



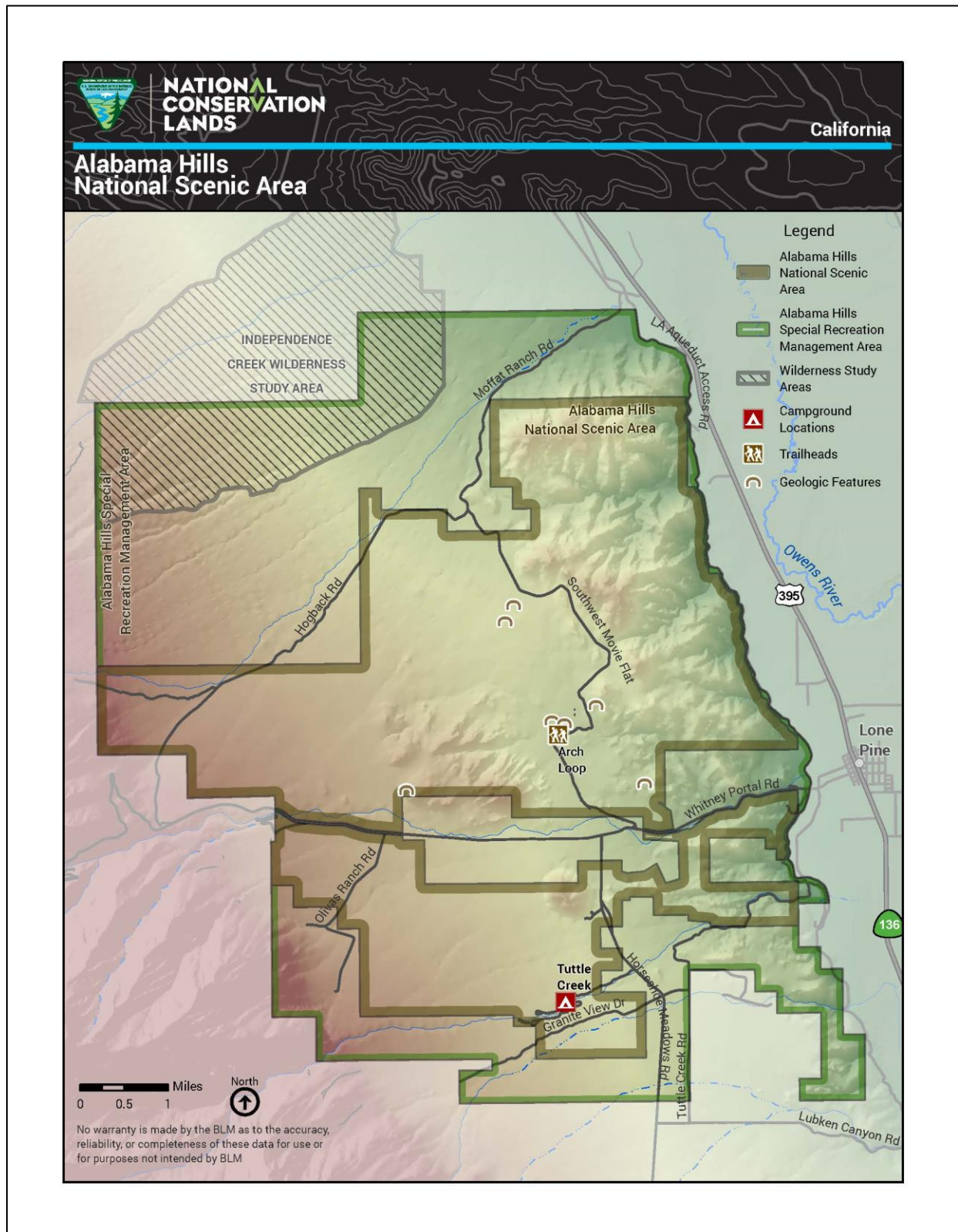
NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

California
2021: Annual Manager's Report

Alabama Hills National Scenic Area



Map



Accomplishments

In January of 2021, we completed the Alabama Hills Management Plan. This comprehensive plan was completed with substantial public input. The actions in the Management Plan are designed to provide diverse, high-quality recreational opportunities, minimize user conflicts, address human health and safety concerns, reduce recreational impacts, and enhance other resources, values, and uses in the planning area. The plan includes a strong adaptive management component and employs an implementation strategy that allows for monitoring results and adjusting accordingly based on desired outcomes.

Implementation of the dispersed camping changes in the plan began in the spring of 2021. The first big push was to designate areas as “day use only” where there were high visitor conflict or impacts to resources. In these new “day use only” areas, fire rings in dispersed campsites were removed and the sites were either restored or delineated as parking. By the end of September, over 125 fire rings had been removed, resulting in at least 5 tons of ash and trash being removed from the National Scenic Area (NSA). This work was completed with significant work from volunteers from local and national nonprofits and private companies. Public response has been positive to these changes.



Challenges

The primary challenge for the National Scenic Area was the huge bump in visitation paired with the pandemic. We struggled to provide information to the public due to COVID-19 related safety measures. Visitor centers in the area were closed or minimally staffed, as was the BLM office. Staff patrolled the NSA but were limiting public contact to the greatest extent possible to minimize risk. Additionally, staff was limited due to difficulties hiring staff, largely related to the high cost of living in the area and minimal available housing. This mix of high visitation and low staffing resulted in some increase in resource damage.

