



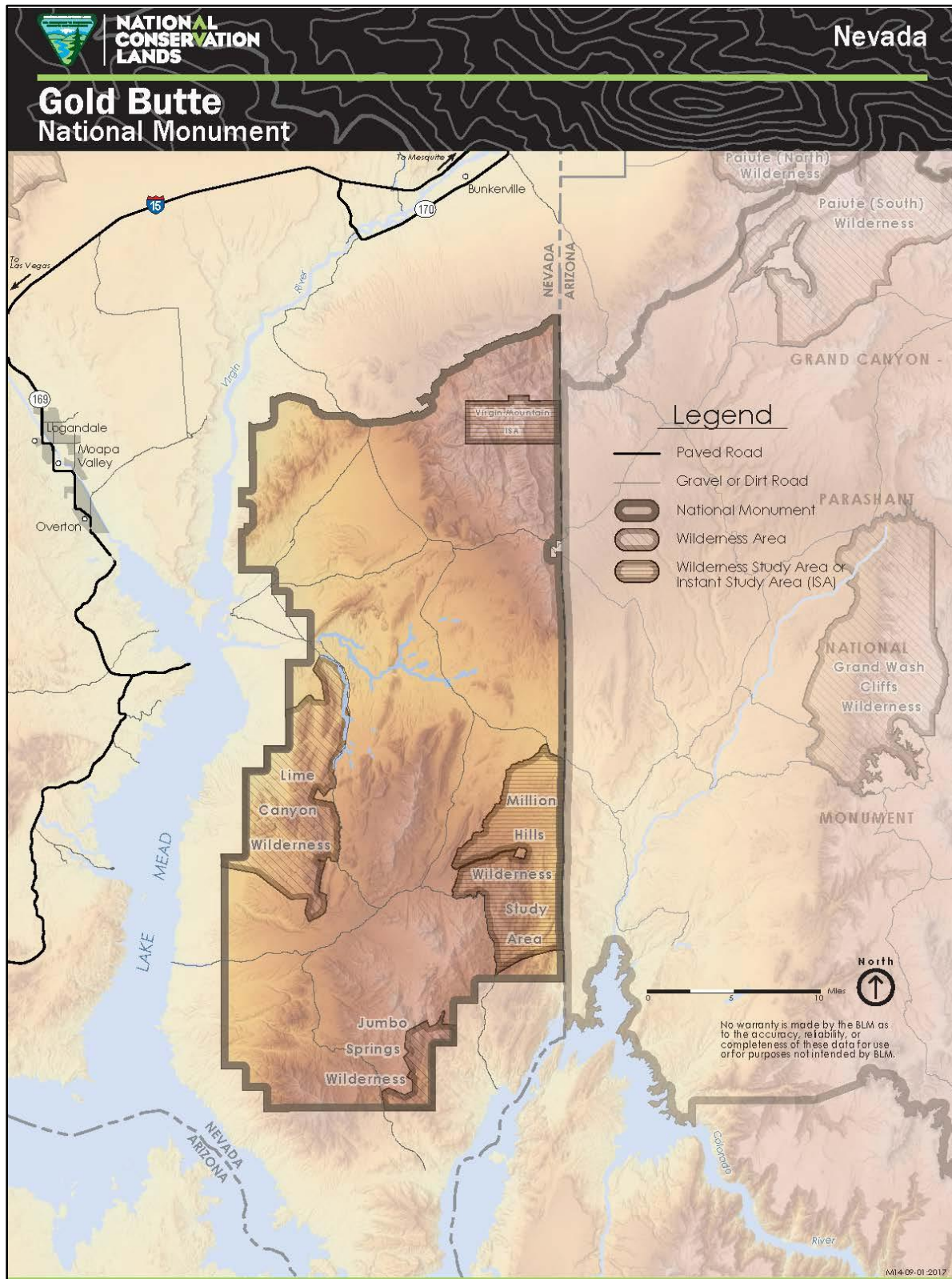
# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

**Nevada**  
2023: Annual Manager's Report

## Gold Butte National Monument



# Maps



# Accomplishments

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The Gold Butte National Monument had many accomplishments this year. Significant accomplishments included the final planning for a new bathroom facility at Cabin Canyon/White Rock, a popular high-elevation destination for locals during hunting season and summer heatwaves; a National Public Lands Day clean-up event around the Whitney Pocket area 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 completion of a draft Implementation Plan that will help guide management direction for visitor use, and in turn reduce resource impacts, especially in site-specific areas that are receiving high visitation.

In the spring of 2023 Monument staff, in collaboration with Clark County Department of Public Works, and volunteers from Friends of Gold Butte, laid down over 200 tons of cold patch road 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 the Travel and Transportation Management decision record, 2008, many roads leading into sensitive cultural sites and natural resources that were closed were treated with restoration actions this past year. Unfortunately, many of these closed and treated routes continue to receive disturbance and multiple new incursions. Full restoration of disturbed sites in the Mojave Desert may take several hundred years without treatment, and up to several decades even with successful treatment. Sparse vegetation, high rates of off-highway vehicle use, and a lack of education are major factors perpetuating this issue. BLM staff, with volunteers from organizations like Friends of Gold Butte and Friends of Nevada Wilderness, cooperate to help identify and treat resource damage as it occurs and reduce the potential for continued illegal incursions.

