



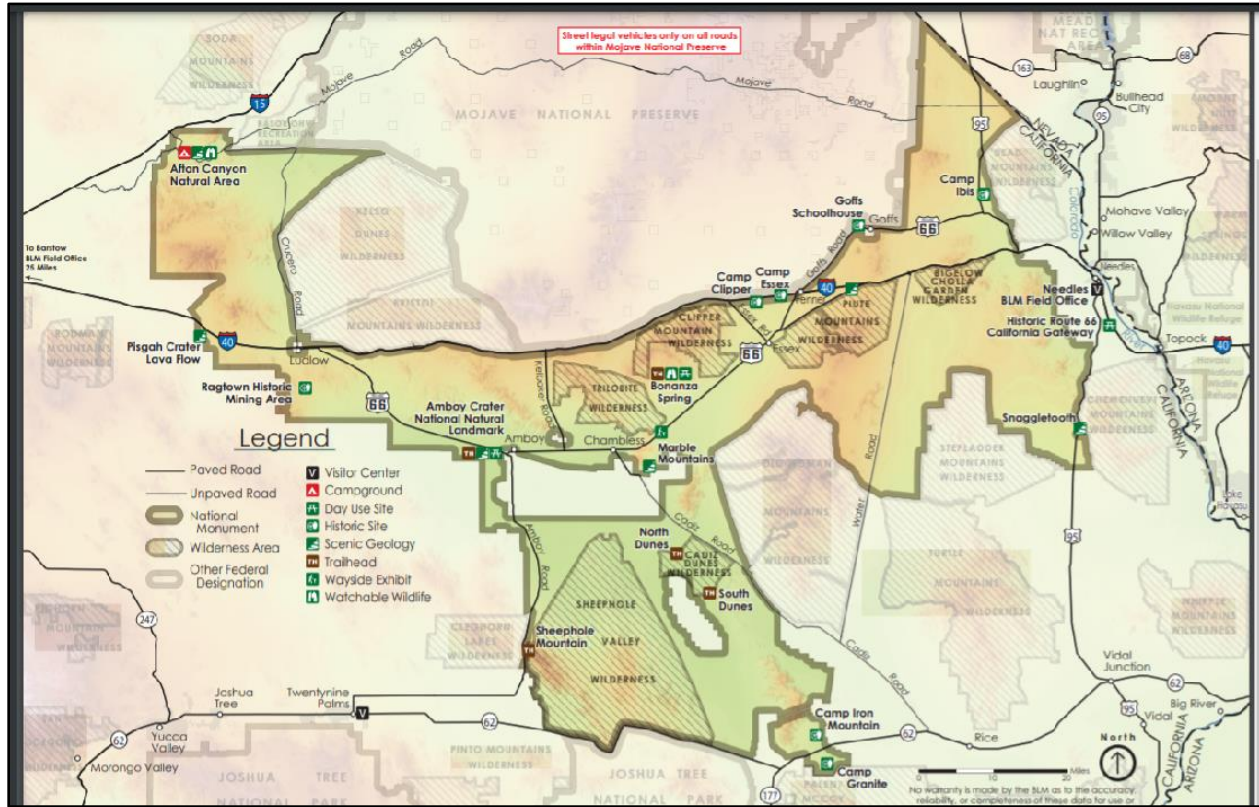
# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

California  
2023: Annual Manager's Report

## Mojave Trails National Monument



# Map

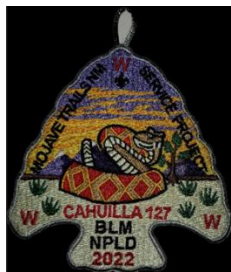


# Accomplishments

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Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM) kicked off 2023 with the Mojave Trails National Monument Advisory Council (MAC) field trips. The MAC is a subgroup of the Desert Advisory Council and is made up of interested public. Formed in late 2022, the purpose of the MAC is to help guide the MTNM planning process.

Another notable accomplishment in 2023 was the 7<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration shared with one of MTNM's newest partners, the Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association. This year's event was promoted by monument partners and acknowledged the importance of night skies and related light influence concerns.



# Challenges

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Climate and weather are an ongoing challenge within Mojave Trails National Monument (Monument). The Monument experiences variable weather conditions ranging from rainstorms to blistering hot blowing sandstorms. Knowledge of the daily weather report is important for successful trip and work planning in the area. This year was no exception.

