

2024 Annual Report

Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area



2024 Overview

A recap of park activity from January 1 through December 31.

Water and Visitation

The Arkansas River sustained higher-than-average flows this year, providing quality extended recreational opportunities. According to the Wellsville gauge, peak flows occurred on June 9, 2024, with a discharge of 4870 cfs.

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

Revenue Type	2024 Revenue	2023 Revenue	% of Change
Camping	\$ 457,255.42	\$ 456,592.80	+0.15%
Commercial Agreements	\$ 1,064,085.44	\$ 1,081,220.94	-1.58%
Donation / Special Projects	\$ 27,691.73	\$ 13,889.34	+99.37%
Gift Certificates	\$ 90.00	\$ -	n/a
Park Passes	\$ 141,372.51	\$ 217,053.38	-34.87%
Registrations	\$ 35,888.67	\$ 35,280.43	+1.72%
Penalty Assessments	\$ 207.64	\$ 139.50	+48.85%
Licenses	\$ 18,655.08	\$ 19,828.51	-5.92%
Search and Rescue	\$ 155.00	\$ 174.00	-10.92%
Special Activities	\$ 1,390.00	\$ 1,260.00	+10.32%
Specialty Retail	\$ 258.91	\$ -	n/a
Totals	\$ 1,747,050.40	\$ 1,825,438.90	-4.29%

Visitation

Month	2024 People Count	2023 People Count	% of Change
January	21,290	15,769	+25.93%
February	25,856	24,009	+7.14%
March	35,926	39,028	-8.63%
April	57,590	39,156	+32.01%
May	85,198	98,772	-15.93%
June	222,654	241,223	-8.34%
July	287,220	276,943	+3.58%
August	217,198	205,898	+5.20%
September	67,146	66,656	+0.73%
October	58,410	67,420	-15.43%
November	25,711	26,650	-3.65%
December	30,229	30,718	-1.62%
Totals	1,134,428	1,132,242	+0.19%

Special Activity Agreements (SAAs)

Special Activity Type	Count
River Races	4
Weddings	2
River Cleanup	3
Photo / Filming Events	6
Festivals	4
Group Picnic Area	3
Search and Rescue	9
Drone Permits	4
Other	4
Total	39

AHRA Work Section Updates

Full-Time Employees

AHRA is organized into work sections for daily operations. Each section 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 2024, AHRA employed 31 temporary positions. One permanent full-time position, Park Resource Tech Supervisor, was added to our staff, bringing our full-time staff count to 11.

The following permanent staff members supervised the sections noted below:

Section Lead Name	Title	Section Name
Tom Waters	Park Manager	LE/Upper Management
Corrine Servis	Operations Manager	LE/Upper Management
Glenn Cottone	Senior Ranger	Law Enforcement (LE)
Jeff Hammond	Park Ranger	Law Enforcement (LE)
Serena Rocksund	Park Ranger	Law Enforcement (LE)
Jessica King	Park Ranger	Law Enforcement (LE)
Steve Wyatt	Park Resource Tech Supervisor	Maintenance
Will Taliaferro	Park Resource Tech (partial year)	Maintenance
Owen Richmond	Park Resource Tech (partial year)	Maintenance
Connor Dady	Park Resource Tech (partial year)	Maintenance
John Kreski	Rationing & Permit Coordinator	Special Use Permits
Jennifer Crawford	Administrative Assistant	Administration

Temporary Employees

Department	Temp Employee Count
Administration	3
Interpretive Naturalist	1
Special Use Permits	1
Maintenance	5
LE - River Rangers	8
LE - Land Rangers	6
LE - Intern	1
LE - OHV Rangers	2
LE - Recreation Rangers	4
Total	31

Administrative Section

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.

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

Education and Interpretation Section

Supervised by Park Rangers, the Seasonal Naturalist and Naturalist Supervisor organize and host several programs and one-time events, including Junior Rangers and Tots on Tuesdays youth programs, Cleanup-Greenup, and other school and community programs. This year, the education team supported Get Outdoors Leadville with multiple programs, including Community Archery, Dia de los Muertos, and the annual GOL Latino Community Event.

Education Events

Event Name	Event Count
Boat Safety Event, All Ages	7
Boat Safety Event, School	2
Interpretive Hikes	2
Education/Interp	29
Jr Rangers/Tots on Tuesdays	19
School Group (not boat safety)	6
Career Day	2
Events/Booths/Festivals	7
Total	74

Volunteer Section

The AHRA volunteer section during 2024 changed supervision a few times throughout the season with programs being rearranged.

