



Ashley Karst National Recreation and Geologic Area

What is the Ashley Karst National Recreation and Geologic Area?

The Ashley Karst National Recreation and Geologic Area (NRGA) is an area within the Ashley National Forest that contains important geologic formations and karst features. The karst features capture surface water and transport it through a series of underground cave systems to springs in the valley below, where it is used for drinking water and irrigation.

The Ashley Karst NRGAs received special designation by Congress in March of 2019. The purposes of the designation are to, “*conserve and protect the watershed, geological, recreational, wildlife, scenic, natural, cultural, and historic resources*” that are located within the NRGAs.

The designation is part of the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (also known as the Dingell Act).

Where is it located?

The Ashley Karst NRGAs is northwest of Vernal, Utah, along the southern slopes of the Uinta Mountains. It is approximately 173,475 acres in size and within Uintah County. It begins at the western county line, extending east to roughly the divide of the Ashley Creek drainage, then follows the Taylor Mountain road to the southern boundary of the National Forest.

A portion of the NRGAs is also located within the original Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation Boundary.

“The purposes of the Recreation Area are to conserve and protect the watershed, geological, recreational, wildlife, scenic, natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Recreation Area.”

*... John D. Dingell, Jr.
Conservation,
Management, and
Recreation Act*



Photo of Ashley Gorge

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Ashley Karst

"Ashley Karst" is the nickname for a large, well-developed karst groundwater system within the Ashley Creek drainage.

The karst captures surface water from various branches of Ashley Creek and transports the water to Ashley Springs through underground cave systems.

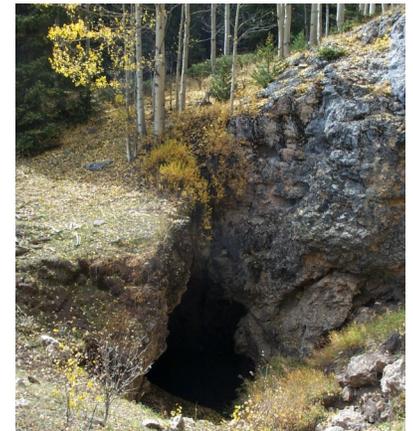
Water flowing in Ashley Creek on the Ashley Karst NRGAs

Why the Designation?

The importance of the Ashley as a headwater source for water in Uintah County led local and state leaders to petition Congress for a designation to protect the karst systems and their associated water supply.

As stated by local officials,

"Uintah County has taken several steps over the past few years to ensure that our water system is not compromised by unhealthy land-use practices. The county has engaged in water study projects, and even created a water protection zone entitled the Ashley Springs Protection Zone. Uintah County is served by a sensitive watershed on the south slopes of the Uintas, and this watershed must be protected. The NRGAs were designed to protect our precious headwaters and it encourages safe recreation practices in our beautiful forested mountains."



Active sinkhole on the surface of the Ashley Karst NRGAs.

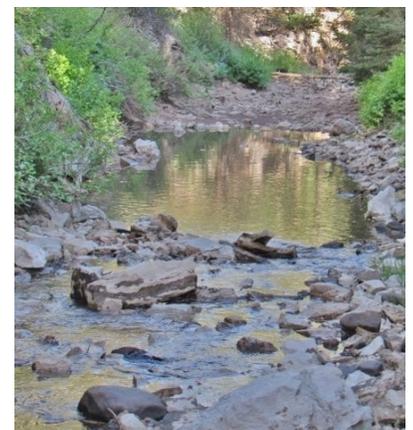


What actually is a karst?

In technical terms, karst is a distinctive type of surface topography which forms above soluble bedrock (limestone, dolomite, gypsum, salt). It is characterized (and created) by underground drainage systems, leading to disappearing streams, sinkholes, and caves.

Essentially, it is a special type of landscape that is formed by the dissolving of soluble underground rocks, which can create caves, underground river passageways, and aquifers. Karst regions are capable of providing large supplies of water.

- Underground (karst) drainage systems often capture surface streams.
- Surface karst features may be limited or hidden, where the dissolving bedrock and flow of groundwater are covered by thick soils, or confined between insoluble rock layers.



Water flowing in a stream that disappears underground as it sinks into the karst

Recreation on the Ashley Karst NRGAs

What recreation activities occur in the Ashley Karst NRGAs now?

- Dispersed Camping
- OHV Riding
- Horseback riding
- Snowmobiling
- Hiking
- Backpacking
- Fishing
- Mountain Biking
- Hunting
- Wildlife Viewing
- Cross country and Backcountry Skiing
- Developed Campgrounds
- Recreation Rental Facilities



Recreation and Geologic Areas

• What is a Recreation and Geologic Area?

It is a specially designated area by Congress for the purposes of what is written in the designation legislation.

• What are the purposes of the Ashley Karst NRGAs in the designation legislation?

Conservation and protection of the watershed, geological, recreational, wildlife, scenic, natural, cultural, and historic resources of the area.

• Are other uses allowed?

Yes, as long as the other uses in the area further the purposes for which the Recreation and Geologic Area was established.

• Will there be new fees?

No, only fees for improved campgrounds may be charged.

Additional Details of the Legislation

Land within the NRGAs will be subject to additional land-use regulations, however most existing practices on the land will continue to be allowed. The following is a summary of land-use practices specifically mentioned in the designation:

MOTORIZED VEHICLES AND ROADS: Motorized travel is allowed on roads and motorized routes designated in the NRGAs' management plan. However, no new roads will be created within the NRGAs. Maintenance of existing designated roads will be allowed. Roads may be rerouted in order to protect public safety or resource protection.