In 2023 the second highest known year for precipitation was recorded in the Monument and Mojave Desert region. Meteorologists indicated that the region received the highest amount of measurable rain in 70 years. There were two cycles of storms that that resulted in these conditions in 2023. First, an unusually wet summer, then Hurricane Hilary made landfall in southern CA as Tropical Storm Hilary. Precipitation caused road damage that made it more difficult to travel within the monument and the region. Existing county road challenges and conditions were exacerbated by this rainfall.

The rain events likely contributed to low visitation in 2023. The Monument shares boundaries with two National Park Service (NPS) units, Joshua Tree National Park, and Mojave National Preserve. Both NPS units also had road damage because of the precipitation, and the Mojave Preserve closed most of their paved road to cars due as a result. This road closure reduced access to the Monument and contributed to the lower numbers of vehicles traveling in the area.



# Visitors

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Monument visitation days fluctuate each year, with a noticeable decrease in 2023. There was also a correlated decrease in campground overnight stays the last two years. This decrease could be attributable to weather related access issues. The table below identifies the fluctuating visitor use data that the BLM collects.

<u>Year</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>
Visits	133,630	83,784	103,286	187,993	162,054
Campground	731	804	1,001	760	430

The monument has one fee campground. Afton Canyon Campground, located within the Barstow Field Office.



# Partnerships

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BLM has partnered with the Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association (MDHCA) to provide trail monitoring and light maintenance on the East Mojave Heritage Trail (EMHT). The EMHT is a 733-mile recreational and interpretive trail which spans portions of the MTNM, Needles Field Office, Barstow Field Office, Las Vegas Field Office, and the Mojave National Preserve.

The EMHT is accessed by four-wheel drive vehicles and visits numerous scenic, historic, and geologic landscapes. It is partitioned into four segments, each of which has an

individual trail guide containing information about the natural resources and historic events of the area. This year the MDHCA provided a complete assessment of the trail, as well as two additional spot assessments after particularly significant storm events.

To date, 33 Women in Science Discovering Our Mojave (WISDOM) interns have participated in various research projects within the monument. The Mojave Desert Land Trust, with the support of partners, has been operating the WISDOM internship program since 2019. The program seeks to engage women from underserved communities in studying Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

The BLM has been working with partners to remove tamarisk trees to restore riparian habitat in Afton Canyon. One method of managing this invasive species is use of tamarisk insects as biocontrol, though the effect of using beetles as a biocontrol method may impact other native species. Even after being sprayed with pesticides, or cut down, the invasive trees can still regrow.

WISDOM interns conducted quantitative biocontrol monitoring surveys of tamarisk beetles (*Diorhabda* spp.) and tamarisk weevils (*Coniatus splendidulus*) at five points within Afton Canyon during the summer months in 2020, 2022, and 2023. This protocol also determined where new populations existed, and this will help the BLM determine where, or if, this method is truly assisting in the eradication of the tamarisk tree.



# Science

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The Monument has a very active vegetation program. The BLM relies on partnerships for a large portion of program support. This year the monument also received the assistance of two Direct Hire Authority Interns supplied provided under an agreement with the Geological Society.

The Monument manages three areas that have been inventoried as Unique Plant Assemblages (UPAs), a resource identified in the presidential proclamation that established the monuments. One of the goals of the monument is to maintain an active inventory of the UPAs. The Monument enlisted the two interns from the Geological Society to assist with updating the monitoring data for two of the UPAs. The two areas of intense monitoring are the Teddy Bear Cholla Assemblage located in the Sacramento Mountains and the Small Ocotillo Assemblage located in the Piute Valley. These assemblages are considered unique due to their location and plant density.



# Climate Impacts

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The Monument is a landscape of many diverse species of animals and plants. One of the more notable plant species is the *Penstemon albomarginatus*, (common name White-Margin Beardtongue). The plant is identified in the monument proclamation and accordingly is one of the resources that is protected within Mojave Trails National Monument. Management goals for the plant will be defined in the Monument Management Plan that is presently under development. Currently there is a small population that is cared for within the monument and the BLM is actively inventorying the national monument for other populations of the plant species.

In the spring of 2023, a small group of resources staff caged the only known population of the plant community located in Mojave Trails National Monument. Their hope is that the caged area will help protect the plant from anthropogenic destructive activities.





