



MEDICINE BOW-ROUTT  
**National  
Forests**



THUNDER BASIN  
**National  
Grassland**

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



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# ABOUT THE MEDICINE BOW-ROUTT NATIONAL FORESTS AND THUNDER BASIN NATIONAL GRASSLAND

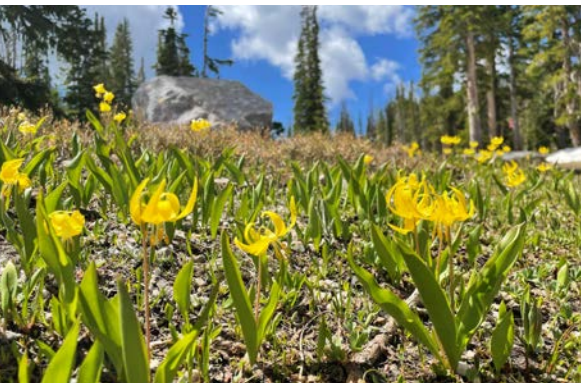
The Medicine Bow and Routt National Forests were established as “Forest Reserves” in the early 20th Century by President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1995 these National Forests were administratively combined with the Thunder Basin National Grassland.

Today the MBRTB includes almost 2.9 million acres of National Forest System lands managed for multiple uses and public enjoyment. These units provide a diverse mix of wildlife habitat, timber, livestock forage, vast mineral resources, and a vital source of water for irrigation and domestic use. Additionally, they offer diverse, year-round outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests extend from north central Colorado to central Wyoming. The National Forests encompass portions of many mountain ranges, including Gore Range, Flat Tops, Parks Range, Elkhead Mountains, Medicine Bow Mountains, Sierra Madre Range, and Laramie Range. The topography varies greatly with elevations ranging from 5,500 to 12,940 feet. The climate ranges from semiarid at low elevations to colder and less arid in the high country.

The Thunder Basin National Grassland is located in northeastern Wyoming in the Powder River Basin between the Big Horn Mountains and the Black Hills. Elevation on the National Grassland ranges from 3,600 to 5,200 feet, and the climate is semi-arid.

The Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland (MBRTB) has six offices. The Supervisor’s Office is in Laramie and is co-located with the Laramie Ranger District. Additional Ranger District offices are located in in Douglas and Saratoga, Wyo., as well as Steamboat Springs, Walden and Yampa, Colo. Many on-the-ground activities occur on the ranger districts, including trail construction and maintenance, operation of campgrounds, and management of vegetation and wildlife habitat. Passes and permits are available for purchase at all six offices.



## ACREAGE

Medicine Bow National Forest  
1,096,885

Thunder Basin National Grassland  
547,499

Routt National Forest  
1,125,558

Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests  
(managed by Parks Ranger District)  
129,325

**Total: 2,899,147**

## ELEVATION

Highest Elevation (CO)  
Mount Richtohofen - 12,940 feet

Highest Elevation (WY)  
Medicine Bow Peak - 12,013 feet

Lowest Elevation (CO)  
Elk River - 6,750 feet

Lowest Elevation (WY)  
Thunder Basin NG - 3,600 feet

## AT A GLANCE

6,008 Miles of Open Road

2,423 Miles of Trail

56 Campgrounds

31 Fee Day Use Sites

183 Non-fee Day Use Sites

## WILDERNESS ACRES

Encampment River - 10,1124

Flat Tops - 38,290

Huston Park - 30,588

Mount Zirkel - 159,935

Neota - 267

Never Summer - 6,659

Platte River - 23,492

Rawah - 1,462

Sarvis Creek - 44,549

Savage Run - 14,927



# PROGRAM OF WORK, FY2023

## USDA STRATEGIC GOALS (FY 2022 - 2026)

1. Combat Climate Change to Support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources and Communities
2. Ensure America's Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous
3. Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers
4. Provide All Americans Safe, Nutritious Food
5. Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities
6. Attract, Inspire, and Retain an Engaged and Motivated Workforce that's Proud to Represent USDA

## FOREST SERVICE STRATEGIC GOALS

1. Sustain our Nation's Forests and Grasslands working Environment
2. Deliver Benefits to the Public
3. Apply Knowledge Globally
4. Excel as a High-Performing Agency

## FOREST SERVICE NATIONAL PRIORITIES

1. Controlling the COVID-19 Pandemic
2. Providing Economic Relief
3. Tackling Climate Change
4. Advancing Racial Equity
5. Improving Our Workforce and Work Environment