WINTER RECREATION: A winter recreation use plan will be created. Use of over snow vehicles may continue.

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE: Authorized users may continue to access, operate, and maintain water infrastructure and facilities.

GRAZING: Grazing areas that were established prior to the designation will be allowed to continue.

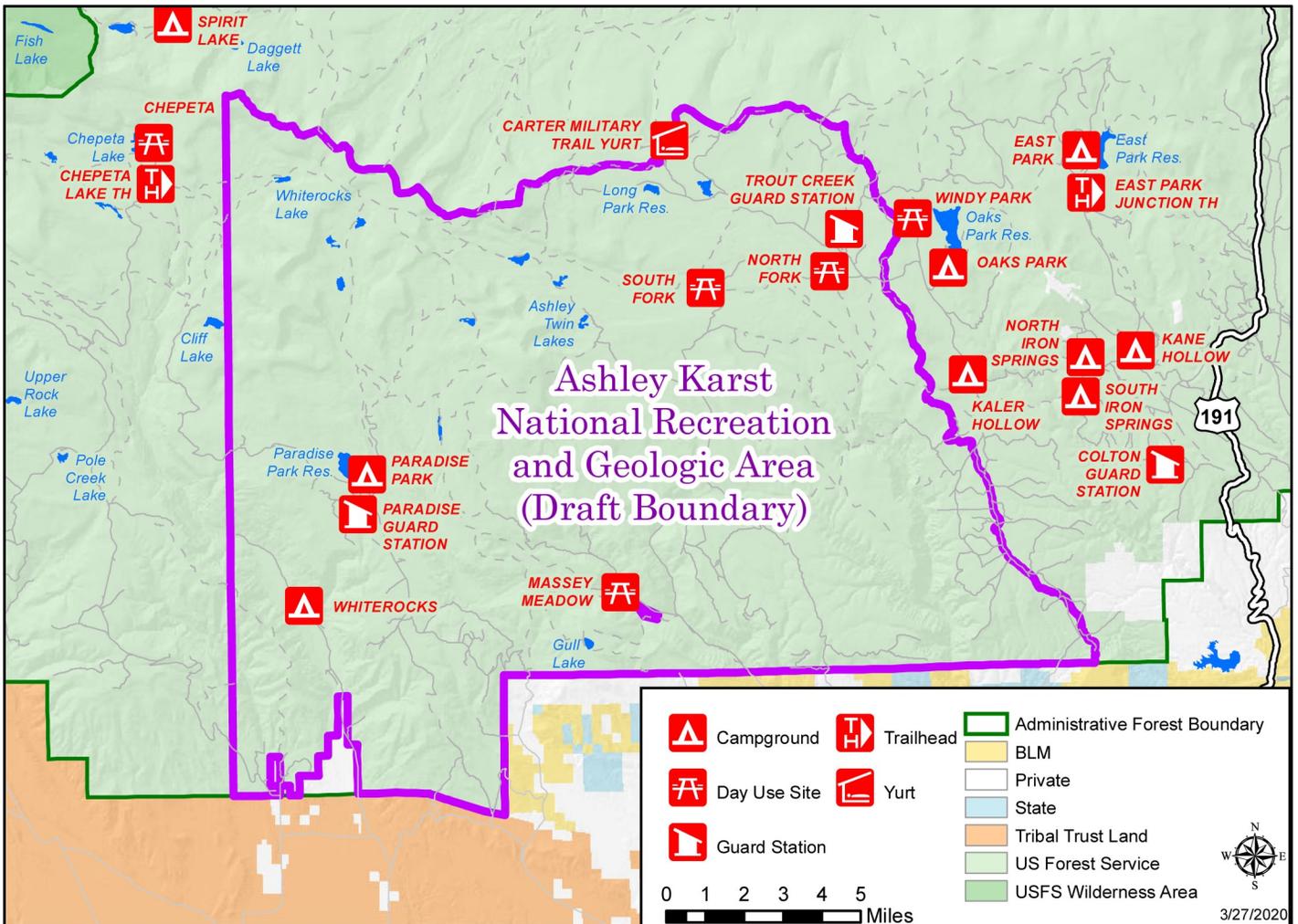
FISH AND WILDLIFE: Designation will not affect the jurisdiction of the State in wildlife management.

MINING: The NRGAs will not allow for mineral leasing, mining, or geothermal leasing.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND WILDLAND FIRE: Vegetation management practices, including fuels reduction practices, will be allowed to continue in order to improve water quality and reduce the risk of wildfire. The NRGAs will allow for wildland fire treatment and restoration.

NON-FEDERAL LAND AND ACCESS: Non-federal land will not be affected by the NRGAs designation, and access to non-federal land will be allowed to continue.

OUTFITTING AND GUIDE ACTIVITIES: Outfitting and guide services will be allowed to continue.



Ashley Karst Management Plan

The Ashley National Forest will soon begin the process of developing a management plan for the Ashley Karst NRG. The management plan is required by the designating legislation, and it will provide management direction to help shape the future of the NRG.

The Forest Service will complete the plan in consultation with Uintah County, affected Indian Tribes, and through public input and participation.

Get Involved

There will be future opportunities for public comment as this management planning process proceeds.

For more information, including a downloadable map, please see our project webpage at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57865>

or visit the Ashley National Forest website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/ashley>

Contact Us

Ashley National Forest
355 North Vernal Avenue
Vernal, UT 84078

435-789-1181

Email:

FS-comments-intermtn-ashley@usda.gov

Please include "Ashley Karst NRG" in subject line of email.