January	15,769	27,428	-73.94%
February	24,009	18,119	24.53%
March	39,028	53,889	-38.08%
April	39,156	53,789	-37.37%
May	98,772	91,351	7.51%
June	241,223	194,735	19.27%
July	276,943	307,816	-11.15%
August	205,898	226,606	-10.06%
September	66,656	70,770	-6.17%
October	67,420	53,186	21.11%
November	26,650	27,503	-3.20%
December	30,718	27,715	9.78%
	1,132,242	1,152,907	-1.83%

Special Activity Agreements (SAAs)

Applicant Group Name	Count	Location
River Races	3	Various
Weddings	2	Various
River Cleanup	3	Entire River
Photo / Filming Events	3	Various
Festivals	4	Salida, Cañon City, Buena Vista
Group Picnic Area	1	Collegiate Peaks Overlook
Search and Rescue	4	Various
Drone Permits	5	Various
Other	7	Various
32		

AHRA WORK SECTIONS

Full-Time Employees

AHRA is organized into work sections for the purpose of daily operations. Each of these sections has specific responsibilities and is staffed by permanent and temporary employees designated for specific job assignments. Our many dedicated temporary employees complete a large portion of the visible fieldwork. In 2023, AHRA employed 28 temporary and 8 permanent staff members. We were able to fill the open Land Ranger Supervisor position in November, resulting in a 9th permanent staff member.

The following permanent staff members supervised the sections noted below:

Name	Title	Section
Tom Waters	Park Manager	LE/Management
Corrine Servis	Operations Manager & Rec Rangers	LE/Management
Glenn Cottone	Senior Ranger & Land Rangers	Law Enforcement (LE)
Jeff Hammond	River & OHV Ranger Supervisor	Law Enforcement (LE)
Serena Rocksund	Land Ranger Supervisor	Law Enforcement (LE)
Steve Wyatt	Park Resource Tech	Maint - Construction
Will Taliaferro	Park Resource Tech	Maint - Facilities
John Kreski	Rationing & Permit Coordinator	Special Use Permits
Jennifer Crawford	Administrative Assistant	Administration

Temporary Employees

Administration	3
Special Use Permits	2
Maint - Facilities	4
Maint - Construction	0

LE - River Rangers	6
LE - Land Rangers	5
LE - Intern	1
LE - OHV Rangers	3
LE - Recreation Rangers	4

ADMINISTRATION



Responsibilities for the administrative section include greeting visitors, answering phone inquiries, completing sales, handling field revenue, generating administrative reports, and maintaining park-related web pages.

Among the items processed/sold are CPW park passes, hunting and fishing licenses, registrations, and special activity permits. We also partner with our friends group, the Greater Arkansas River Nature Association (GARNA), selling books, maps, apparel, and other educational and gift items.

Each year, the administrative team organizes and hosts several programs and one-time events, including Junior Rangers and Tots on Tuesdays youth programs, Cleanup-Greenup, and other various school and community programs.

On behalf of CPW and AHRA, we'd like to extend a "thank you" to our many volunteers who donate their time and travel miles to help with these and other opportunities throughout the year.

Community Events

Event Name	Event Count
Boat Safety Event, All Ages	1
Boat Safety Event, School	5
Interpretive Hikes	11
Education/Interp	12
Jr Rangers/Tots on Tuesdays	34
School Group (not boat safety)	9
Career Day	2
Events/Booths/Festivals	6

Volunteer Hours

Opportunity Name	Volunteers	Hours
Bluebird Monitoring	3	124
Campground Host	7	1,872
Citizen Task Force (CTF) Delegate	15	133
CMC Student	1	2
Maintenance and Trail Work	3	115
Naturalist	8	580
Rationing and Permit Advisory Committee Member	5	68
Special Projects	11	112
	53	3,005

Thank you to all of our volunteers for their contributed time and energy!

*The table above reflects only those hours reported in our visitor database.

