

2021

Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area Annual Report



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2021 OVERVIEW

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

Water and Visitation

The Arkansas River saw average flows that led to a good boating season. Many other rivers in Colorado had less than average flows and this led to an increase in commercial and private use on the Arkansas River. Summer flow augmentation through the Voluntary Flow Management Program, along with great coordination from our water partners, ensured a viable recreational boating season through the peak visitation months and helped the commercial boating industry have a productive year even amidst the COVID pandemic. Lower river flows in the fall led to outstanding float and walk & wade fishing opportunities.

Many users found boating as an opportunity to recreate while maintaining social distance. AHRA continues to see an increase in the number of private boaters during the peak season. AHRA and partners increased the education effort to disperse boaters from heavily used sections and encouraged them to boat in less used sections.

AHRA saw an increase in visitation in 2021. Boating, fishing, and other recreational opportunities brought more users to the Arkansas Valley leading to an increase in AHRA camping reservations, special use permits, day area facility use, and dispersed camping use.

Revenue Comparison

	2021	2020	% of Change
Camping	\$ 516,580.37	\$ 511,129.00	1.07%
Commercial Agreements	\$ 1,339,791.57	\$ 887,342.05	50.99%
Donation / Special Projects	\$ 15,597.27	\$ 602.17	2,490.18%
Gift Certificates	\$ 1,524.96	\$ 406.00	275.61%
Park Passes	\$ 305,328.59	\$ 294,078.13	3.83%
Registrations	\$ 40,991.80	\$ 39,441.12	3.93%
Penalty Assessments	\$ 344.50	\$ 417.50	-17.49%
Licenses	\$ 23,422.90	\$ 18,693.82	25.30%
Search and Rescue	\$ 165.00	\$ 135.00	22.22%
Special Activities	\$ 1,536.00	\$ 714.00	115.13%
	\$ 2,245,282.96	\$ 1,752,958.79	28.09%

Visitation Within the AHRA

	2021 People	2020 People	% of Change
January	26,003	23,054	11.34%
February	24,263	19,335	20.31%
March	37,588	29,576	21.32%
April	38,866	41,980	-8.01%
May	64,076	85,782	-33.88%
June	218,888	181,175	17.23%
July	273,060	311,025	-13.90%
August	220,139	214,527	2.55%
September	64,769	59,906	7.51%
October	55,730	56,540	-1.45%
November	37,428	32,686	12.67%
December	24,915	17,617	29.29%
	1,085,725	1,073,203	1.15%

Special Activity Agreements (SAAs)

Applicant Group Name	Count	Location
Races	9	Browns Canyon, Royal Gorge
Weddings	3	Various
River Cleanup	2	Entire River
Photo Events	4	Various
Festivals	3	Salida, Cañon City, Buena Vista
Other	3	Various
	24	

AHRA WORK SECTIONS

Leadership Team

AHRA is organized into work sections for the purpose of daily operations. Each of these sections has specific responsibilities and is staffed by both permanent and temporary employees who are designated specific job assignments. A large portion of the visible fieldwork is completed by our many dedicated temporary employees. In 2021 AHRA employed 21 temporary and 9 permanent staff members.

The following permanent staff members supervised the sections noted below:

Name	Title	Section
Tom Waters	Park Manager	LE/Management
Corrine Servis	Operations Manager	LE/Management
Glenn Cottone	Senior Ranger	Law Enforcement (LE)
Tappan Brown	River Ranger Supervisor	Law Enforcement (LE)
Jeff Hammond	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	1
Maint - Facilities	4
Maint - Construction	1

LE - River Rangers	4
LE - Land Rangers	5
LE - Intern	1
LE - OHV Rangers	2

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, and other educational and gift items.

Each year, the administrative team organizes and puts on several programs and one-time events including Junior Rangers and Tots on Tuesdays youth programs, Cleanup-Greenup, and other various school and community programs. Many of these activities were suspended in 2020 but were able to resume in a modified format in 2021.

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
Interpretive Hikes	9
Cleanup-Greenup	1
School Group Program	8
Career Day	1
Interpretive Program	9
Jr Rangers / Tots on Tuesdays	21

Volunteer Hours

Opportunity Name	Volunteers	Hours
Bluebird Monitoring	3	106
Campground Host	5	1,381
Citizen Task Force (CTF) Delegate	16	229
Maintenance and Trail Work	4	109
Naturalist	2	401
Rationing and Permit Advisory Committee Member	3	53
Special Projects	4	69
Visitor Services	6	279
	43	2,627

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

*The table above reflects only those hours that were 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 58 commercial contractors in 2021 conducting 96 different activities. Permitted concessioners provided various combinations of activities such as whitewater rafting and kayaking, float fishing, walk & wade fishing, shuttle services, rock climbing, Mt. biking, and photo/video imaging to over 260,674 paying clients in 2021. In 2021, the overall commercial use of paying clients at AHRA increased by 41.11% as compared to 2020. Total Gross Receipts outfitters received from all commercial operations within the AHRA in 2021 were 51.13% above receipts received in 2020. This total includes revenue from total gross receipts and *does not* include administrative and assessment fees. In 2021, commercial contractors contributed a total of \$1,322,432 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 2021, 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 one count crew assisted in counting private boaters via photo images online and in the field spot checks.

