



# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

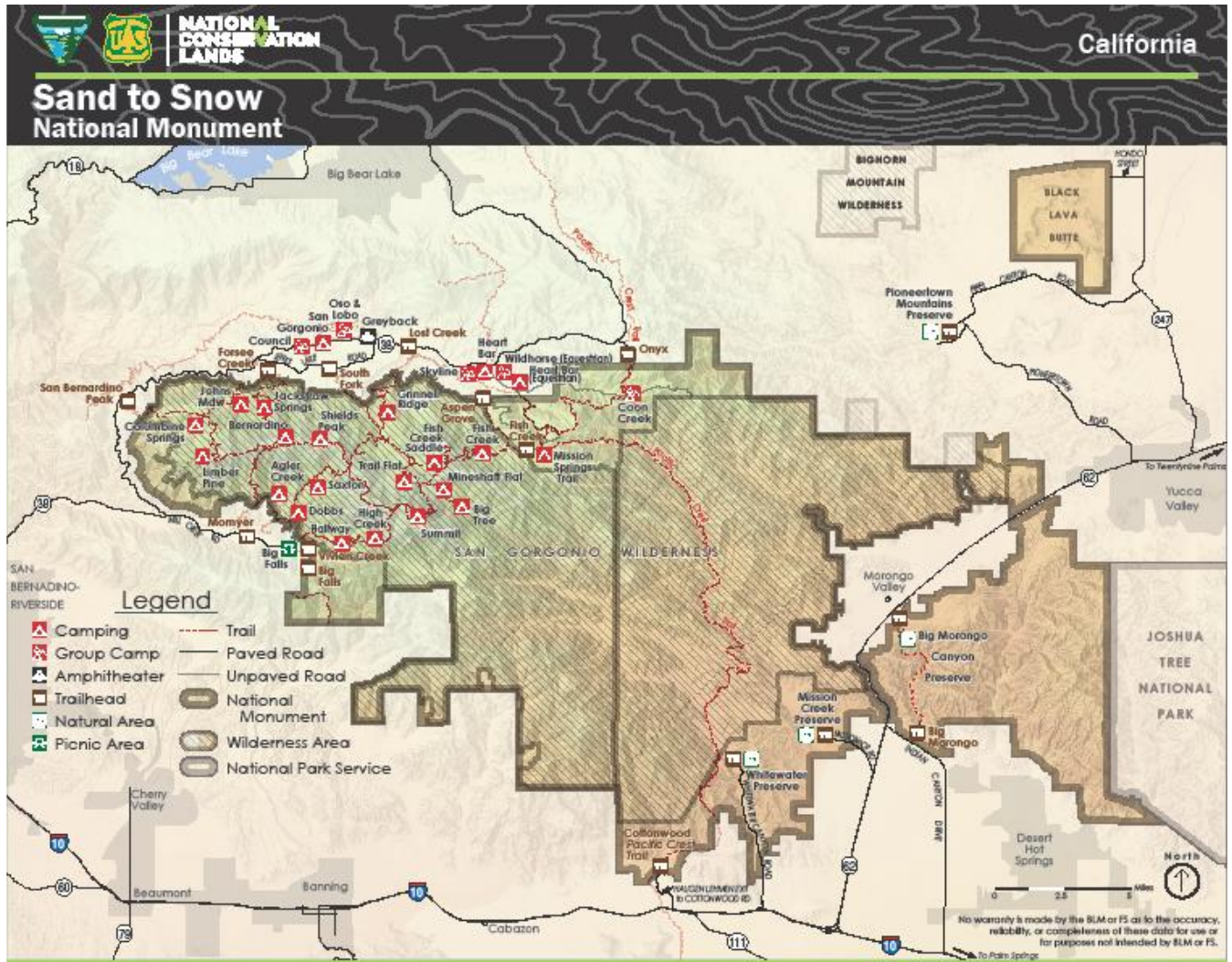
California  
2021: Annual Manager's Report

## Sand to Snow National Monument





# Map





# Accomplishments

---

The Sand to Snow National Monument (Monument) had many accomplishments this year despite the continued disruptions of Covid-19 and forest closures. The fifth anniversary of the Monument was recognized through various activities, a new walking trail was opened to the public, and dozens of miles of trails were maintained. Pre-planning began for Whitewater River Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan and the Monument. BLM promoted Agents of Discovery, a 3D augmented reality game, which was a big hit with children and educators! Visitation to the Monument was estimated at 175,000 visitors, and neighboring partner-managed lands that serve as gateways to the Monument reported approximately 275,000 visitors. Annual visitors to the US Forest Service (USFS)- managed side of the Monument numbered 76,000. Development of an online permit system for the San Geronio Wilderness, by the USFS, helped manage and track visitor numbers.



# Challenges

---

Due to extreme fire weather conditions, USFS Region 5 implemented a Regionwide Forest Closure Order between August 31, 2021, and September 14, 2021. Southern California Forests then implemented an additional closure from September 15, 2021, to September 22, 2021. All of the San Bernardino National Forest (BDF) was closed to public entry, including those areas of the Monument managed by the BDF. This resulted in a noticeable increase in visitation to BLM and partner-managed lands. Fire closures on the USFS-managed Monument due to 2020 wildfires remained in place all of 2021. As we move forward, such closures may become the norm.





