



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

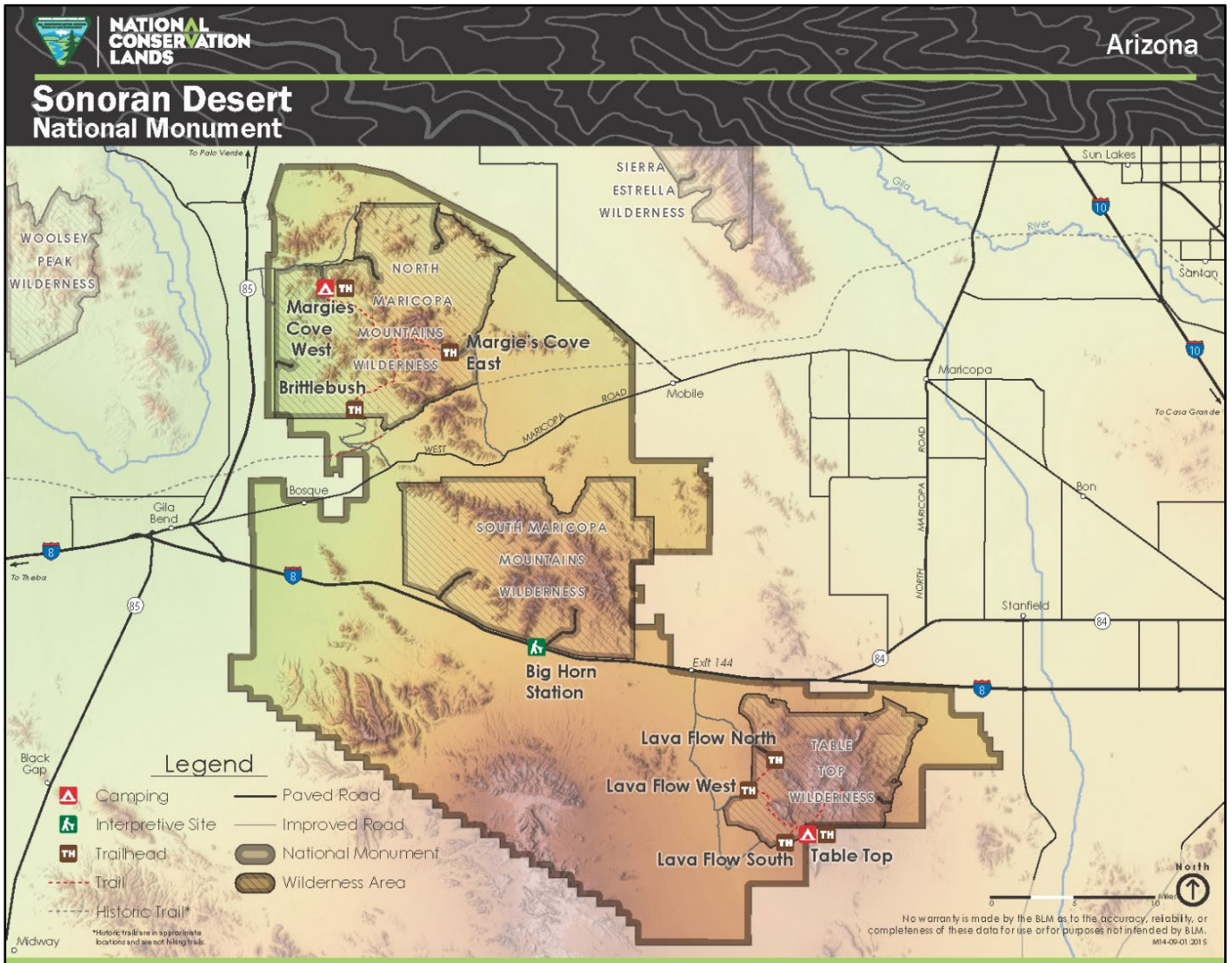
Arizona
2022: Annual Manager's Report

Sonoran Desert

National Monument



Map



Accomplishments

The Sonoran Desert National Monument (Monument) had many accomplishments this year. Funding for a portion of the Estrella-Wayside Recreation Site (Phase 1) was received during spring of 2021. On July 18, 2022, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) published a Federal Register notice to close the area for construction. Construction began in August 2022 and was completed in December 2022. BLM Route 8002 was re-constructed from the north of Maricopa Road for approximately one mile to a visitor contact station. Several campgrounds were constructed with picnic tables and fire rings. Once the rest of the project is complete, camping opportunities on the Monument under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) will provide for long-term sustainable development while also protecting cultural resources. This will also enhance heritage tourism opportunities through the interpretation of the Monument's portion of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, the Butterfield Overland Stage Route, Mormon Battalion Trail, and other historic trails in the vicinity.



Challenges