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Resilient Landscapes  
Improving Recreation Opportunities  
Workforce Enhancement  
Continuing to PIVOT

## MBRTB PRIORITIES

1. Restoring and Maintaining Resilient Landscapes
  - a. Disaster Recovery
  - b. Integrated Vegetation Program Accomplishments
  - c. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Legacy Roads and Trails Implementation
2. Providing Outstanding Recreation Opportunities
  - a. Field a recreation workforce that can respond to customer needs, mitigate hazards to employees and the public, and minimize impacts to resources as much as possible.
  - b. High leverage Recreation Program projects
  - c. Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) Projects
3. Internal Management Investments and Emphasis Items
  - a. Project Management
  - b. Facility Moves
  - c. Advanced Acquisition Planning, IAS requisitions, Grants and Agreements spending cutoffs
  - d. Regional Management of NFSE and Fleet and the move to a Regional Budget Organization



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## Timber Management

The MBRTB continues to work with Wyoming State Forestry Division to provide funding for the Forest Wide Vegetation Management and Restoration agreement adding approximately \$1.6 million dollars to fund foresters and projects. The first of two roadside hazard tree removal contracts within the Mullen Fire is offered for bids. Foresters also worked on the good Neighbor Authority (GNA) Fallen Pines timber sale which will be offered for bid in 2024. Focus remains to be on disaster recovery, fuels reduction, and vegetation management.

The MBRTB is working with the Colorado State Forest Service on GNA projects for fuels reduction and vegetation management, as well as the Steamboat Ski area expansion. Two GNA timber sales are planned for 2024.

The MBRTB worked with the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region to develop a Regional keystone participating agreement with Mule Deer Foundation (MDF). The MBTRB participated in the agreement by adding \$292,000 dollars for resource surveys and plan additional funding for more resource surveys in 2024. A stewardship agreement with MDF id planned for implementation of fuels reduction projects.

The MBRTB is working with National Forest Foundation to develop an agreement to provide project management coordination, resource surveys, foresters and other specialists to build capacity to implement more projects.

The MBRTB received \$3.4 million dollars to begin implementing projects within Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) to strengthen potential fuel breaks and provide materials to local milling facilities. The MBRTB expects additional funds this year to further PODs work.

The MBRTB completed the Taylor Draw Vegetation Management Project Categorical Exclusion (CE) authorizing 3000 acres of treatment and expects to sign the Walton Peak East Vegetation Management Project CE in 2024 and begin several new National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) projects.

The MBRTB offered and sold 42,073 ccf of timber sales and 5,080 ccf of fuelwood permits.

## Law Enforcement & Investigations

Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) issued there were 383 warning notices and filed 411 incident reports in FY2023. The most common incidents types were: Occupancy/Use, Over Snow Vehicles, Off-Highway vehicles, Forest Roads/Trails, and Fire. Forest Service LEOs work to educate visitors on day use fees, stay limits, and other regulations to increase compliance and reduce future incidents.

## Lands and Minerals

| <i>Coal Mines</i>                   | <b>MBNF</b> | <b>RNF</b> | <b>TBNG</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Active                              | 0           | 0          | 3           |
| Yearly Production<br>(million tons) | 0           | 0          | 144         |
| <i>Lands/Surveying</i>              | <b>MBNF</b> | <b>RNF</b> | <b>TBNG</b> |
| Exchange Cases Pending              | 3           | 0          | 1           |
| Purchases Pending                   | 0           | 0          | 0           |
| Acquisitions Complete               | 1           | 0          | 0           |
| <i>Non-Recreation Special Uses</i>  | <b>MBNF</b> | <b>RNF</b> | <b>TBNG</b> |
| Issued                              | 11          | 10         | 15          |
| Active                              | 222         | 323        | 233         |
| Pending                             | 50+         | 15         | 20+         |
| <i>Oil and Gas</i>                  | <b>MBNF</b> | <b>RNF</b> | <b>TBNG</b> |
| Applications for Permit             | 0           | 0          | 0           |
| Active Wells                        | 0           | 3          | 535         |



## Rangelands

### At a Glance

130 livestock grazing permits authorized  
68,493 Head months of cattle authorized  
393 Head months of horses authorized  
120,473 Head months of sheep authorized

### Projects

Virtual Fence projects engaged three permittees and collared 768 head of cattle. This project worked across one allotment on Thunder Basin National Grassland and five allotments on the Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District. Staff on the HPBE District led fieldtrips to share the work being done with permittees and community members.

