



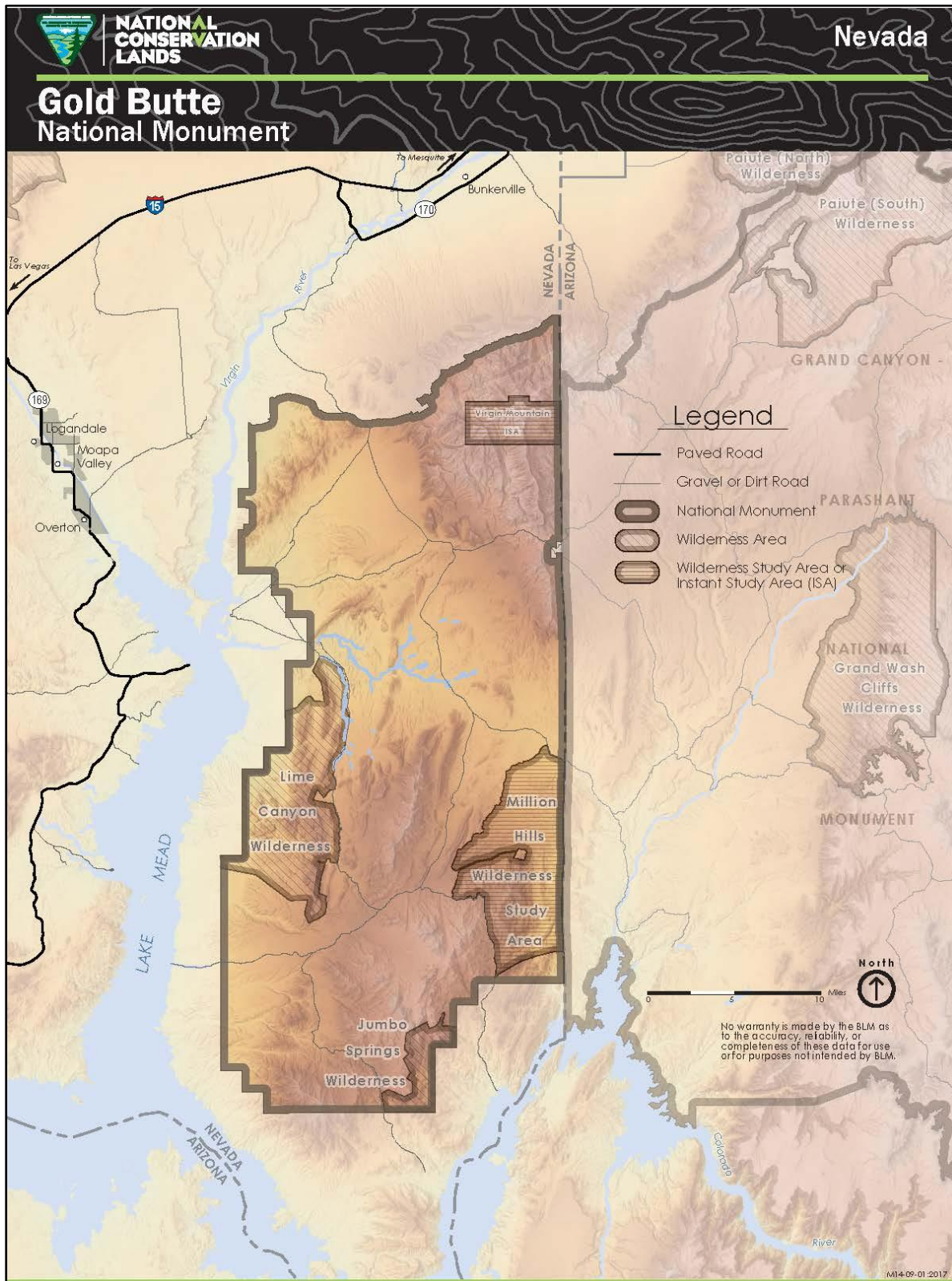
# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Nevada  
2021: Annual Manager's Report

## Gold Butte National Monument



# Map



# Accomplishments

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The Gold Butte National Monument had many accomplishments this year. Significant accomplishments include the installation of a new Monument portal sign at Cabin Canyon/White Rock, a popular higher elevation destination for local residents during hunting season and summer heatwaves; a National Public Lands Day clean-up event at White Rock with partner group Friends of Gold Butte; habitat improvement projects at multiple springs for relict Leopard Frog populations; installation of additional directional signage in remote areas of the Monument; and design and installation of updated map and informational material at Whitney Pocket kiosk.