# Climate Resiliency

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Climate resiliency is the forefront of the monument, found in multiple different program areas, including but not limited to, the incredible WW2 history, Territory Fossils, Ecological studies, and archaeological impacts.

The Presidential Proclamation that created the Mojave Trails National Monument in 2016 provided measures to manage the Mojave Trails area as an invaluable treasure and serve as an irreplaceable national resource for geologists, ecologists, archaeologists, and historians for generations to come.

The area exemplifies the remarkable ecology of the Mojave Desert, where the hearty insistence of life is scratched out from unrelenting heat and dryness. This punishing environment has also forged the unique human history of the area, from ancient settlements uprooted by a changing climate to the armies of General George S. Patton, Jr., as they trained for battle in North Africa. In addition, the fossil history within the southern Bristol Mountains has also been used to understand the climate history of the Mojave Desert.

The Mojave Trails area has been important for ecological research, including studies on the effects of climate change and land management practices on ecological communities and wildlife. More abundantly, humans have lived in and moved through the Mojave Trails area for more than 10,000 years. The archeological record tells of a human existence shaped by a changing climate.

The BLM is working with partners to study local climate impacts and develop plans for landscape level restoration strategies. These strategies are not only good for the environment but can also help to mitigate the effects of climate change. In the years ahead, the BLM and its partners will consider many ways of building climate resilience which may include:

- Designing infrastructure such as campsites, outhouses, and parking lots to withstand extreme weather events.
- Educating people about the risks of climate change and how to adapt to them.

# Social and Environmental Justice

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Mojave Trails National Monument began preplanning for a Monument Plan since 2021, including gathering input from the public. When the BLM informed the Desert Advisory Council (DAC) about the management plan development process, the DAC advised the BLM that they wanted to form a Monument Trails National Mountain Subgroup of the Desert Advisory Council (MTNM Subgroup). The MTNM Subgroup includes

representation of diverse local and concerned community members from California and Nevada. The Subgroup gathered for five field trips in the winter/spring of 2023 to go into the Monument together and talk about their interests and concern related to the plan. The group met in the Monument Gateway communities of Barstow, Needles, Twentynine Palms, and Goffs, CA and visited many identified monument Resources, Objects, and Values. The BLM received beneficial information and shared information about some of the major evolving issues. Following these meetings, the BLM, in May 2023, released the Notice of Intent (NOI) to develop the plan, officially starting the planning process and legally documented public scoping.

The MTNM Subgroup:

- Explores, understands, and advises the DAC on the progress of the development of the monument management plan for the MTNM.
- Brings the public perspective to the planning effort and be central to the public outreach efforts on the plan.
- Shares their understanding of the planning issues with their representative constituents to gain public perceptions and possible resolutions.



# Events

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The Monument is dynamic in providing an outlet of support for partner sponsored events. During the 2023 year, the BLM participated in two partner led events: the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary event located at the Goffs School house in Goffs, CA and the annual US Route 66 Scenic Byway event held each year in Needles, CA.

The 7th anniversary event included educational talks with several key guest speakers under the stars. It was held at the MDHCA headquarters and museum in Goffs, CA. The School House Museum staff offered a night sky viewing party with the Las Vegas Astrological Society. The BLM also received support form local partners who provided free refreshments to everyone learning about and the night sky, night photography, and why the “shrinking night sky matters”. It was a great way to start the year.



# Words from the staff

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The dedicated partners who support Mojave Trails National Monument, including the Mojave Desert Land Trust, the Desert Advisory Council, the Monument Advisory Council, help make the BLM's care and management of the monument possible.

Thank you to the staff of the MDHCA Goffs School House Museum for supporting the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mojave Trails National Monument. Without your support the celebration would not have materialized.

Special thanks to the Monument Advisory Council members for dedicating their personal time and volunteering four weekends in the desert looking at the Resources, Objects, and Values of Mojave Trails National Monument.

Special thanks to the BLM Planning and Environmental Coordinator team for their enormous effort to set the Mojave Trails National Monument Planning effort into motion.



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## **Mojave Trails**

### **National Conservation Area**

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Bureau of Land Management  
Needles Field Office  
P.O. Box 1301 US-95  
Needles, ACA 92363  
Phone: 760-326-7000

### **Report compiled by:**

**Mojave Trails National Monument staff**

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