

News Release

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Vulnerable Gunnison River Parcel Now Protected Within the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area

MESA COUNTY, Colorado—In the waning days of 2022, Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) together added a critical Gunnison River property to the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA). WRC conveyed the 27-acre Meridian Junction property to the BLM on December 29, furthering the partners' efforts to improve the integrity of the NCA and the health of the Gunnison River for fish, wildlife and people.

WRC and the BLM have been working together to purchase and conserve strategic riverfront inholdings in the NCA since its creation in 2009. Although the lower Gunnison River flows through the NCA for 30 miles, more than 16 miles of it remain privately owned and could be developed or mined for gravel.

The small but important Meridian Junction property was one such parcel that could have been locked out of the NCA for good. With previous conservation successes under their belts, the BLM approached WRC in 2014 about acquiring the property when it was put up for auction. WRC was able to move quickly and purchase the property and then hold it until funding sources were lined up to convey it to the BLM. Funding for the project came from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

“We’re thrilled to see nearly 10 years of hard work pay off with another parcel along the Gunnison protected and one more crucial property included in the Dominguez-Escalante NCA,” said Sue Doroff, president of WRC. “The Gunnison is a lifeline for this parched western Colorado landscape, and protecting vulnerable land along the river is crucial to the health of the entire conservation area.”

With its rich archeology, unique geologic formations, free-flowing stretches, healthy riparian corridors and prime habitat for endangered desert fish, the Gunnison is one of the West’s great rivers. On its journey to the Colorado River, the lower Gunnison flows through the 210,172-acre Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The conservation area is home to diverse wildlife, and the lower Gunnison is one of the last places where all four species of Colorado basin warm-water fish (Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, bonytail chub and razorback sucker) still survive. The remote NCA also offers exceptional recreation opportunities for boaters, hikers, cyclists, equestrians and others.

This is the sixth property that WRC has purchased along the lower Gunnison and transferred to the BLM for permanent protection. The partners’ efforts began with two pivotal projects in 2012

and 2013, which prevented gravel mining at the northern entrance to the conservation area and improved access for boaters and other recreationists. To date, WRC and the BLM have protected over eight miles of the lower Gunnison within and adjacent to the NCA.

“This acquisition will benefit our National Conservation Lands” said Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Manager Amber Koski. “We have great partners, such as Western Rivers Conservancy that assist the BLM in acquiring lands for the public to enjoy and cherish here on the western slope.”

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ABOUT

Western Rivers Conservancy acquires lands along rivers throughout the West to conserve critical habitat and to create or improve public access for compatible use and enjoyment. By cooperating with local agencies and organizations and by applying decades of land acquisition experience, Western Rivers Conservancy secures the health of whole ecosystems. Western Rivers Conservancy has protected hundreds of miles of stream frontage on great western rivers, including the Rio Grande, Yampa, Little Cimarron, John Day, Salmon, Snake, North Umpqua and Madison Rivers. To learn more, visit www.westernrivers.org.

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