In the spring of 2021 Monument staff, in collaboration with Clark County Department of Public Works and with the assistance of volunteers from Friends of Gold Butte and Recreation Technicians from The Great Basin Institute, laid down over 200 tons of “cold-mix” road patching material. This annual pot-hole repair project covers approximately 20 miles of the paved portion of the Gold Butte Back Country Byway, the main route into the Monument, and helps to retain access for vehicles with lower clearance or vehicles with trailers.

# Challenges

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Following the implementation of Travel and Transportation Management decisions in 2008, many roads leading into sensitive cultural sites and natural resources that were closed were treated with restoration actions. However, many of these closed and treated routes continue to be disturbed and multiple new incursions created. Full restoration of disturbed sites in the Mojave Desert may take several hundred years without treatment and up to several decades with successful treatment. Sparse vegetation, high rates of OHV use, and a lack of education are major factors in perpetuating this issue. BLM staff, with volunteers from organizations like Friends of Gold Butte and Friends of Nevada Wilderness, cooperate to identify and treat resource damage as it occurs, minimize the potential of continued use, and reduce further impacts to sensitive plant and animal species.

Throughout the Monument, an increase in noxious and invasive weeds, particularly red-brome and cheatgrass, has been documented. These weeds increase fuel loads and the potential for large, hot wildfires. A large portion of the Monument is designated critical habitat for the federally protected desert tortoise; large fires may lead to significant declines in population numbers for the species and further slow its recovery. BLM

proposes to increase educational outreach to the public and strengthen enforcement fire restrictions during fire seasons.



With the increase in visitation, there has been an expansion of existing dispersed campsites, creation of new campsites, and an increase in human waste contamination. Camping in the Monument is primitive with no amenities or developed sites. A Monument Implementation Plan, currently in development, will help provide management direction for recreational uses at high visitation sites like Whitney Pocket. Currently, actions within the Monument are guided by the Las Vegas Resource Management Plan (1998) and the Monument's Proclamation.

## Visitors

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Visitation to the Monument in Fiscal Year 21 was estimated at 114,458 visits, based on vehicle use data collected at dispersed sites. Most visitors enter the Monument along the Gold Butte Back Country Byway, staging or camping at Whitney Pocket, the end of the

paved portion of the Byway. From this location, visitors may access other undeveloped sites, continue to sightsee along the Byway, enter the adjacent Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument, or drive to nearby non-motorized trailheads. Whitney Pocket is the most popular destination within the Monument, with less than half of the visitors at this location venturing further south to the more remote areas of the Monument.



The Gold Butte National Monument is a popular destination for off-road enthusiasts, particularly side-by-sides and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). Other popular recreational activities include camping, hiking, and sightseeing. Increasingly more common, are uses such as equestrian and mountain bike riding. Hunting, during big game season, is common at higher elevations, particularly in the north slope of the Virgin Mountains. Small game hunting is common at lower elevations near springs and game guzzlers.

There has been a year-over-year increase in visitation to the Monument since its designation in 2016, with significant increases in Fiscal Year 21, keeping with national trends in outdoor recreation during the COVID-19 pandemic.



# Partnerships

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Several organizations provide assistance and volunteer hours towards activities within or supporting the Monument. Below are two examples of our partnership activities.

## **Friends of Gold Butte (FOGB)**

The mission of FOGB is “to promote the responsible enjoyment of the Gold Butte National Monument through education, stewardship, advocacy, and preservation of natural and cultural resources.”

The BLM maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the FOGB in a cooperative effort to protect, monitor, and sustain the natural and cultural resources; increase public awareness; increase educational and interpretive resources; enhance and restore areas that have experienced human-caused or natural adverse effects; and enhance the quality of recreational opportunities in GBNM while protecting the landscape.