Bluebird Monitoring

Jeanette Lara, Southeast Region Volunteer Coordinator, helped with the Bluebird Monitoring programming and provided insights for the 2025 season. AHRA has a 2025 Bluebird meeting set with GARNA and Area 13 to design a monitoring program for AHRA and Area 13 and recruit a lead volunteer to assist with accountability for recording Bluebird data.

Campground Hosts

Three of the seven campground host sites were filled during the 2024 season. All active hosts during 2024 were recruited by employees locally.

School Programs & Partnerships

In partnership with GARNA, AHRA will continue to assist with the GARNA School Programs. These programs provided educational opportunities to youth in Chaffee County.

Salida High School and Colorado Mountain College (CMC) had three students volunteer in 2024. These students gained valuable experience volunteering at the AHRA while receiving college credit through CMC.

Volunteer Hours

Opportunity Name	Volunteer Count	Volunteer Hours
Bluebird Monitoring	8	304
Campground Host	5	1,388
Citizen Task Force (CTF) Delegate	22	142
CMC Student	3	162
Maintenance and Trail Work	2	95
Naturalist	8	647
Rationing and Permit Advisory Committee Member	5	69
Special Projects	5	40
Totals	58	2,846

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 Section

The Special Activity Permits section exists to accurately and efficiently administer AHRA Special Activity Permits and administer the Rationing Plan for commercial boating on the Arkansas River within the AHRA. AHRA had 56 commercial contractors in 2024, conducting 95 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 168,093 paying clients in 2024. In 2024, the overall commercial use of paying clients at AHRA decreased by 6.60% compared to 2023. Total Gross Receipts outfitters received from all commercial operations within the AHRA in 2024 were 1.59% below receipts received in 2023. This total includes revenue from total gross receipts and does not include administrative and assessment fees. In 2024, commercial permittees contributed \$1,030,103.98 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 the carrying capacities of commercial boats per day (bpd) on sixteen different river sections. In 2024, 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 manage contractor Special Activity Permit compliance. This year, one count crew employee assisted in counting private boaters using photo images online and in-field spot checks.

Commercial Special Activity Permits by Type

Commercial Special Activity Type	Active Permits in 2024	Active Permits in 2023
Boating	45	45
Imaging	27	27
Walk and Wade Fishing	15	15
Shuttle Services	4	4
Rock Climbing	4	3
Totals	95	94

Rationed Days by Section

For the 2024 season, water flows were very good for overall rafting, with the Voluntary Flow Management Program needed from July 1st to August 15th. There were fifteen days of high water advisories for the Royal Gorge, Section 5, and thirteen days of high water advisories for the Numbers, Section 1E. Therefore, June's higher water levels provided more challenging flows in the higher-class rated sections for the summer season.

River Section	Rationed Days in 2024	Rationed Days in 2023
1e Numbers to Railroad Bridge	0	2
2b Fisherman's Bridge to Stone Bridge	2	4
3a Salida East to Rincon	0	1
4a Vallie Bridge to Texas Creek	2	4
5 Parkdale to Canon City	8	12
Totals	12	23

Law Enforcement Section

Throughout the year, the ranger section patrols all portions of AHRA, both land and river. It is led by upper management and 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. All rangers can take appropriate law enforcement action when 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 all rangers' essential and necessary responsibility. It should also

be noted that AHRA rangers work closely with other local, state, and federal peace officers and resource managers to perform 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 and 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 ideal for Rangers to complete most of their training and recertification, organize and evaluate programs, and plan for the upcoming high-use season.

Upper 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 is the communication link between field staff, 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 meet management plan goals and directives. 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 developing and enhancing communication and cooperation among visitors and current and potential partners.

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

River Rangers

River Rangers, a team of six temporary employees, specialize in whitewater boating activities on the river. River Rangers spent nearly 3,000 hours patrolling the Arkansas River by boat this year. Since the Arkansas River is one of the most commercially rafted rivers in the United States, much of the River Rangers' time is spent administering the River Outfitter Licensing Program. These rangers set proactive safety at major rapids, mitigate hazards such as fallen trees, 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 manage the Loaner Life Jacket program.

Salida, Buena Vista, and Cañon City have installed life jacket stations that allow users to borrow a life jacket for free and encourage all to wear a life jacket when recreating on the river.

In 2024, AHRA expanded the River Safety in Schools program to 3rd-grade classrooms in Buena Vista, Salida, and Cañon City, providing over 500 children with a free life jacket and basic river safety education. This program partners with local schools, recreation departments, fire departments, and non-profits. It was funded by AHRA and CPW's Philanthropy at Work Grant.