Throughout the Monument, 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 and large fires have the potential to lead to a significant decline in the population numbers for this species and further slow its recovery. BLM proposes to increase educational outreach to the public and strengthen enforcement of fire restrictions during fire seasons.



Mojave Desert tortoise.

With increase in visitation, there has been a commensurate increase in resource disturbance within existing dispersed camping areas, development of new dispersed camping areas, and an increase in improper disposal of human waste. Currently, all camping in the Monument is primitive and dispersed with little to no amenities or developed sites. A draft Monument Implementation Plan has been in development, which will help guide management direction for visitor use, and in turn reduce resource impacts, especially in site-specific areas that are receiving high visitation, like the Whitney Pocket area. Current management direction within the Monument is guided by the Las Vegas Resource Management Plan, Record of Decision (1998), and the Presidential Proclamation (2016).

# Visitors

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Visitation to the Monument in Fiscal Year 23 was estimated at 77,590 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, at 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 trailheads which lead to non-motorized trails. The Whitney Pocket area 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.



Whitney Pocket Area

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, sightseeing, and 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-after-year increase in visitation to the Monument since it was designated 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, including but not limited to:

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

The mission of Friends of Gold Butte 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 Gold Butte National Monument while protecting the landscape.

## **Friends of Nevada Wilderness (FONW)**

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

The BLM entered into an MOU with FONW to formalize both party’s desire to cooperate on programs and projects that protect, monitor, and improve 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, Site Stewards, Great Basin Institute, Northern Arizona University, and the Kokopelli ATV Club.

# Science

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The United States Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) Bee Research Laboratory continued to survey for and document Mojave Poppy Bee populations in the Monument this year. 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 its 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. The 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 continued conducting 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 on 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 Frogs 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 and Resiliency

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The Gold Butte National Monument 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 “heatwaves” and the average temperatures have continued to increase and are projected to continue their upward trend.

Most development and large-scale utility projects are prohibited within the Monument. BLM will focus on maintaining or improving the current condition of the objects for which the Monument was designated. In most instances, this will require closely monitoring those objects 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.



Cinchweed blooming in the summer.



# 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 off-highway vehicles, 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. Annual pothole repair ensures that smaller, less capable vehicles can retain access to the Monument.

Friends of Gold Butte regularly host hiking expeditions into well-known sites. These free-of-charge hikes are guided by FOGB volunteers and provide the public with a unique opportunity to experience the Monument's remarkable 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.



Hiker in the Bitter Ridge area.

# Events

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Due to the Monument’s underlying designation as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), the Las Vegas Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (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 FY23, BLM did not issue any permits for events in the Gold Butte National Monument.

FOGB regularly host hiking expeditions inside the Monument. These free-of-charge, guided hikes generally occur during the cooler months, providing the public with an opportunity to experience pristine and otherwise inaccessible areas of the Monument. FOGB also hosts various events such as volunteer clean-ups and night sky viewing events throughout the year.

As an annual tradition, BLM hosts a National Public Lands Day event in the fall of each year. For Fiscal Year 2023, volunteers helped protect wildlife habitat around a popular camping area (Whitney Pocket) by installing posts to help delineate and define the area. The posts will help to reduce future resource impacts while maintaining the recreational setting and opportunities. A similar event is planned for Fiscal Year 2024, with the host site to be determined.

BLM and Clark County Department of Public Works collaborated to host a road repair project that aimed to provide maintenance to the 20-mile paved section of the Gold Butte Back Country Byway. This section of the Byway is severely deteriorating, but with the assistance of several volunteers over the course of two weeks, approximately 15 miles of pavement received much-needed pothole repairs.



Cabin Canyon viewing area.

# Words from the Staff

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Our Monument Staff is dedicated to caring for and protecting not only the objects that are outlined in the Monument's Presidential Proclamation but also the less tangible, yet equally important, sentimental values that the Tribes, stakeholders, and public have placed on this remarkable stretch of desert. Like many of the visitors that venture into the Monument, we are equally in awe at its remarkable vastness, beauty, and diversity. We are encouraged by the increase in visitation each year and we look forward to future site-specific implementation improvements, so we can continue to provide exceptional opportunities while still protecting the diverse and irreplaceable cultural and natural resources for which the Monument was set aside. From the snowy peaks of the Virgin Mountains to the arid Mojave Desert bottom of the Whitney Pocket area, we are honored to be entrusted as your land stewards and public servants and we remain committed and dedicated to protecting this remarkable landscape, known as Gold Butte.



Falling Man window.



## NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

### **Gold Butte**

### **National Monument**

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<https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/nevada/gold-butte>  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/blmnevada/albums/72157679319061155>

### **Report compiled by:**

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