## **Friends of Nevada Wilderness**

The mission of Friends of Nevada Wilderness (FONW) is “preserving all qualified Nevada public lands as wilderness, protecting all present and potential wilderness from ongoing threats, educating the public about the values of and need for wilderness, and improving the management and restoration of wild lands.”

The BLM entered an MOU with FONW in order to formalize both party’s desire to cooperate on programs and projects that protect, monitor, and improve the wilderness character of designated wilderness areas and adjacent lands; promote volunteerism; increase public awareness of the value and importance of wilderness; enhance and restore areas experiencing human-caused or natural adverse effects; and enhance the quality of recreational opportunities and access to public lands.

Other informal partnerships that provide support to the Monument include Wilderness Volunteers, Great Basin Institute, Northern Arizona University, and Kokopelli ATV Club.

# Science

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United States Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS), Bee Research Laboratory, surveyed for and documented Mojave Poppy Bee populations in the

Monument. The bee is an obligate pollinator of the Las Vegas Bearpoppy, a BLM listed special-status species. Both the plant and the bee have been petitioned for federal Endangered Species Act listing. The bee is extremely difficult to find as it is tiny and solitary. The goal of the project is to document the presence of this species throughout the monument ahead of the Species Status Assessment and to proactively protect habitat. USDA-ARS is also surveying for other sensitive bee species and may expand the study to better understand mutualisms between the plant and the bee (pending funding). Rocky Mountain Research Institute also conducted aerial drone flights to survey and document the location of individual plants, plant populations, and potential habitat of Las Vegas Bearpoppy. One of the goals of this research is to improve species modeling and assess the health of its habitat.

Additionally, USDA-ARS conducted research to study the impacts of weed treatments in unburned areas. Researcher's goals are to determine if there is competitive increase of native species after weed treatments, the longevity of herbicide treatments, and differing impacts from scale of treatment.

Nevada Department of Wildlife conducted multiple annual surveys for occurrences of amphibians, reptiles, and raptors along pre-identified routes in the Monument. The data collected is integrated into their statewide databases and provides information as to the health of certain species throughout their respective ranges within the state.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, continued conducting seasonal nocturnal point count surveys for relict Leopard Frog at multiple springs within the Monument. The surveys assess habitat conditions and monitor tadpole, juvenile, and adult frog populations at release sites. Populations at some sites persist with evidence of active recruitment while other sites exhibit population declines. Additionally, BLM and University staff conduct habitat improvement projects, monitor species populations, clear ponds and streams, and repair protective fences and barriers.

## Climate Impacts

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The Gold Butte National Monument's landscape increasingly shows impacts of elevated annual temperatures, including vegetation changes, conditions conducive to more frequent wildfires, longer intervals between precipitation, and shifting wildlife ranges. In southern Nevada, the frequency and severity of "heat-waves" and the average temperatures have continued to increase and are projected to continue their upward trend.



# Climate Resiliency

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Site type development and large-scale utility projects are prohibited within the Monument. BLM will focus on maintaining or improving the current condition of the objects and values for which the Monument was designated. In most instances this will require closely monitoring those objects and values as well as ensuring that anthropomorphic impacts are documented and addressed as soon as possible.

In response to anthropomorphic impacts, several small-scale habitat restoration projects were completed throughout the Monument. BLM has developed a disturbance reporting program that provides volunteers and staff with tools to report instances of resource damage. Once reported, staff can coordinate treatments of sites to restrict further damage and allow for rehabilitation. By maintaining vegetation and soil conditions, the landscape is less susceptible to additional impacts from climate change.

Plans to install facilities, such as restrooms or shade structures, will consider all reasonable protocols to reduce emissions during all phases of construction and installation, as well as during maintenance activities. Other considerations during planning will include minimizing impacts to soils, vegetation, water resources, and dust abatement.

