



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

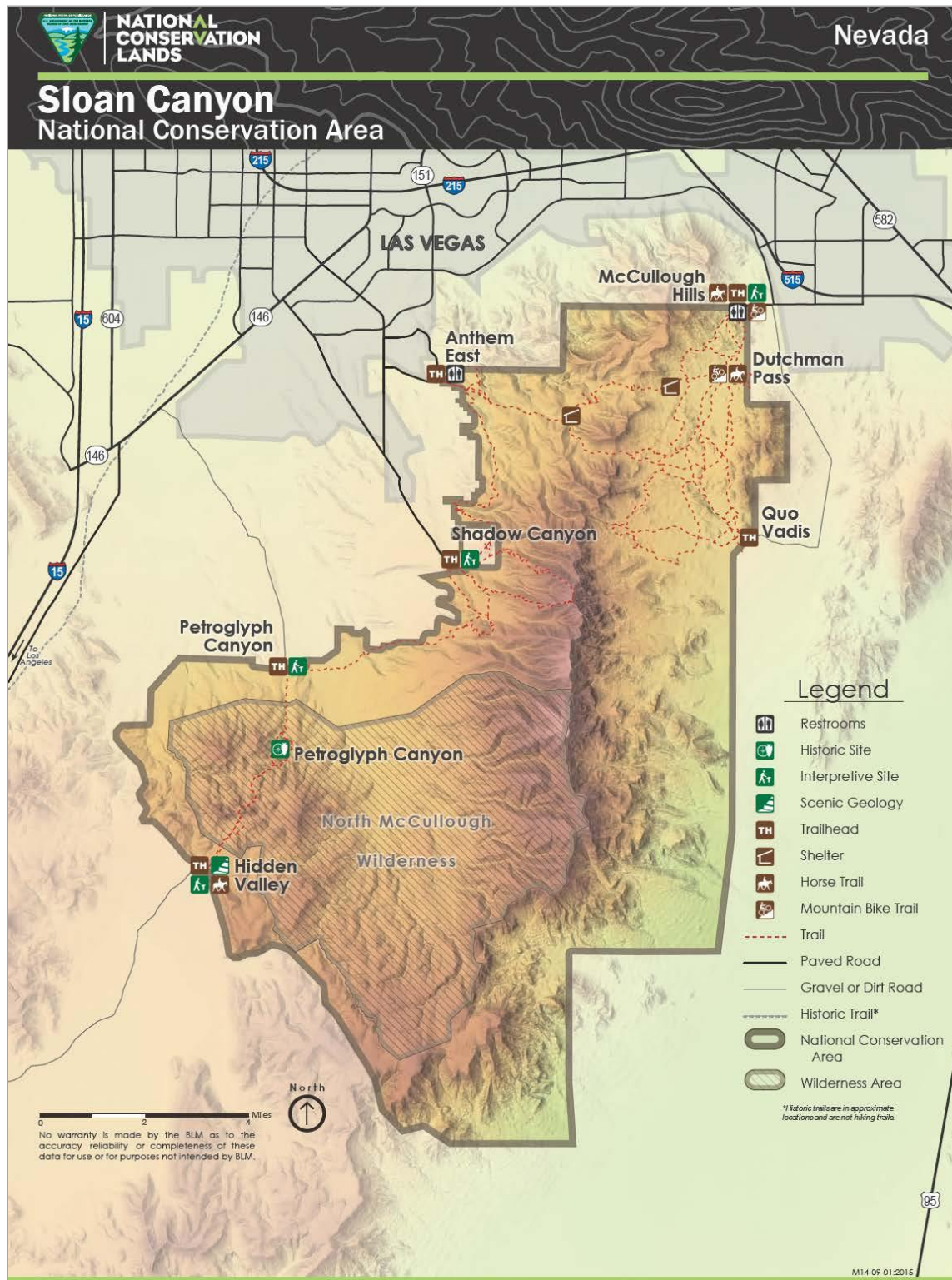
Nevada
2021: Annual Manager's Report

Sloan Canyon

National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

Sloan Canyon NCA (SCNCA) accomplished many projects that have been pending for several years and started new projects that are a vital part to the success for Sloan's future management

SCNCA Contact Station Design

A design for a new VCS was completed in August 2021. The design provides a new 3,000 square foot contact station building that will house full-time NCA staff. It will also house an indoor gallery featuring interpretive displays, a small gift shop area, and a reception desk where visitors can receive information and purchase tickets to visit the Petroglyph Management Area (PMA). Outside the contact station building, most of the site will be developed as outdoor venues. Visitors arriving at the contact station will enter an expansive parking lot that accommodates approximately 80 cars and features bus parking and loading/unloading zones. From there, visitors may enter the contact station or choose to enjoy outdoor covered picnic areas. Visitors who pass through the contact station may exit to an outdoor plaza at the rear of the building.