The pandemic and staffing levels have presented numerous challenges for effective management of the Monument. The staff, however, found ways to implement projects and share duties to monitor and protect the resources consistent with the Monument's [Proclamation](#). One such project resulted in the removal of 3,350 pounds of trash and abandoned equipment related to illegal border activity accumulated in remote areas of the Monument. A district-wide team, consisting of an outdoor recreation planner, park rangers, law enforcement, fire, and maintenance staff, worked together to accomplish a cleanup. Before the two-day cleanup operation, law enforcement, maintenance, and park ranger staff made several trips to the Monument to locate, bag, and organize the trash to make it easier to remove. One cleanup site was in the Table Top Wilderness (Wilderness). The large amount of trash in the Wilderness was affecting the natural environment and visitor experience. The Phoenix District's Weaver Mountain Helitack Module, based in Wickenburg, provided staff and helicopter support to remove trash. During the two-day cleanup operation, the helicopter carried fire personnel to collect and prepare the trash for sling-load removal by helicopter.

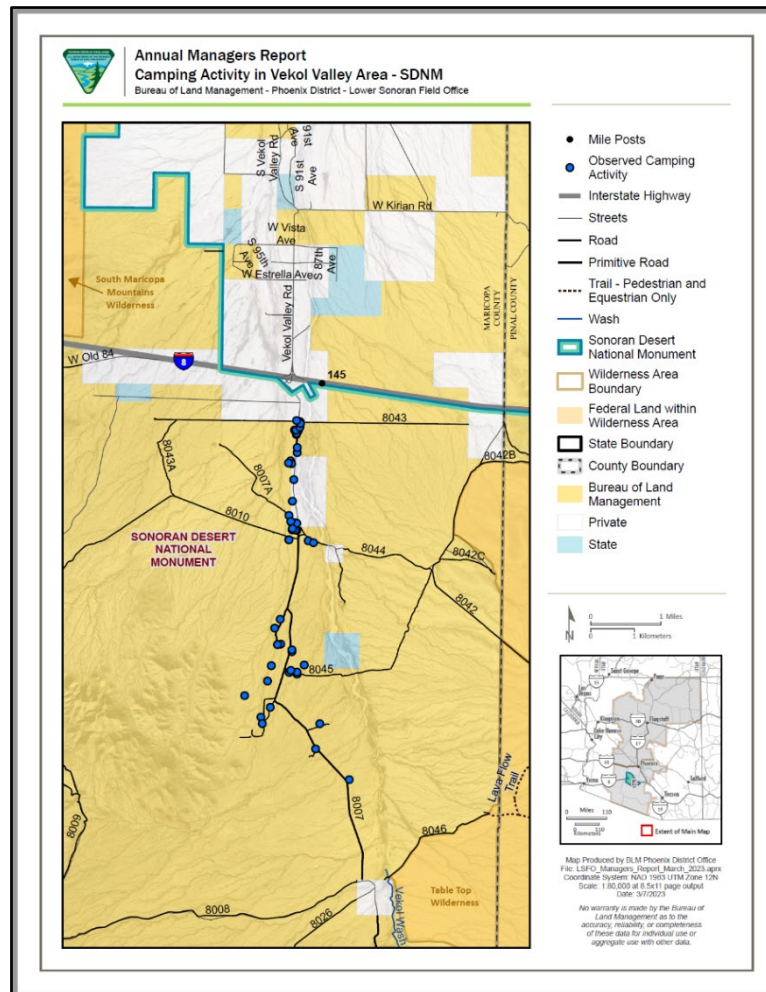


Visitors

Monument visitation decreased in 2022 as many COVID-19 restrictions ended. The Monument received an estimated 49,695 visits and 52,198 visitor days. Many visitors stay on the highway and enjoy the scenery from waysides during short visits. Others use the waysides to access the Monument's undeveloped areas, where visitors generally stay for a few days to a week.