SPECIAL ACTIVITY PERMITS

The Special Activity Permits section exists to accurately and efficiently administer AHRA Special Activity Permits as well as administer the Rationing Plan for commercial boating on the Arkansas River within the AHRA. AHRA had 55 commercial contractors in 2023, conducting 94 different activities. Permitted concessioners provided various combinations of activities such as whitewater rafting and kayaking, float fishing, walk & wade fishing, shuttle services, rock climbing, and photo/video imaging to over 179,980 paying clients in 2023. In 2023, the overall commercial use of paying clients at AHRA decreased by 9.91% as compared to 2022. Total Gross Receipts outfitters received from all commercial operations within the AHRA in 2023 were 4.24% below receipts received in 2022. This total includes revenue from total gross receipts and *does not* include administrative and assessment fees. In 2023, commercial permittees contributed a total of \$1,045,030 in use fees. The Arkansas River within the AHRA remains one of, if not the most, commercially rafted rivers in the United States.

The AHRA Rationing Plan regulates commercial boats per day (bpd) carrying capacities on sixteen different river sections. In 2023, river sections had commercial bpd carrying capacities ranging from 360 bpd to 10 bpd with differing section-specific boating restrictions.

Data control methods and commercial use verification controls are used to manage contractor Special Activity Permit compliance. This year, two count crew employees assisted in counting private boaters via photo images online and in the field spot checks.

Commercial Special Activity Permits by Type

	2023	2022
Boating	45	45
Imaging	27	25
Walk and Wade Fishing	15	15
Shuttle Services	4	4
Rock Climbing	3	3
	94	92

Rationed Days by Section

For the 2023 season, water flows were very good for overall rafting without the need for the Voluntary Flow Management Program with thirty-eight days of high water advisories for Pine Creek Rapid. Therefore, June's higher water provided more challenging flows in the higher-class rated sections for the summer season.

Section	2023	2022
1e: Numbers to Railroad Bridge	2	3
2b: Fisherman's Bridge to Stone Bridge	4	5
3a: Salida East to Rincon	1	3
4a: Vallie Bridge to Texas Creek	4	15
5: Parkdale to Canon City	12	12
	23	38

LAW ENFORCEMENT



The ranger section patrols all portions, both land and river, of AHRA throughout the year. The section is divided into four sub-sections: land, river, off-highway vehicle, and recreation.

All permanent rangers are certified Colorado Peace Officers. All AHRA seasonal law enforcement rangers have limited commissions. These rangers only enforce Colorado Parks and Wildlife laws and regulations. When necessary, all rangers can take appropriate law enforcement action necessary to protect our visitors, preserve the resource and ensure compliance with other administrative regulations. While law enforcement may not be the primary function of any ranger's job, it is an important and necessary responsibility of all rangers. It should also be noted that AHRA rangers work closely with other local, state, and federal peace officers and resource managers in performing their duties.

In the winter, the rangers continue to patrol AHRA sites along the river corridor. Winter search and rescue activities involve assisting other agencies with motorists who end up in the river. Full-time rangers also conduct snowmobile patrols as well as avalanche rescue activities. Additionally, AHRA rangers manage three snowmobile trail-grooming contracts and patrol snowmobile trails on Bureau of Land Management, National Forest, and other public lands in Chaffee, Lake, Gunnison, and Saguache counties as part of the Colorado Parks & Wildlife Snowmobile Program responsibilities. Winter is also the ideal time for Rangers to complete most of their training and recertification, organize and evaluate programs, and plan for the upcoming high-use season.

Land Rangers, a team of four temporary employees assigned to land-based operations, are responsible for managing visitor use in the busy recreation sites and campgrounds and collecting field revenue critical to AHRA operations. They are the customer service face of the park, assisting visitors in making reservations, providing basic interpretive information, and ensuring compliance with all Parks and Wildlife statutes and regulations.