This area includes a small amphitheater and a controlled access gate where rangers will take groups on a guided hike along the rugged 1.73-mile Petroglyph Trail to the PMA. Next to the plaza, an accessible half-mile interpretive loop trail will allow visitors who are unable to complete the challenging hike to the PMA to experience carefully curated displays along its length which replicate interesting features along the Petroglyph Trail. The new SCNCA contact station is expected to draw throngs of guests from around the world and offer an alternative recreational opportunity to the world-renowned Red Rock Canyon Visitor's Center at the other side of the Las Vegas Valley.

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act Packet Development

SCNCA submitted a capital improvement proposal to the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) Working Group for consideration to cover the costs of constructing the VCS, expanding the interpretative elements, designing and installing an entrance gate, and installing a boundary fence. This package was accepted by SNPLMA and the Working Group. The overall project was approved at \$19.8 million in fiscal year 2022 (FY22).

Implementation Strategy

In 2021, the Implementation Strategy Draft was updated to reflect the following:

- Chapter 2 was updated to show the past visitation from 2016-2020.
- Chapter 3 was updated to explain the management direction for future facility development, including updating all costs associated with development.
- Chapter 4 was updated to reflect the future staffing needs, current and projected operation, and maintenance costs.
- Chapter 5 was updated to show current and future financial program costs associated with the Public Law.

For example, some new programs that are developed include funding for the SCNCA Science Plan, a Tribal Travel Reimbursement Program, and funding for a potential partner to help with volunteer recruitment.

Congressional Cadastral Standard Operating Procedures Guide

SCNCA working with the Nevada State Office and the Southern Nevada District Office's Cadastral teams, created a Standard Operating Procedures Guide to complete SCNCA's congressional mapping. This project was made a priority by the Deputy State Director.

Hired 3 new staff Including Experienced Services Program Hire

SCNCA staffing issues were solved by hiring three Park Ranger positions that provide interpretative planning, volunteer coordination, and day-to-day trail maintenance needs. SCNCA also hired an Interpretative Specialist through the Experienced Service Program to complete interpretative planning specific to the Petroglyph Trailhead.

Agents of Discovery Headquarters Approval

Earlier in the year SCNCA was awarded a grant through the BLM National Headquarters to help fund the initial costs and extra licensing years for the Agent of Discovery Program, an interactive website application (app) located at multiple trailheads. This app will be presented and made available to the public when the VCS opens to the public.

Wilderness Accomplishments

In 2021 the Friends of Nevada (FNW) worked closely with the BLM on multiple service projects and field work. The FNW assisted the BLM with scouting and mapping a social trail in the North McCullough Wilderness Area that receives many visitors. Additionally, the FNW worked with the BLM to offer volunteer service opportunities and restore over half of a mile of a two-track route within the conservation area.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) conducted an emergency water drop at a wildlife guzzler once in 2021. The drop utilized one helicopter landing in the North McCullough Wilderness Area. Fortunately, the valley received monsoonal rainstorms in July of 2021 and guzzlers were refreshed naturally.

Challenges

For 2021, SCNCA has had some significant challenges ranging from everyday problems to long term issues. Within the year solutions to all challenges were planned for.

Staffing Challenges

During FY21 staffing was at an all-time low. The loss of two staff left the remaining two staff members working together to ensure Sloan Canyon continued operations as usual. BLM Human Resources and other BLM offices within Nevada helped to promote

position announcements which helped SCNCA hire three new staff members. As SCNCA continues to see increases in visitation, more staffing will need to be considered in the future, especially when the VCS is completed. “If you build it, they will come”.

Implementation Management Strategy Updates

It has been five years since the last version of the SCNCA Implementation Management Strategy. This strategy explains to the public where the funding is being spent from the special legislation account through the year 2044. Staffing considerations for the next 10 years were reviewed but was deferred until a clearer concept and design of the VCS was available to help with staffing and management strategies. The strategy discussion included review of overall costs planned at SCNCA compared to others of similar nature. It was recommended to start incorporating some sort of other funding as soon as possible to offset drops in the special legislation account’s balance.