The other challenge faced by BLM staff working with the NSA was putting the actions in the Management Plan into practice. Taking the many actions and breaking them down into manageable pieces, finding people to help do the work and messaging about the changes was slow. This slow, phased approach was intentional, allowing us to adapt and develop targeted messaging. There was a lot of trial and error for many of the steps needed to make the changes and communicate the changes to visitors. For example, staff had to experiment with sign size and placement to create signs that were effective yet understated and consistent with National Conservation Lands signage standards. Most visitors expressed a positive response to the changes, but it will take time to finish plan implementation and for visitors to adapt



Visitors

The Alabama Hills is one of many popular attractions that draws outdoor recreational users to Inyo County. The Alabama Hills is a destination for overnight or day use and a stopover on the way to hiking, camping or other outdoor activity in Inyo and Mono Counties. Recreational opportunities in the Alabama Hills include but are not limited to hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, sightseeing, photography, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, and motor touring.

Despite COVID-19 travel limitations, visitation increased in 2021 to the highest level on record. In April 2021, the main vehicle counter logged just over 14,000 vehicles. The previous visitation record was October of 2019, with approximately 7500 vehicles. Visitor use can be derived from the vehicle counter numbers by assuming approximately 2.5 people per vehicle. This results in at least 30,000 visitors in April of 2021 alone. While general visitation was up, there were very few special recreation permits due to county and state covid group limitations.



Partnerships

Partners were essential to the accomplishments in the Alabama Hills in 2021. The agreement with Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association (ESIA) was instrumental in providing information to the public and hosting volunteer events. ESIA hired an Alabama Hills Steward who patrolled the Alabama Hills, helped develop and disseminate messaging and led volunteers in work projects. The Alabama Hills Stewardship Group continued to support the BLM with their long-standing partnership. Friends of the Inyo, Inyo County and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power also provided on the ground support for projects.

Another highlight was an increased partnership with Tread Lightly. Tread Lightly brought Milestar Tires, Stinger Off-Road, and Project Heal the Land for a two-day event with the BLM and local partners to help transition dispersed campsites into “day use only” areas to reduce impacts to the natural and cultural resources in the area. They removed at least 50 fire rings and the ash and trash associated with them.



Science

This year, the BLM completed Assessment, Monitoring and Inventory (AIM) vegetation plots to assess the baseline condition of the vegetation prior to fuels reduction treatments planned for next year. Lotic AIM plots, that focus on water quality and stream condition, were also completed to better understand the limited riparian areas in the NSA.

In addition, a visual resource inventory was completed by a group of contractors and an interdisciplinary team of BLM staff. This inventory will provide a data point to assess change over time in visual resources.



Climate Impacts

Current models of climate change show potential changes such as increasing temperatures, changes in precipitation amounts, increased frequency and severity of wildfires and more frequent extreme weather events. The Alabama Hills is not immune to these threats. In 2021, a small wildfire occurred in the Alabama Hills, primarily outside of the NSA. Drought continues to lead to impacts to vegetation and to the very limited riparian reaches in the Hills.



Climate Resiliency

There are objectives and corresponding actions in the new management plan that will promote increased climate resiliency. These objectives include but are not limited to:

- Apply a full suite of restoration and revegetation techniques to promote the establishment and growth of native vegetation in previously and newly disturbed areas, including but not limited to riparian and wetland habitat, BLM sensitive plant habitat, and areas impacted by wildfire.
- Manage pinyon-juniper woodlands, shrubland, riparian and wetland vegetation types to promote healthy resilient ecosystems, increase productivity, and reduce the risk of loss to disturbances such as drought, insects, disease, and wildfire.

There are numerous actions described in the plan that will implement these objectives, including fuels reduction treatments, restoration with native plants, recreation use management strategies, and increased monitoring of natural resources to detect change over time.

In addition to the Management Plan, every year, BLM staff, partners and volunteers restore many locations in the Alabama Hills with native seed, native plants and vertical mulch. These restorations occur where visitors have driven off existing roads into the shrubs, damaging these fragile areas. The native shrubs are sometimes over 100 years old, so we remind visitors “don’t crush the brush” with a sticker when we do public contacts.



Social and Environmental Justice

The Management Plan provides many actions to support social and environmental justice. Two examples are:

- Develop at least one rock climbing area to conform with standards in the Americans with Disability Act.
- Develop interpretive and educational material for non-English speakers.

Additionally, we continued to work on increasing education both locally and virtually, providing opportunities to learn about the Alabama Hills to the diversity of users of public lands. Our partners at Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, developed a nature guide for the Alabama Hills through an assistance agreement with the BLM. They also developed social media content and updated their website (graphic below is developed by ESIA) to provide information, including [videos](#), about the Alabama Hills and responsible recreation to a wide audience



Events

There were very few events this year due to COVID-19 contact restrictions. The BLM hosted only small volunteer events as described in the partnership section. The largest event BLM hosted was a National Public Lands Day event in September. Many partners and volunteers helped remove fire rings, restore areas where there had been off road driving, and pick up trash. The Alabama Hills is usually a very popular location for events, weddings and filming, however, only a small number of these happened in 2021. One popular event that did occur was Concert in the Rocks. This is a yearly live music event that supports the Museum of Western Film History, a nonprofit dedicated to telling the film history of the Alabama Hills.





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Alabama Hills

National Scenic Area

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