In 2023, dispersed camping continued to be in high demand. Land Rangers were assisted in managing these areas by the new Recreation Ranger program focused on education in dispersed areas. Land Rangers managed busy boat ramps and parking lots during peak usage days and assisted with education programs hosted by the Greater Arkansas River Nature Association (GARNA). They even went above and beyond the bounds of the park and assisted other first responders with highway accidents.

River Rangers, a team of six temporary employees, specialize in whitewater boating activities on the river. Since the Arkansas River is one of, if not the most commercially rafted rivers in the United States, much of the river rangers' time is spent administering the State River Outfitter Licensing Program. These rangers actively monitor river flows, mitigate hazards, provide whitewater search and rescue support, inspect commercial and private boat trips for adequate safety equipment, investigate boat incidents, and provide expert river education to AHRA visitors in the field.

River rangers assisted with the management of the Loaner Life Jacket program. Salida, Buena Vista, and Cañon City had a life jacket station installed that allowed a user to borrow a life jacket for free and encouraged all to wear a life jacket when recreating on the river.

In 2023, AHRA piloted the River Safety in Schools program in Salida, providing nearly 100 3rd graders with a free life jacket and basic river safety education in partnership with Salida Recreation, Salida Fire, FIBArk, and GARNA.

Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Rangers are part of a multi-agency trail crew working in the Upper Arkansas River Valley. The trail crew members represent Colorado Parks & Wildlife and the U.S. Forest Service. Funding for this collaborative effort comes from the Colorado OHV Good Management Grant, funded by OHV registration dollars. The trail crew maintains trails and OHV routes, provides input on new OHV routes, and enforces OHV registration and equipment requirements in the San Isabel National Forest as well as at the Big Bend OHV Track. The trail crew promotes motorized recreation by encouraging safe riding practices and Stay the Trail and Tread Lightly guidelines. The trail crew also works with local OHV riding clubs to promote volunteer opportunities by means of the U.S. Forest Service Adopt a Trail program. Recent years have seen both increases in trail users and major trail damage from wildfire and weather events, keeping the OHV Rangers busy.

In 2023, OHV Rangers rode over 2,000 miles to build or maintain more than 500 miles of trail and cut out nearly 1,100 trees.

Recreation Rangers - This year, we had four seasonal recreational rangers who patrolled the dispersed camping areas within the AHRA. Their duties included campground clean-up efforts and education of our visitors on recreating responsibly within the river corridor. The Recreation Rangers also took part in multiple joint projects with BLM, USFS, and the Chaffee Rec Adopters. This year we also partnered with Salida High School and Colorado Mountain College to bring in local students who were part of an internship program to fill most of the Recreation Ranger positions. This partnership was a way to introduce local youth to the natural resource field.

Some of their accomplishments in 2023 included contacting over 1,500 visitors, breaking up over 150 illegal fire rings, and removing over 200 bags of trash/human waste from the park.

Investigated and Reported Incidents

	2023	2022
Reportable Commercial Boat Accidents	22	10
Private Boat Accidents	3	1
Commercial Non-Boating Accidents	5	4
Private Non-Boating Accidents	0	0
Medical Assists	0	1
Inter-Agency Assists / SAR	2	4
Vandalism / Theft	1	3
Law Enforcement	0	11
Other Incidents	1	2
	34	36

Citations Issued

	2023	2022
Pass / Permit Violations	1	3
Resource Protection Violations	3	8
Public Safety Violations	0	6
Records / Reporting Violations	2	0
Commercial Outfitter Citations (included in totals above)	2	3
	6	17

MAINTENANCE – FACILITIES



Facility Maintenance is a team of permanent and seasonal employees. Their primary role is to maintain all AHRA-managed facilities throughout the river corridor. These duties include maintenance and service to vault toilets and changing areas; upkeep of campgrounds and day-use sites; improvements to dispersed recreation sites; installing new signs, as well as, updating existing signs; installation and repairs to fencing; maintaining solar systems for campground vaults and signs; grounds and landscape maintenance; tree care and weed control; maintenance and repairs for the visitor center, shop, and garage bays; large and small equipment service and repairs; and traffic counter maintenance.