Land Rangers

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

Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Rangers

Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Rangers are part of a multi-agency partnership between Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the United States Forest Service. The OHV Rangers are a trail crew working in the Upper Arkansas River Valley. Funding for this collaborative effort comes from the Colorado OHV Grant, which is funded entirely by OHV registration dollars. The trail crew maintains motorized trails, provides input on new OHV routes, and enforces OHV registration and equipment requirements in the San Isabel National Forest, Fourmile Recreation Area, and neighboring forest areas. The trail crew promotes responsible motorized recreation by encouraging safe riding practices, Stay the Trail and Tread Lightly guidelines, and trail etiquette with non-motorized users. The trail crew also works with local OHV riding clubs to promote volunteer opportunities through the U.S. Forest Service Adopt a Trail program. In recent years, we have seen both increases in trail users and significant trail damage from the fallout of wildfire and weather events, keeping the OHV Rangers busy.

In 2024, OHV Rangers rode over 2,000 miles, improved trail sustainability by servicing or building roughly 80 drains, and cut out over 1,700 fallen or ready-to-fall trees.

Recreation Rangers

Designated dispersed camping on the AHRA continues to be in ever-increasing demand. The Recreation Ranger program focuses on these dispersed lands by creating a presence, providing education, monitoring use, and supporting sustainable recreation on public lands in Chaffee, Fremont, and Lake County.

In 2024, AHRA had four seasonal recreational rangers and two AmeriCorps Members with Blue Elements who patrolled the dispersed camping areas within the AHRA. The six recreation rangers patrolled 94

designated campsites throughout the Arkansas River corridor. The recreation rangers also participated in multiple partner projects with the BLM, USFS, and the Chaffee Rec Adopters.

The 2024 recreation rangers made approximately 2,415 visitor contacts, removed 4,732 gallons of trash off public lands, dismantled 90 rock rings, removed 117 piles of dog waste and 27 human feces, provided 66 green tags for educational purposes, and one citation for an aggressive dog off-leash.

The AHRA partnered with Salida High School and Colorado Mountain College to promote future environmental educators by providing an internship program. The internship provides the next generation with experience and skills to apply as recreation rangers as they conclude their high school years. These local youth are also provided opportunities with the CPW team, where safety and sustainability are promoted.

Law Enforcement Reporting

Investigated and Reported Incidents

Type of Incident	Incident Count for 2024	Incident Count for 2023
Reportable Commercial Boat Accidents	23	22
Private Boat Accidents	0	3
Commercial Non-Boating Accidents	5	5
Private Non-Boating Accidents	2	0
Medical Assists	0	0
Inter-Agency Assists / SAR	2	2
Vandalism / Theft	4	1
Law Enforcement	4	0
Other Incidents	7	1
Totals	47	34

Citations Issued

Citation Type	Citation Count for 2024	Citation Count for 2023
Pass / Permit Violations	7	1
Resource Protection Violations	3	3
Public Safety Violations	4	0
Records / Reporting Violations	1	2
Commercial Outfitter Citations (included in totals above)	0	2
Totals	15	6

Maintenance Section

Facilities Maintenance

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 2024 were:

- The painting and repair of several vault toilets and sheds
- Adjustment of lighting at Ruby Mountain Campground to be designated as a “dark sky” park
- Planted 40 new trees around the Salida East Campground
- Replacement of the Railroad Bridge Campground tent pads
- Replacement of old wooden signposts with new metal posts
- Repaired the new ADA fishing pier at the Vallie Bridge Campground.
- Weed and brush control: continually trimming back the vegetation along pathways and campsites, as well as around facilities, signs, and parking areas
- Worked with National Public Lands Day volunteers to install new fencing in dispersed camping areas.
- Continual cleaning and maintenance of 74 vault toilets and several port-a-potties to look after.

Staff continuously works hard to maintain and clean up along the river to improve the visitor experience. If you see these maintenance folks out and about, thank them for their work.

Construction Maintenance

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

One-hundred twenty-six (126) new picnic tables have been placed at nearly every site around the park. Replacing the old tables brings cleaner, more modern amenities to our park, and visitors have been very impressed with the new look.

Canyon Trading Post was renovated with new day-use areas and rocks outlining the roads and pathways.

Some great projects coming up include:

- Rebuilding the Vallie Bridge parking area and vault toilet will bring the site's facilities up to ADA standards. Hopefully, this is the first of many such projects.
- Rebuilding the stairs leading to the shade shelters at the Collegiate Peaks Overlook site is also an in-house project.
- The boat ramp at Parkdale will be rebuilt. It will soon be out to bid, and construction is planned to begin in January.
- Widening of the county road into Ruby Mountain. This project will improve access to Browns Canyon National Monument by involving rock scaling, blasting, and road construction.

AHRA's shop is well-equipped to handle almost any project, from welding to woodworking and everything in between. Being able to do projects in-house not only saves time but also money. Staff is already busy for the 2025 season to provide the best experience possible for visitors.