Working with partners, aerial cheatgrass treatment was applied to 5,500 acres on Pole Mountain unit and 4,000 acres in the Mullen and Badger Creek wildfire areas.

Research continued with Agricultural Research Service and Geospatial Technology and Applications Center to use drones and satellite imagery for mapping prairie dog colonies on Thunder Basin National Grassland.



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## Recreation & Special Uses Statistics

- Recreation Sites
  - Campgrounds: 53 (MB – 29; Routt – 24)
  - Rental Cabins: 13 (MB-11; Routt-2)
  - Day Use Sites: 45 (MB-30; Routt – 14; TB-1)
  - Trailheads: 153 (MB-74; Routt-79)
  - Trails - 2351 (MB – 1013; Routt – 1338; TB – 0)
    - Includes winter trails, as well as motorized/non-motorized
  - Ski Areas: 2 (MB – 1; Routt – 1)
- Visitation Information
  - Annual Visits - 2,604,000
    - Medicine Bow/TB - 658,000
    - Routt - 1,946,000
  - Average Total Spending by Party
    - Medicine Bow - \$213
    - Routt - \$777
- Recreation Special Use Permits: 5 Resorts/Lodges; 11 Recreation Events; 122 Outfitters and Guides; 125 Recreation Residences
- Christmas Tree Permits Sold: 5343, Total Revenue \$51,881
  - 71 Every Kid Outdoors Permits given
- Recreation Partnerships: Colorado State Parks, Wyoming State Parks, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, Colorado Mountain Club, Wyoming Conservation Corps, National Forest Foundation, Yampatika, Common Outdoor Ground, Wyoming Pathways, Medicine Bow Nordic, Visit Laramie

### Project Highlights

***Pines Campground Redesign*** - Funded by GAOA, staff worked over the past year to modernize and increase capacity at this Northern Colorado campground. Renovations include improvements to tent pads and living areas, lengthening and widening spurs, as well as installing a new vault toilet and hand pump for water. Tent pads at most of the campsites now have a 20-foot by 20-foot tent pad and 21-foot by 21-foot living area and longer spurs that better suit modern recreational vehicles.

***Jack Creek Crew Quarters Rental*** - Brush Creek/Hayden Recreation Staff improved conditions by upgrading chairs, sofas, and outdoor furniture. A graveled patio and 60" fire pit were also installed. Furthermore, crews performed extensive clean-up of the surrounding grounds. Old Forest Service signs were recycled and used as artwork.

***Nash Fork Campground Redesign*** - During the summer of 2023, improvements were completed by staff partnership with Wyoming Conservation Corps Crews, as well as a Laramie District Work Day and forest-wide Recreation Cadre Work Week. Upgrades and additions include widened roads, tent pads, living spaces, and lantern posts. Sites were designed to include accessible amenities wherever possible.

***Fee Machine Installation*** - Fee kiosks were installed at Tie City and Fish Creek Falls trailheads, enabling visitors to pay Day Use Fees with credit cards. Fee machines enable the public to pay easily without planning ahead or needing proper change, while traditional methods of payment are still accepted.



## Partnerships

Working with organizations in our communities is vital to deliver our mission. The highlights below are examples of how partnerships helped us care for the land and serve people in new and creative ways in 2023.

### Rocky Mountain Youth Corps (RYMC)

In addition to several crew hitches, RMYC hired 7 fire and fuels and 16 recreation employees for the 2023 field season. These RMYC funded positions allowed employees to gain experience across multiple disciplines and obtain Public Land Corps Hiring Authority. This partnership helped us develop a workforce for the future while addressing immediate capacity needs on the ground. Three additional fire employees were funded for the 2023-2024 winter season.

### Centennial Visitor Center

The Laramie Ranger District worked with Visit Laramie and Common Outdoor Ground to fund visitor information positions at the Centennial Visitor Center. This outpost on the Snowy Range Scenic Byway had been closed to the public for several years, and reopening it allowed staff to make contact with thousands of visitors over the summer. The partnership has continued into the winter, providing for winter recreationists with easy access to information and Christmas tree permit purchases on weekends.

### Adding Color to Vault Toilets on Pole Mountain

Working with Laramie Public Art Coalition and Visit Laramie, the Laramie Ranger District facilitated installation of four murals in two vault toilets on Vedauwoo Road. At Nautilus Trailhead and Reynolds Hill, Artists Rhiannon Jakopak and Olivia Ewing created pieces that represent responsible recreation and Visit Laramie's [Cowboy Character Campaign](#).