Some noteworthy projects completed by the crew and with volunteers in 2023 were:

- The painting and repair of several vault toilets and sheds
- The clean-up after the flash flood at Railroad Bridge Campground
- Replacement of the Five Points Campground tent pads
- Assist with signage and development of the Salida East Campground project
- Maintenance, signage, and installation of appropriate ADA access features
- The removal and installation of new “Welcome To” frames and signs
- Weed and brush control; continually trimming back the vegetation along pathways and campsites, as well as around facilities, signs, and parking areas
- Work with the Southwest Conservation Corps on a section of the Ruby Mountain Trail through a Colorado Youth Conservation Association award
- Work with the Collegiate Peaks Chapter of Trout Unlimited to install a new fishing access ladder at Rapid Number 4 recreation site
- Continual cleaning and maintenance of 73 vault toilets and several port-a-potties to look after.

Staff continuously works hard to maintain and clean up along the river to make the visitor experience the best it can be. If you happen to see these maintenance folks out and about, give them a thank you for the work they do.

MAINTENANCE – CONSTRUCTION



It has been a very eventful year at AHRA for site development. Staff is in charge of all the sites along the river. They keep up with roads and parking needs, maintain the boat ramps, and take care of any issues that come up to keep the river users flowing as smoothly as possible. Many projects, large and small, were completed to enhance the sites up and down the river.

Staff also assisted the group Volunteers of Colorado (VOC) in rebuilding trails where needed. We brought in materials to build and tighten up the edges of the trails. It is usually a two-day weekend project when we get this group.

Our in-house crews also worked on the Elephant Rock dispersed camping site. We defined the campsites with rocks so that users are able to stay within the areas designated for camping.

The Salida East Campground rebuild finished up around Father's Day weekend. This was a total rebuild of the site, with more vault toilets and three new shade shelters installed. Once open to the public, nothing but good comments from the visitors were expressed.

We were able to get a new skid steer this year, and it will be a great asset for future projects.

Some great projects coming up include:

- Rebuild of the Canyon Trading Post viewers platform. This will be an in-house project.
- Rebuild the stairs leading to the shade shelters at the Collegiate Peaks Overlook site. This is also an in-house project.
- Rebuild of the Ramp at Parkdale. This will hopefully be out to bid and completed soon.
- Small-cap money for 121 new cement picnic tables to replace old ones at the sites. These are ordered and scheduled for delivery in March.

From welding to woodworking and everything in between, AHRA's shop is well-equipped to handle almost anything that comes up. Being able to do projects in-house not only saves time but also money. Staff is already busy for the 2024 season to provide the best experience possible for the visitor.

LE/MANAGEMENT



The Law Enforcement (LE)/Management section oversees and coordinates the daily visitor service and maintenance operations and overall programs and projects for the entire work unit within this document. This section serves as the communication link between field staff and the Southeast Region Office in Colorado Springs and the Colorado Parks and Wildlife offices in Denver and Littleton. This section works closely with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District (SECWCD), Pueblo Water, Colorado Springs Utilities, Arkansas River Outfitters Association (AROA), and Trout Unlimited (TU) to ensure the success of the Voluntary Flow Management Program (VFMP). They also work closely with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to ensure that management

plan goals and directives are being met. Most importantly, this section works with staff and the public to provide the many community and resource-wide coordination activities and efforts needed throughout the 152-mile river corridor while continuing to develop and enhance communication and cooperation among visitors as well as current and potential partners.

This year, as in past years, all AHRA staff continued to maintain the essential quality of management practices and public services that help conserve the Arkansas River and its unique features for everyone's enjoyment.