The Monument is a popular destination for hunters seeking deer, small game, and gamebirds. Highest levels of visitation take place during the fall big-game hunts and during winter months when the weather is more amenable to recreational activities.

Most notably, in 2022 our rangers noted a localized increase in camping and visitation in the Vekol Valley located in the southernmost portion of the Monument near mile-marker 145, along road 8007 and several adjacent routes. Law enforcement was able to show an increase in campers from less than 10 during the past 10 years to more than 70 campers in 2022. The increase in visitors and camping in appropriate areas is a result of several years of partnership between our law enforcement rangers and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol.



Partnerships

Between October 2021 and February 2022 there were six events hosted by the BLM with the primary focus of removing old unmaintained barbed-wire fences from the Monument, South of Interstate 8 in Vekol Valley. This area was closed to cattle grazing through the Proclamation, but many miles of old range and pasture fencing remain in the area. These fences are being removed to improve wildlife movement and to prevent wildlife injury, particularly for Sonoran pronghorn. Volunteers from Eagle Scout groups, Arizona Wildlife Federation, and the Arizona Antelope Foundation spent six days removing 20 miles of fence. North of Interstate 8, there is an old earthen stock tank, known as Gap Tank, which was fenced to keep out trespass livestock. When the fencing was installed, it was not a wildlife-friendly fence. On February 2, 2022, Aaron Ellertson led his scout troop for his Eagle Scout project, retrofitting the fence to make it wildlife friendly.



Science

In October of 2021, volunteers from the Arizona Antelope Foundation, and agency personnel from Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the BLM constructed the temporary holding pen to prepare for the release of Sonoran pronghorn on the Monument. On December 7-9, 2021, twenty Sonoran pronghorn were released into the holding pen. The pronghorn were monitored by BLM, FWS, and AGFD personnel until their planned release in January of 2022. The pronghorn released in the winter of 2021/2022 produced four fawns this season.



Events

The BLM Lower Sonoran Field Office (LSFO) and the Monument kicked off the Monument Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) on August 24, 2022, by posting a notice of intent in the Federal Register. The purpose of the RMPA is to determine where and whether recreational target shooting should be allowed inside the Monument. Two virtual scoping meetings were held on October 12 and 13, which were recorded and posted to the BLM Arizona YouTube channel. Work on the RMPA continued through 2022 and is expected to be signed in fall of 2023.

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Sonoran Desert National Monument

**Sonoran Desert National Monument
Recreational Target Shooting
Resource Management Plan Amendment**

**Public Scoping Meetings
October 12 and 13, 2022
5:00pm to 7:00pm**

October 2022

Words From the Staff

The staff at the Monument have been through a lot of changes, starting with an office move and ending with a change in leadership.

In April 2022, the BLM Phoenix District Office, where LSFO and Monument employees are housed, began preparation for an office move. This move came amidst so many other projects and obstacles, but our staff led the charge in getting the old office packed up and ready to go. In August, we began moving our files and equipment to our new location at 2020 East Bell Road in Phoenix.

In April 2022, Edward Kender took a position at another agency after nine years as the LSFO Field Manager. In August 2022, Tyler Lindsey was hired as the new LSFO Field Manager. Tyler's career began 17 years ago with BLM in the student temporary education program. Being an avid outdoorsman and having an appreciation for public lands, he always knew his heart was in the work he performs at the BLM. Throughout his career he has been fortunate enough to work in many different professions and places. We are so happy that his travels landed him here at LSFO and the Monument. – *Katie White Bull, Monument Manager*





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