# Visitors

---

Sand to Snow NM visitation increased slightly in 2021 with an estimated 175,000 visits. Most visitors participate in hiking various trails though others enjoy picnicking, horseback riding, nature study, and camping in dispersed/primitive campsites. Hunting in fall is moderately popular during archery and rifle seasons. The highest use occurs in the summer months on the USFS-managed lands; and in the fall, winter, and spring on those lands managed by BLM.

The Sand to Snow NM is a very popular destination for hiking along the world-famous Pacific Crest Trail with visitors enjoying short hikes or longer, day-long treks.



# Partnerships

---

The Long Canyon Trail, in Desert Hot Springs, CA opened to the public in FY 2021. The 9.5-mile trail begins in Desert Hot Springs, meanders through a wash into the Monument and ends in Joshua Tree National Park The trail was a concept of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, Friends of the Desert Mountains, and Coachella Valley Conservation Commission.

The Sand to Snow NM continued to work with existing partners such as The Wildlands Conservancy and Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve to develop and conduct environmental education, messaging, and various stewardship activities. Boys and Girl Scouts of America developed a new Desert National Monuments patch youth that can be earned after participation in an environmental activity at Wildlands Conservancy or Big Morongo Canyon Preserve.





# Science

---

Alexandra Gresham is a graduate student working on her master's degree at California State Polytechnic University Pomona. Her thesis study is investigating lead toxicity and its effects in California turkey vultures. Ms. Gresham is on year two of trapping and sampling vultures captured on the Sand to Snow NM's Big Morongo Canyon Preserve unit.

California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDF&W) began a three-year study to determine the mountain lion population within the San Geronio Wilderness. An annual census of big horn sheep populations, also headed by CDF&W, continues within the Monument.

Monitoring of desert tortoise is ongoing on BLM and partner-managed lands within and adjacent to the Monument.

Citizen science monitoring occurs weekly at the Big Morongo Canyon Unit where volunteers take water level readings and bird surveys.





# Climate Impacts

---

Over half the Sand to Snow NM landscape lies within the Mojave Desert and climate impacts to desert plants and animals are becoming more evident and widespread. Elevated temperatures and less precipitation, particularly the higher elevation snowpack, have resulted in less surface water at lower elevations, stressed plants, and decreased populations of wildlife such as desert tortoise and federally listed plants including Triple ribbed and Coachella valley milkvetch.





# Climate Resiliency

---

The majority of water for municipalities within and adjacent to the Sand to Snow NM come from the local watershed. Water users typically utilize domestic wells, many of which are upstream from units open to public visitation. Volunteers at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve have been taking weekly staff gauge readings in areas of standing water. Four years of data collection has indicated that the amount of time water is found on the surface is getting shorter. This has led to discussions about the need for groundwater testing wells in the Morongo Valley area to better understand the groundwater system and to monitor ground water levels.



# Social and Environmental Justice

---

BLM teamed up with land managing partner groups Mojave Desert Land Trust, The Wildlands Conservancy, and Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, and Hispanic Access Foundation, to host the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Latino Conservation Week. The main goal of this week is to inform policymakers, the media, and the general English and Spanish-speaking public of the Latino community's views on local and national conservation issues and to encourage the Latino community to enjoy public lands. Activities included water play, environmental education, and guided nature walks. Future Latino Conservation Week promotion will include USFS managed lands.





# Events

---

As the infection rates from Covid-19 dropped, annual events that usually took place prior to the pandemic began to resume, though outdoors and on a more limited basis. Events on the Sand to Snow National Monument included its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary in February. The week-long celebration drew both new and returning visitors. Families participated in environmental activities, nature hikes, and listened to the Bird Singers from the nearby Cahuilla Tribe. Activities took place at the Whitewater and Big Morongo Canyon units of the Monument.

On USFS managed lands, an event of note was the return of the Forest Festival in August 2021. Visitors were thrilled to participate in activities, view presentations, learn about early camping history, obtain camping and hiking permits into the San Geronio Wilderness, and learn about the first people of the area. Events drew an estimated 275 visitors.



# Words from the staff

---

Sand to Snow has many hiking and backpacking opportunities from the desert floor to the highest peak in Southern California and we welcome everyone to come visit and explore the Monument and its trails!







**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

## **Sand to Snow National Monument**

California Desert District Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
Palm Springs South Coast and Barstow Field Offices  
1201 Bird Center Drive and 2601 Barstow Road  
Palm Springs, CA 92262 and Barstow, CA 92311  
Phone: 760-833-7100 and 760-252-6000

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/blmcalifornia/albums/72157647014279350/page2>

**Report compiled by:** Jihadda M. Govan, Monument Manager

The mention of company names, trade names, or commercial products does not constitute endorsement or recommendation for use by the federal government.