



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Washington
2024: Annual Manager's Report

San Juan Islands

National Monument



Map



Accomplishments

In 2024, BLM staff at the San Juan Islands National Monument (Monument) continued to work with Coast Salish Tribal partners to support meaningful steps toward a Tribal Forum consisting of interested Coast Salish Tribes. Through a third-party facilitator, the BLM held multiple in-person meetings with Coast Salish Tribes to foster coordination and develop relationships.

The BLM also updated its comprehensive invasive plant inventory across most of the islands within the Monument. This updated inventory provides crucial data for developing and implementing effective strategies to control and eradicate these non-native species, protecting the native plant communities and overall ecological health of the islands. Collaboration with Kwiáht–Center for the Historical Ecology of the Salish Sea, a local nonprofit, ensured that the inventory was conducted with local knowledge, maximizing its value for long-term management planning.

The Monument staff supported over 2,700 hours of volunteer work, including 128 hours by youth volunteers. These efforts helped reduce noxious weeds, maintain historic structures, engage the public, monitor landscapes, and maintain recreational facilities such as hiking trails.



A locally-owned landing craft carrying gravel for a Monument project to a remote island

Challenges

In February 2024, a significant rockfall blocked the access road to the Turn Point Light Station on Stuart Island. Over 60 tons of rock fell from an adjacent ledge, completely blocking vehicle access between the boat ramp and the light station. Removing the rockfall quickly became a high priority not only to ensure access to maintain the historic site, but also to ensure smooth operation of a critical aid to navigation that guides and monitors vessels negotiating the 90-degree turn between the Haro Strait and Boundary Pass. Since Stuart Island is not served by a public ferry, Humpback Hauling, a local company, provided expertise to repair the road by utilizing a large landing craft to ferry the heavy equipment and gravel needed for the repairs.

BLM staff are continually faced with the unique challenge of moving people and equipment from ferry-served islands to the many small outer islands wholly or partially included in the Monument, including two with historic light stations. Navigating this logistical challenge is an everyday occurrence for staff. Local partners such as Washington State Parks, San Juan County, and others help make it possible.



60 tons of rock block the only access to Turn Point Light Station

Visitors

Visitation to the Monument in 2024 reflects a return to more typical patterns after the exceptional surge during the pandemic. This year the Monument welcomed an estimated 240,449 visitors, including both residents of the islands and travelers from away who were eager to experience its unique beauty. Cattle Point on the southern tip of San Juan Island remains the most popular destination, drawing over 67 percent of total visitation. While some sites experienced decreases in total visitation during 2024, the overall trend indicates a normalization of visitation, not a decline in interest.

Outdoor recreation remains an essential part of American culture, and the Monument provides an important recreation resource, particularly for local communities. Most shoreline and tidelands in the county are privately owned and only a small fraction of lands in San Juan County are owned publicly and allow recreation. The Monument provides access to a wide variety of recreational resources, such as hiking trails, vistas, beautiful beaches, wildlife photography, and rich American heritage sites, including two unique light stations from the late 1800's.



A group of volunteers enjoys the Monument

Partnerships

To better manage hunting within the Monument, the BLM partnered with the Washington Department of Natural Resources, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the San Juan County Land Bank. This collaboration provided increased staffing and a public information station to engage with visitors and share hunting-related information. The increased staffing and the public information station are critical components of this strategy, allowing for more direct communication with the public, promoting responsible hunting practices, and facilitating a safe and positive experience for all who visit the Monument.

The Monument continues to see strong support from its many volunteers, who put their heart and energy into caring for this special place. In 2024, volunteers dedicated over 2,700 volunteer hours to supporting the Monument.



A massive container ship navigates the turn at Turn Point

Science

The updated invasive plant inventories are providing Monument staff with information to prioritize locations for noxious weed interventions and for future forest health and restoration projects outlined in the Monument's resource management plan.

BLM staff are also working with regional partners to examine ways to better track use and tell the story of how people enjoy the Monument. In 2024, the Monument added new visitor counters and took a hard analytical look at the visitation data to identify trends and potential techniques to increase accuracy. Visitor satisfaction surveys were also conducted at key locations in the Monument with the assistance of the San Juan County Land Bank, volunteers, and the University of Washington.

Citizen science opportunities abound in the Monument. The BLM uses these opportunities to engage visitors and promote sustainable recreation and active stewardship of public lands. Citizen science involves public participation in scientific research, where non-professional scientists collaborate with, or work under the direction of, professional scientists. It enables the collection and analysis of data by members of the public, contributing to a wide range of scientific disciplines.



Residents and visitors alike get involved in understanding local ecosystems

Outreach and Special Events

Throughout 2024, the BLM attended many of San Juan County's community events and hosted several of its own. Monument staff participated in farmers' markets, the county fair, the Tour de Lopez, and Lime Kiln Point State Park's holiday open house. Monument staff helped to plan and lead the Great Islands Clean Up in the spring and fall for National Public Lands Day. They participated in multiple workdays on Patos Island with Keepers of the Patos Light, hosted a citizen science seabird monitoring training, and worked with Washington State Parks and the Bellingham Corinthians Yacht Club to complete a clean-up on one of the Monument's most heavily used small islands. They also spent a lot of time in the field with partners, including multiple nonprofit organizations, volunteer groups, and the local youth conservation corps.



Volunteers from Keepers of the Patos Light continue to fly the flag at this remote outpost

Facing Future Challenges Together

The San Juan Islands National Monument's beauty, bounty, and uniqueness have been drawing visitors for thousands of years. From time immemorial, Coast Salish Tribes have actively steward these lands and waters, as they continue to do. Throughout that long history, the Monument's lands have seen countless travelers come and go. Change has been the only constant. Even the lands themselves have been changed over time by the needs and values of the peoples who live and visit these islands. Open prairies gave way to encroaching forests, old forests were cleared to grow crops and provide fuel, settlements died out, moved on, or grew into villages.

With San Juan County's rapid growth and millions of visitors each year, continuing to sustain the lifeways of the people who live here, responsibly stewarding the land, and providing for visitors to come and experience this special place, is a huge challenge. Thankfully, the BLM has an amazing community to help. The BLM's caretaking of the Monument is shaped by long standing and new partnerships with the local community and incorporates both the traditional knowledge of people who stewarded these lands for thousands of years and continued research into current impacts. The BLM is proud to continue to steward the Monument into the next millennium.



One of the many visiting photographers gets too close to a fox



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Special thanks to Debbie Sodi for this cute photo of a fox kit and the photo of the photographer. Taken responsibly from far away with a telephoto lens.