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## Events and Outreach

Annual Landscape Vegetation Analysis Monitoring Trips  
Community Field Trips | Job Fairs | Public Presentations  
Conference Attendance | Farmers Markets Booths | Parades

## Volunteers

Accumulated Hours: 31,255  
Appraised Value: \$993.909

Volunteer Groups: Backcountry Horsemen, Common Outdoor Ground, Visit Laramie, Laramie Public Art Council, Southeast Wyoming OHV Alliance, Medicine Bow Rail Trail, Medicine Bow Nordic Association, University of Wyoming, Friends of Wilderness, Routt County Rider, Mountain Trails Axxess, Northwest Colorado Trails Corps, Laramie Enduro, Campground Hosts

### Highlight: Friends of Wilderness

Funded by the Yampa Valley Community Foundation, Friends of Wilderness hired a Routt National Forest Ranger for the 2023 season. Ranger Chris Powell completed eight weekend patrols, four in the Zirkel Wilderness and 4 in the Sarvis Creek and Flat Tops Wilderness Areas. Powell also conducted six day trips.

Working to educate recreationists, Chris targeted his efforts at known problem areas in the evenings. This approach allowed him to connect with visitors before issues occurred, rather than citing them the following morning. Using a friendly approach, he was able to prevent wilderness regulation violations in a way that was minimally disruptive to the recreationists' experience.

### *Routt National Forest Ranger Program at a Glance*

|                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 216 miles hiked         | 38 fire rings naturalized |
| 276 campsites evaluated | 37 water bars             |
| 305 hiker contacts      | 6 signs repaired          |
| 187 backpacker contacts | 16 warnings issued        |
| 91 trees cut            | 12 violations issued      |

## Safety

- Total Injuries/Illnesses/Motor Vehicle Accidents: 113
  - Personal Injuries: 56
  - Illnesses: 20
  - Motor Vehicle Accidents: 37
    - 10 chargeable (greater than \$1500 to repair damages)
    - Total Repair Costs: \$49,800
- Total OSHA Recordables: 7
- Total Lost Days: 3+
- Total Restricted Days: 125

## Historical and Cultural Resources

|   | MBRTB | NZ   | CZ   | SZ   |
|---|-------|------|------|------|
| Number of acres surveyed in house                         | 11652 | 2067 | 3470 | 6115 |
| Number of acres surveyed by contract                      | 16018 | 3625 | 9319 | 3074 |
| Number of projects with Section 106 clearance/concurrence | 123   | 31   | 51   | 41   |

### Public and Collaborative Events

- Talk with a Scientist Day at Soda Creek Elementary 5th Graders
- Paleocultural Research Group Windy Ridge Survey
- Farwell Ditch Survey and Research
- Wyoming State Fair
- Headquarters Archaeological Testing in collaboration with the Office of the State Archaeologist and University of Wyoming
- Mule Deer Shrub Planting Project completed with MDF
- Wyoming Archeology Awareness Month proclamation
- Collaborative efforts between MBNF Archeologists, Forest Contractors and WY State partners
- Collaboration with Forest partners including Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, Office of the Wyoming State Archeologist, University of Wyoming, Bureau of Land Management, and other archaeology agencies/companies at the 2023 September Archaeology Fair in Laramie

## Tribal Partners

In 2023, the MBRTB consulted with 25 federally recognized Tribes on multiple projects. A Tribal Relations Specialist was employed to focus on Tribal relations and improve opportunities to include Tribal partners in Federal decisions and actions. The Tribal Relations Specialist will identify methods to strengthen, support, and improve the agency's Tribal Relations Program and also assist the MBRTB staff to engage Tribal partners through consultation, coordination, and collaboration. The Tribal Relations Program is guided by the [USDA Forest Service Action Plan to strengthen Tribal consultation and Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#) published in 2023.





# ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## Air, Aquatics, Botany, Fisheries, Soils, Watershed and Wildlife

Soil and Water staff completed resource surveys for Vegetation Management and documentation for the Special Uses Programs. Specialists covered nine timber sales, eight fuels projects, three invasive species projects, and two wildlife projects. This included resource protection measures and recommendations for numerous areas with mass failure potential, steep and/or erosive slopes and over 365 streams and over 300 wetlands (including 50 groundwater dependent ecosystems).