With the increasing outdoor recreation visitation, commercial and private activities surge to record-breaking visits. The season proved to be successful with commercial clients reaching record high clients and total gross receipts hitting an all-time high of \$24,621,626.

The data showed that use was expanded into the shoulder seasons (earlier and later from the main summer season) with a definite increase during the week in June and July.

Commercial Special Activity Permits by Type

Activity	2021	2020
Boating	47	48
Imaging	25	26
Walk and Wade Fishing	15	15
Shuttle Services	5	5
Rock Climbing, Hiking, and Mtn Biking	4	4
	96	98

Rationed Days by Section

For the 2021 season, water flows were very good for overall rafting with no high water advisories that kept boaters out of the class IV sections. Therefore, resulting in more use throughout the river corridor.

Section	2021	2020
1e: Numbers to Railroad Bridge	2	3
2b: Fisherman's Bridge to Stone Bridge	4	4
2d: Big Bend to Salida East	12	9
3a: Salida East to Rincon	4	4
3b: Rincon to Vallie Bridge	19	19
4a: Vallie Bridge to Texas Creek	17	15
5: Parkdale to Canon City	12	11
	70	65

LAW ENFORCEMENT



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

Land Rangers, a team of five temporary employees assigned to land-based operations, are responsible for managing visitor use in the busy recreation sites and campgrounds, and for collecting field revenue which is 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.

2021 saw a large increase in visitation, especially in dispersed camping areas. Rangers focused education efforts in these areas to limit vegetation damage, litter, and human waste concerns. Following the model of Tunnel View and Rapid #4, Elephant Rock was converted to a designated dispersed camping area. These areas are free, first-come-first-serve with camping limited to specified numbered sites. This model prevents campsite sprawl, vegetation damage, and overcrowding, improving the overall visitor experience. Boat ramp parking became a concern on several high-use days in Brown's Canyon. Rangers were stationed at ramps on busy days to ensure efficient parking.

River Rangers, a team of five 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 accidents, and provide expert river education to AHRA visitors in the field.

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

Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Rangers are half of a four-person 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.

Notable accomplishments for 2021 were a seven-mile reroute project on the Rainbow, continued mitigation of post-wildfire erosion damage in the Decker Fire area, and the closure and rehabilitation of unapproved routes in the Fourmile Recreation Area.

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 the performance of 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 that 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, to organize and evaluate programs and plan for the upcoming high-use season.

Investigated and Reported Incidents

	2021	2020
Reportable Commercial Boat Accidents	22	14
Private Boat Accidents	0	2
Commercial Non-Boating Accidents	1	2
Private Non-Boating Accidents	0	0
Medical Assists	1	0
Inter-Agency Assists / SAR	3	7
Vandalism / Theft	3	20
Law Enforcement	3	7
Other Incidents	5	8
	38	60

Citations Issued

	2021	2020
Pass / Permit Violations	7	7
Resource Protection Violations	10	15
Public Safety Violations	10	10
Records / Reporting Violations	11	2
Commercial Outfitter Citations (included in totals above)	14	6
	38	34

MAINTENANCE – FACILITIES



Facility Maintenance is a team of permanent and numerous temporary employees. Their primary role is to maintain all AHRA-managed facilities throughout the river corridor. These duties include maintaining vault toilets/changing areas; ash removal from grills and fire rings; developing new recreation sites; designing new signs as well as updating existing signs; maintaining solar systems in campgrounds; weed control; maintaining visitor center, shop, and garage bays; recycling cardboard, paper, and metals; grounds maintenance; and traffic counter maintenance.

Some noteworthy projects completed by this crew in 2021 were to keep the sites and vault toilets as clean as possible with the record number of visitors and all the sanitary issues that 2021 presented. Additionally, a large percentage of time was spent on weed and brush control. Continually trimming back the vegetation along pathways and campsites, as well as, around facilities, signs, and parking areas.

Staff also goes out and helps keep the dispersed camping sites cleaned 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 built the new Vallie Bridge Boat Ramp, which has been such a great hit for the outfitters. Made twelve camping sites at the Point Bar area, and cleaned up the day-use side downriver. Staff with the help of volunteers from the local motorcycle club, also worked on the Big Bend OHV track to remove as much rock and add new dirt mixed with binders to help with riding conditions. This has created a track that is in great shape and has seen more use than ever before.

From welding to woodworking and everything in between, AHRA's shop is well equipped to handle most anything that comes up. Being able to do projects in-house not only saves time but also money. Staff is already busy for the 2022 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 Colorado Parks and Wildlife offices in Denver and Littleton. This section works closely with the Bureau of Reclamation, Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy, 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 and the U.S. Forest Service 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.