VCS Design

Working through the design of the VCS, a few challenges were averted while working closely with the City of Henderson (COH). COH had requested SCNCA to develop and install fire hydrants along Nawghaw Poa Road which would have required a very expensive pumping system with costly maintenance. SCNCA collaborated with COH Fire Department to accommodate for safety measures at the future VCS building.

Tribal Community Involvement

The biggest challenge in FY21, was the absence of our tribal partners during the design and development phases of the VCS. COVID-19 restricted access to tribes leaving it very difficult to communicate and involve them in the process. In 2022, SCNCA is in the process of working with 10+ tribes as a working group to fine tune some aspects and planning of the VCS.

Increased Visitation

As COVID continued to restrict visitors from interior places, a lot of visitors chose to enjoy their time outdoors. With the COH bordering the SCNCA, there has been an increase in the creation of social trails from various adjacent neighborhoods. SCNCA is working with the COH Parks and Recreation Department and the COH Planning Division to properly plan future access points and trail systems that match the management of the SCNCA.

Wilderness Challenges

The impacts to the North McCullough Wilderness Area include loss of solitude, degradation of cultural resources, threats to the Bighorn Sheep population, motorized and mechanized incursions, and impacts to the natural quality of wilderness character.

The Sloan NCA has a robust, and growing, wildland-urban interface along its border shared with the community of Henderson, Nevada. Additionally, during the Covid-19 pandemic, public lands experienced a dramatic increase in visitor-use and the Sloan NCA was no exception to this trend. The Sloan NCA is planning to construct a VCS and

expects this to assist the BLM in managing visitor-use around the NCA. However, the VCS will also add publicity to the NCA and is expected to contribute to the popularity of the area even more.

The PMA is completely inside of the North McCullough Wilderness Area. The PMA is currently experiencing degradation from visitor-use in the form of rock art trampling and graffiti. The PMA is a challenging place for the BLM to manage, but the BLM is currently creating an implementation plan to manage visitor-use in the PMA to preserve the cultural resources found in the wilderness area.

Threats to the Bighorn Sheep include habitat fragmentation, a growing wildland-urban interface, extreme drought, and virus infections. Much of the Bighorn Sheep's habitat in the NCA is within the North McCullough Wilderness Area. Managing a sustainable Bighorn Sheep population is expected to remain a challenge in the North McCullough Wilderness Area. Helicopter landings in the form of water drops at wildlife guzzlers is likely to remain a challenge in the wilderness area.

The SCNCA and surrounding lands are popular mountain biking and Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use areas. These uses are not a compatible wilderness use but due to the proximity of other lands mountain biking and OHV use is occurring within the North McCullough Wilderness Area. The intrusion of motorized and mechanized use in wilderness creates a challenge for the NCA in preserving the undeveloped quality of wilderness character.

Preserving the natural quality of wilderness character in the North McCullough Wilderness Area remains a challenge for the BLM. Factors such as climate change, large wildland-urban interface, increasing visitor-use, habitat fragmentation, and motorized and mechanize have cumulative impacts on the natural quality of wilderness character.



Visitors

Through 2021, visitation has grown as expected, with a few more issues than usual. Recreation Visitation is high, Education opportunities are minimal, and Public Interpretation is starting to be put in place with much success into 2022.

Recreation Visitation

As stated previously, there has been increased visitation due to COVID. Our issues lie with newly developed social trails that were not present prior to COVID. Newly developed neighborhoods within 200' of the boundary exacerbate this issue.

Interpretation

Again, like 2020, SCNCA continues to evolve our interpretation strategies and are working with all ages to develop an interest in Sloan Canyon. Due to COVID, Sloan Canyon Staff has worked very hard to develop a Tribal Interpretive Working Group to help further the opportunities for tribal input and involvement in the future.

Visitor Education Opportunities

Sloan continues to revamp our education programming with updated school district curriculum. During COVID, there were no invites or opportunities to enter schools to conduct some of our best programs and further the BLM's Every Kid Outdoors program. In 2022 Sloan Staff have dates selected for career fairs, science days and other partner events.