Highlights for the Wildlife, Fisheries, and Botany Program include species monitoring efforts to support the Vegetation Management projects, habitat enhancement activities, and interpretation and education events. All Ranger Districts surveyed more than 30,000 acres for Forest Service sensitive species including raptors, bats, mountain plovers, sage grouse, burrowing owls, swift fox, boreal toads, sensitive plants, and northern goshawks. The MBRTB initiated contract surveys using the Master Agreement in concert with MDF to accomplish some of these acres. In addition, the Douglas Ranger District staff mapped 9,690 acres of active black-tailed prairie dog colonies on the Thunder Basin National Grassland.

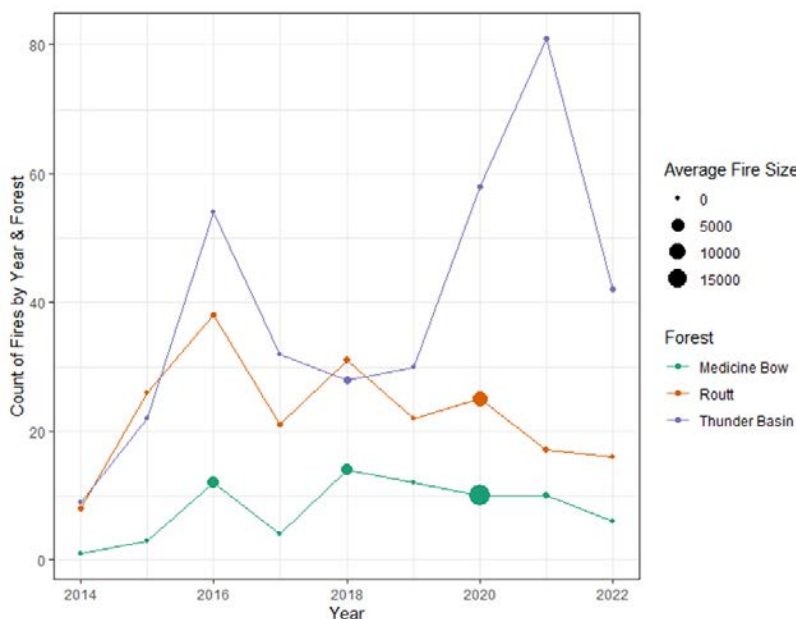
Botany surveyed 3,750 acres for rare plants and documented 85 rare plant "Element Occurrences." The most exciting find was *Erythranthe rubella* (little redstem monkeyflower), found on rock outcrops on the Laramie Peak unit. The plant is very rare in Wyoming and had not previously been known to grow in Albany County or on the Medicine Bow National Forest.

### National Keystone Agreement Highlight: Lost Dog Creek

Working collaboratively with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Trout Unlimited, the Lost Dog Creek Project on Routt National Forest was conducted to 1) eliminate upstream migration of undesirable non-native brook trout during all stages of stream flow thereby protecting native Colorado River cutthroat, and 2) address structural and safety concerns of the current infrastructure. This is one of the first projects completed under the 2022 Forest Service and Trout Unlimited National Keystone Agreement that uses Infrastructure Bill funds to support watershed restoration and resiliency.



## Fire and Fuels



### 2014- 2022 Averages (Depicted in Chart Above)

- Medicine Bow: 3972 acres / 7.2 fires per year
- Routt: 1162 acres / 20.4 fires per year
- Thunder Basin: 175 acres / 35.6 fires per year

### 2023 Fires Statistics

- Fire Season June 1 through October 31
- 83 unplanned fires on 1,867 acres of NFS Lands

### Treatment

- Mechanical - 8,301 acres
- RX fire - 834 acres
- Grazing/ Chemical - 10,215 acres
- Total treatments: 19,350 acres

### Additional Efforts

- Forest Prevention Program created and added Forest Prevention Officer to continue and improve education, partnerships and mitigation efforts.
- Fire/Fuels continued to contribute to Disaster Recovery work from the 2020 large fires on the unit and surrounding areas
- Valley and Headwaters Restoration Joint Chiefs work projects continued
- Increased capacity for hazardous fuels reduction with Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding
- A Facilitated Staff Ride was conducted for all of fire/fuels individuals and Forest Leadership for learning as an organization and continuing our relationships and training
- Storm Peak Wildland Fire Use Module obtained National Type 1 status
  - (1) Fuels Crew, (1) Type 3 Engine, (1) Type 4 Engine, (5) Type 6 Engines, (1) Type 1 WFM

# Vicinity Map for Medicine Bow - Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland

