



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

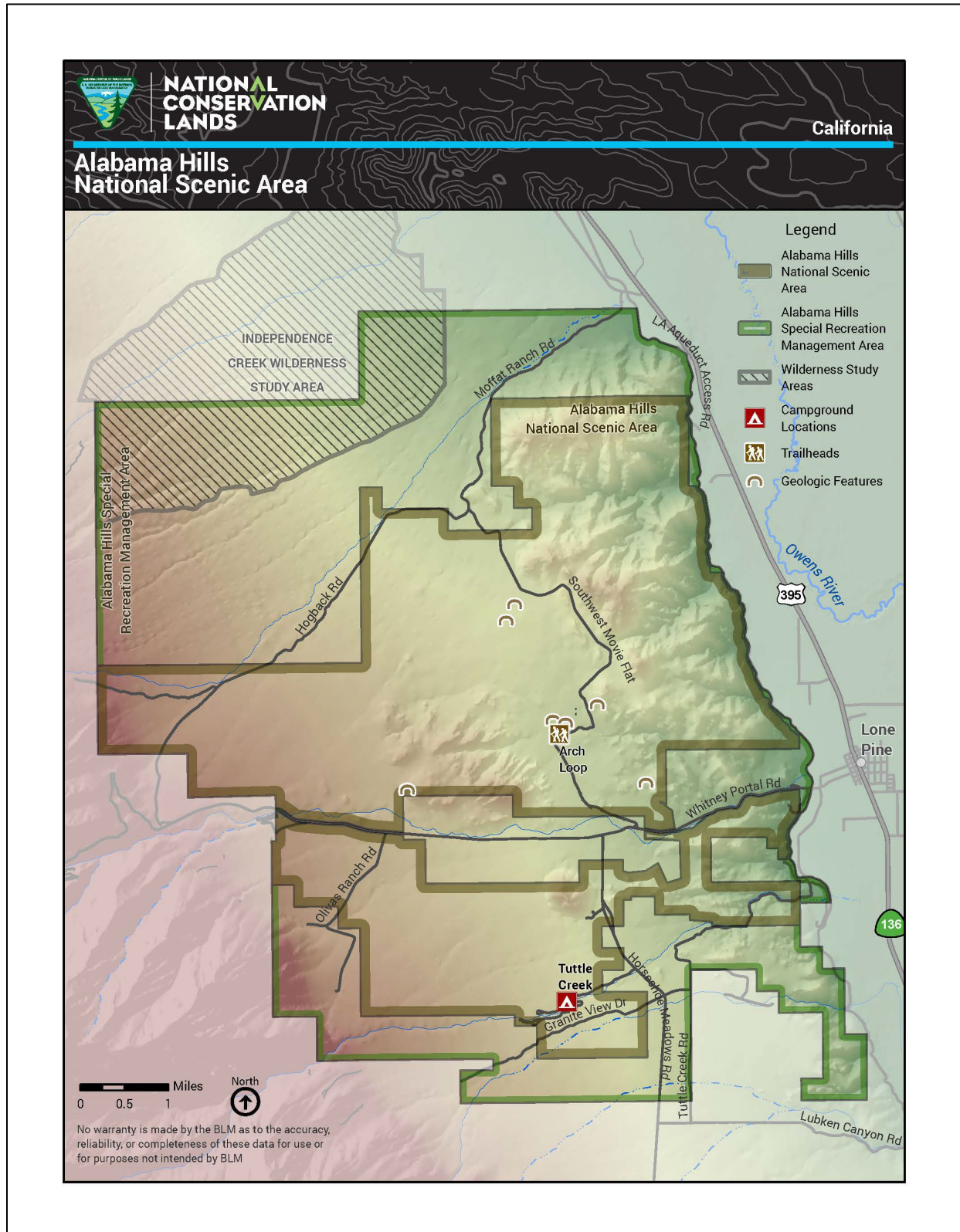
California
2022: Annual Manager's Report

Alabama Hills

National Scenic Area



Map



Accomplishments

The major accomplishment in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 was making significant headway on implementation of dispersed camping management actions from the Alabama Hills Management Plan (Plan). The camping actions were designed to preserve the National Scenic Area's (NSA) amazing views, many of which are memorialized in the over 400 movies and countless commercials that have been filmed in the NSA. Additionally, these camping changes resolve conflicts between users, reduce impacts to natural resources, and maintain the great views for which the Alabama Hills are known. Of the at least 126 user created dispersed campsites inventoried, approximately 50 were planned to be designated as campsites. The following is the timeline for camping implementation, all completed with partners and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff:

- **October 2021:** The west side of Movie Flat Road became day use only. Approximately 25 user created dispersed sites were restored, plus fire rings and trash were removed. Signs were installed indicating "Day Use Only".
- **March 2022:** Another approximately 25 user created sites were restored outside of the Movie Road area. User created sites that met the criteria for designation as a campsite were signed. Each site has a single fire ring.
- **September 2022:** All remaining user created sites that would not become designated campsites were restored. 52 sites remain designated for camping.
- **Year-round:** At the Tuttle Creek campground, all bathrooms were painted, and sites were brushed to reduce fire danger.

Many non-camping actions in the Plan were also completed. In November, the historic Alabama Hills entrance sign site was upgraded with deferred maintenance funds (historic sign is pictured below). This included resurfacing the road, hardening the surface for the picnic area, installing four picnic tables, improving the trailhead, and updating the existing kiosks. In June, the Alabama Gulch mineral claim was relinquished to the public with the understanding that the site be managed by the BLM in collaboration with the Lone Pine Gem and Mineral Society as a recreational prospecting area. In August, two new information kiosks were installed along Movie Flat Road at the bathroom sites.



Challenges

The primary challenge this fiscal year was planning the implementation of the actions in the Plan with a limited staff and a limited number of days to work without extreme summer heat. Despite this challenge, the dispersed camping and many other changes were implemented, with the dedication of staff and help from partners and volunteers.

Another key challenge was education and outreach to both new and returning visitors. Based on data gathered at outreach events, many visitors did not do any planning prior to visiting and were unaware of changes that occurred with the new designation and Plan. Many campers also arrived after dark, resulting in challenges in finding designated sites. Some campers chose to camp in areas that were now day use only or created new sites, despite signage about no camping. Park Rangers, Law Enforcement Rangers, and Partner staff patrolled on a regular basis to educate visitors and to help campers choose correct locations for camping. Most visitors expressed a positive response to the changes, mostly due to the unobstructed views, lack of human waste issues, and reduced user conflict.



Visitors

The Alabama Hills National Scenic Area (NSA) 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.

Traffic counter data has been collected for over a decade to count vehicles and hikers. According to the data, April and October are the most visited times of the year. In 2021, the Alabama Hills saw the highest level of visitation on record, perhaps due to increased public interest in the outdoors during COVID-19. In April 2021, the main vehicle counter logged just over 14,000 vehicles, the highest monthly total recorded since the counters were installed. In April of 2022, visitor use returned to a more normal pattern with just over 8,000 vehicles. Visitor use can be derived from the vehicle counter numbers by assuming approximately 2.5 people per vehicle. For FY22, this resulted in approximately 150,000 visitors as compared to FY21 which was approximately 197,000 visitors. The newly renovated information pull-off, where the historic Alabama Hills entrance sign is located, had approximately 43,000 visitors pass through. This was a similar number of visitors as seen on the popular Mobius Arch trail. Tuttle Creek Campground, the only campground in the NSA, saw approximately 42,000 visitor days. On the BLM website that covers the Alabama Hills over 76,000 page views were recorded.



Partnerships

Partners were essential to the accomplishments in the Alabama Hills in FY22. 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 area and helped develop and disseminate messaging through a monthly Alabama Hills Newsletter. The Steward also led volunteers in work projects.

The Alabama Hills Stewardship Group (AHSG) continued to support the BLM with their long-standing partnership and helped to disseminate information.

Tread Lightly, Milestar Tires, Project Heal the Land, the Eastern Sierra 4WD club, ESIA, the BLM, and the AHSG partnered for another volunteer event where they removed and cleaned fire rings, and installed signs.

Lastly, in cooperation with Death Valley National Park, two shared employees were hired. They answered questions at the Lone Pine Visitor Center and patrolled the Alabama Hills on occasion.



Science

This year, the BLM completed Lentic and Lotic Assessment, Monitoring and Inventory (AIM) vegetation plots to assess the baseline condition of the vegetation and focus on water quality and stream condition.

Interpretation of Indicators of Rangeland Health monitoring and Proper Functioning Condition assessments also began in FY22.

Rare plant surveys at multiple locations were completed by the Santa Barbara Botanic Gardens through an assistance agreement with BLM.

A Monarch Joint Venture field crew did survey work in the Alabama Hills with a goal to "Map the distribution and quality of monarch habitat and use on CA BLM land."

Finally, approximately 50 acres of broadcast seeding of native species occurred within the burn area of the 2021 Alabama Fire.



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 2022, the summer heat was drawn out making project work difficult.

Also, there was an intense rainstorm that had effects on roads and did significant damage to the Inyo National Forest's nearby Lone Pine Campground.



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 actions in 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 restoration efforts occur where visitors have driven off existing roads into the shrubs, damaging the fragile ecosystem. 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 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. Our partners at ESIA 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 to provide information, including videos, about the Alabama Hills and responsible recreation to a wide audience.

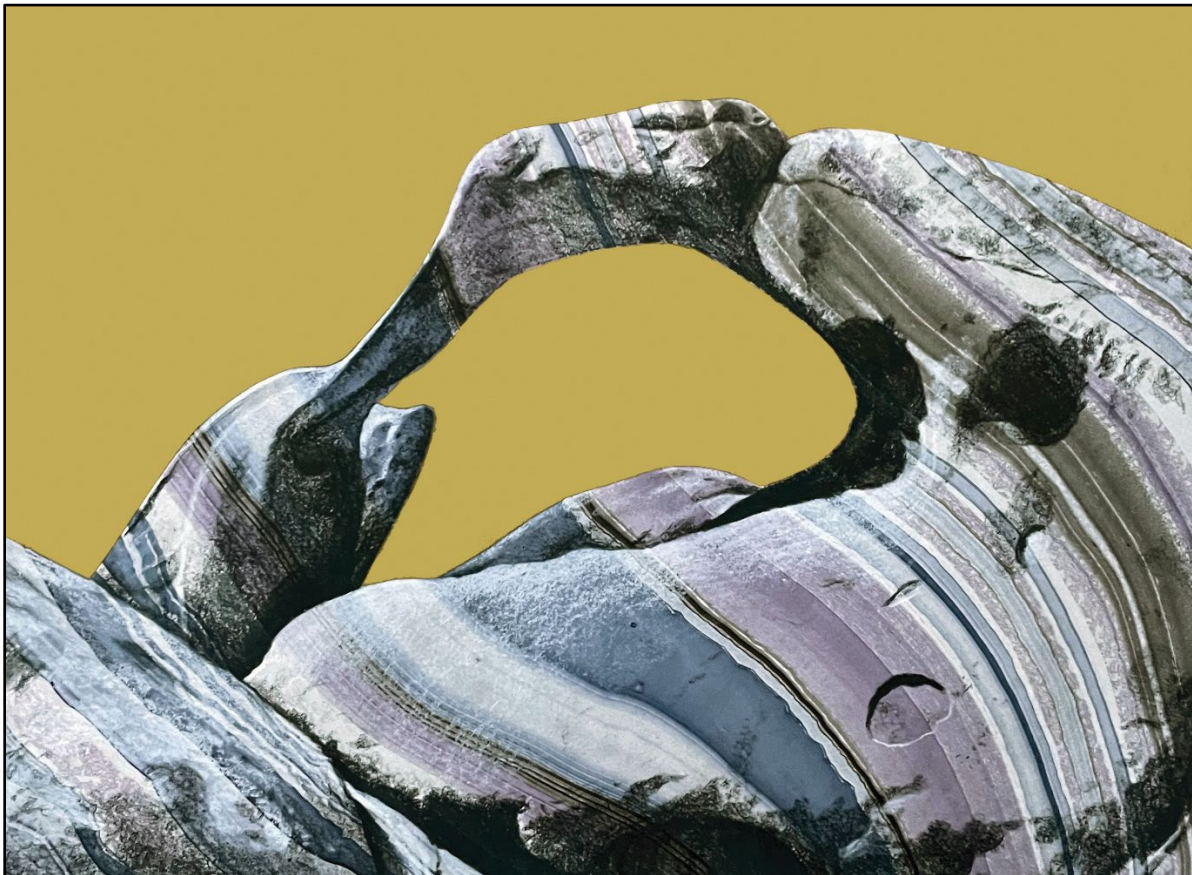


Events

Following the COVID-19 Special Recreation Permit (SRP) slow down, in FY22 SRPs returned to normal levels, as the Alabama Hills is a very popular location for events. There were 25 SRPs ranging from guided rock climbing to weddings, and 14 film permits were also issued. The Concert in the Rocks, 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 had normal attendance.

Throughout the fall, BLM, in partner with the ESIA, held 12 days of pop-up booths that were set up to provide informative interaction with the public based on camping and information about the NSA. Also, the BLM hosted 3 public virtual meetings called “Hills Happenings” to provide information and updates to the public about the changes that occurred in the Alabama Hills.

Lastly, the Bishop Field Office hosted two Alabama Hills Artists-in-Residence, Aubrey Edwards and Heather Heckel. They used their artistic techniques to showcase their experience in working in the NSA.





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