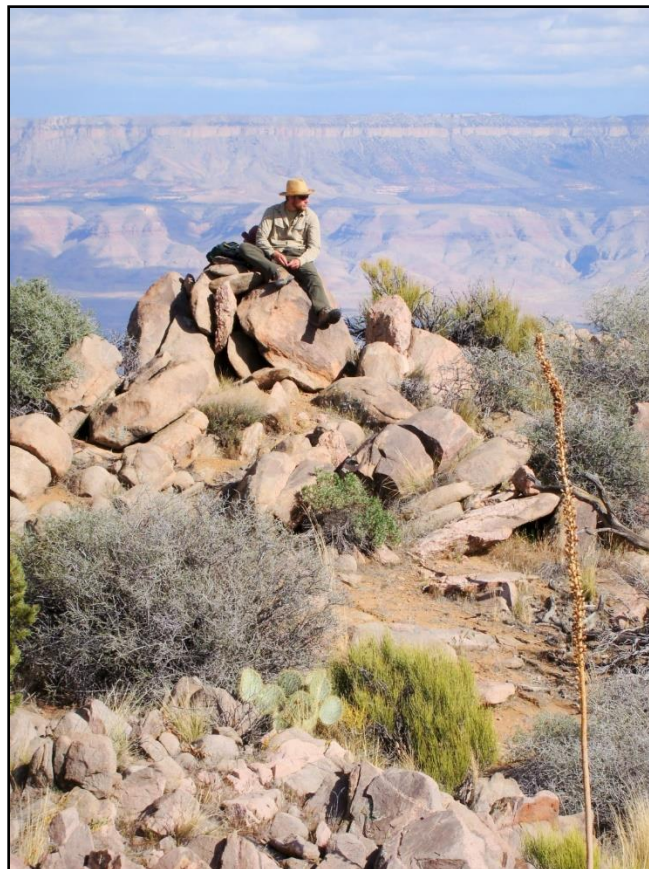
# Social and Environmental Justice

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Visitation to the Monument continues to be free of charge. While most of the Monument is only accessible by OHV, BLM continues to collaborate with Clark County Department of Public Works to repair potholes along the Gold Butte Back Country Byway. Access along the paved portion of the byway can be challenging for smaller vehicles in many sections. However, annual pothole repair ensures that smaller, less capable vehicles can retain access into the Monument.

Friends of Gold Butte regularly hosts hikes into well-known sites. These hikes are hosted by FOGB volunteers and are of no charge to participants. These no-cost guided hikes provide the public a unique opportunity to experience the Monument's resources.

Tribal input is solicited whenever any significant projects are proposed within the Monument. Input from affected Tribes is an important part of planning that allows for the considerate and careful execution of projects in this culturally significant area.



# Events

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Due to an underlying designation as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), the Las Vegas Resource Management Plan (1998) limits the number and type of events that are allowed in the Monument. These restrictions help ensure that permitted activities are compatible with the relevant and important values for which the ACEC was designated. In FY21, BLM did not issue any permits for events in the Gold Butte National Monument.

FOGB regularly hosts hikes inside the Monument. These free-of-charge, guided hikes generally occur during the cooler months, providing the public with an opportunity to experience the Monument in a unique way.

As annual tradition, BLM hosts a National Public Lands Day event in the fall of each year. For Fiscal Year 21, volunteers installed signs and conducted a clean-up at Cabin Canyon/White Rock. A similar event is planned for Fiscal Year 22, with the host site not yet determined.



# Words from the staff

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The staff at the Gold Butte National Monument is dedicated to caring for and protecting not only the resources that are outlined in the Monument's Proclamation document but also the less tangible, but equally as important, sentimental values that the public has placed on this lone stretch of desert. Like many of the visitors that venture into the Monument, we are equally in awe at its vastness, beauty, and diversity. We are encouraged by the increase in visitation from local communities and the touring public; embracing this opportunity to provide an exceptional user experience guided by the communities we serve. From the snowy peak of Virgin Mountain to the bone-dry bottom of Devil's Throat, we are honored to be your public servants at the Gold Butte National Monument.





# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

## **Gold Butte National Monument**

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Phone: 702-515-5000

**Website:**

<https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/nevada/gold-butte>

**Flicker:**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/blmnevada/albums/72157679319061155>

### **Report compiled by:**

**Jimmy Linares, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

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