Visitation within the Wilderness

The North McCullough Wilderness Area offers a diverse array of primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities. Diverse non-developed recreational opportunities include hiking, backpacking, rock scrambling, nature study, photography, horseback riding, hunting, and general exploration.

Partnerships

Sloan Canyon has continued our Relationship with our primary partner, Friends of Sloan Canyon. COVID really put a stop to a lot of volunteering events and opportunities, but going into 2022, we are hopeful for more opportunities and volunteer recruiting events. Once the temporary mobile offices are put in place at Petroglyph Trailhead (2022) we anticipate volunteering to exceed pre-COVID levels.

Wilderness Partners

Friends of Nevada Wilderness is another partner that was of great help in 2021. From installing rock stairs to continuing to restore non-designated trails into the wilderness area, Friends has exceeded our partnership expectations and will continue to work with Sloan into 2022 and beyond.

Science

Science Plan Draft

In August of 2021, Sloan Canyon began drafting the Sloan Canyon Science Plan in hope of completing the document in 2022. This Science Plan incorporates the following scientific mission and goals:

- Support the conservation, protection and enhancement values and objects identified in the Legislation, and the 2002 SCNCA Resource Management Plan (RMP), Cultural Resources Management Plan, Biological Management Strategy, Wilderness Management Plan and the Programmatic Biological Opinion.
- Allow and encourage pertinent science across Geologic and Archeologic resources and develop time scales that can:
 - Inform and evaluate management decisions.
 - Conserve and protect cultural and historical resources.
 - Conserve and protect the geologic history of SCNCA.
 - Be used as part of public interpretive displays to inform the public.
- Support investigations into the impact of stressors on the integrity of SCNCA objects, including how landscape level compounding stressors such as climate change and visitation affect resources.
- Be responsive to the BLM National Conservation Lands 15-year Strategy.
- Serve as a model system for surrounding areas so that scientific findings can be exported to other landscapes on both federal and non-federal lands.
- Serve as an outdoor laboratory for studies and scientific investigations.
- Serve as an outdoor science classroom to educate and inspire the next generation.

Research applications will potentially be validated through the Science Coordination Committee or similar and will fund projects that:

- Help the overall mission and goals.
- Inform land management decisions in the SCNCA.
- Are designed around clearly articulated research/management questions.
- Stay responsive to the National Conservation Lands 15-year Strategy, the BLM, National Conservation Lands Science Strategies, and SCNCA's Science Plan and RMP.
- Support research on and interpretation of the archaeological and geological resources of the SCNCA.
- Will include only conservation and research relating to the Conservation Area.
- Will support other purposes that the Secretary determines to be consistent with the purpose described in section 602 of the legislation.

Climate Impacts

Sloan Canyon has continued to feel the effects of the ongoing drought that is typically experienced in the west. There has also been habitat fragmentation, a growing wildland-urban interface, and rising temperatures in the valley.



Bighorn sheep along the slope of the McCullough Mountain Range at Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area.

Climate Resiliency

With various climate related impacts, listed above, Sloan Canyon, with the help of the city of Henderson, has started to implement more direct notice to visitors about the drought, rising temperatures and the importance of hiking with snacks and water. Staff have recommended to visitors the importance of water and staying on designated trails. Habitat fragmentation is a direct result of a growing urban interface that is directly adjacent to SCNCA. The team has drafted supplemental rules to ensure protection of highly important ecosystems and will continue to monitor all aspects of SCNCA in the future.

Social and Environmental Justice

The new VCS is designed to follow guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Architectural Barriers Act (ABA), and once built, will provide opportunities for people with disabilities to have “ready access to and use of” federal buildings and facilities. The ADA-ABA areas will include the building interior space, the Amphitheatre, and the half-mile loop trail.

The incorporation of Tribal input and participation related to their heritage is a premise that is being included into the new VCS. Staff has been planning to incorporate tribal heritage in various ways into the new building including hands-on demonstrations, space for tribal vendors to sell their goods, and tribal story telling within the Amphitheatre.

Events

During these COVID times, very few events took place in Sloan Canyon. No Special Recreation Permits were approved or received during 2021. Towards the end of the year, Friends of Sloan Canyon received a Letter of Authorization to start having Astronomy Nights at McCullough Hills Trailhead. With much success, an additional back-to-back day had to be added due to the high-level interest and low use levels allowed by BLM Policy.



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Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area

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