



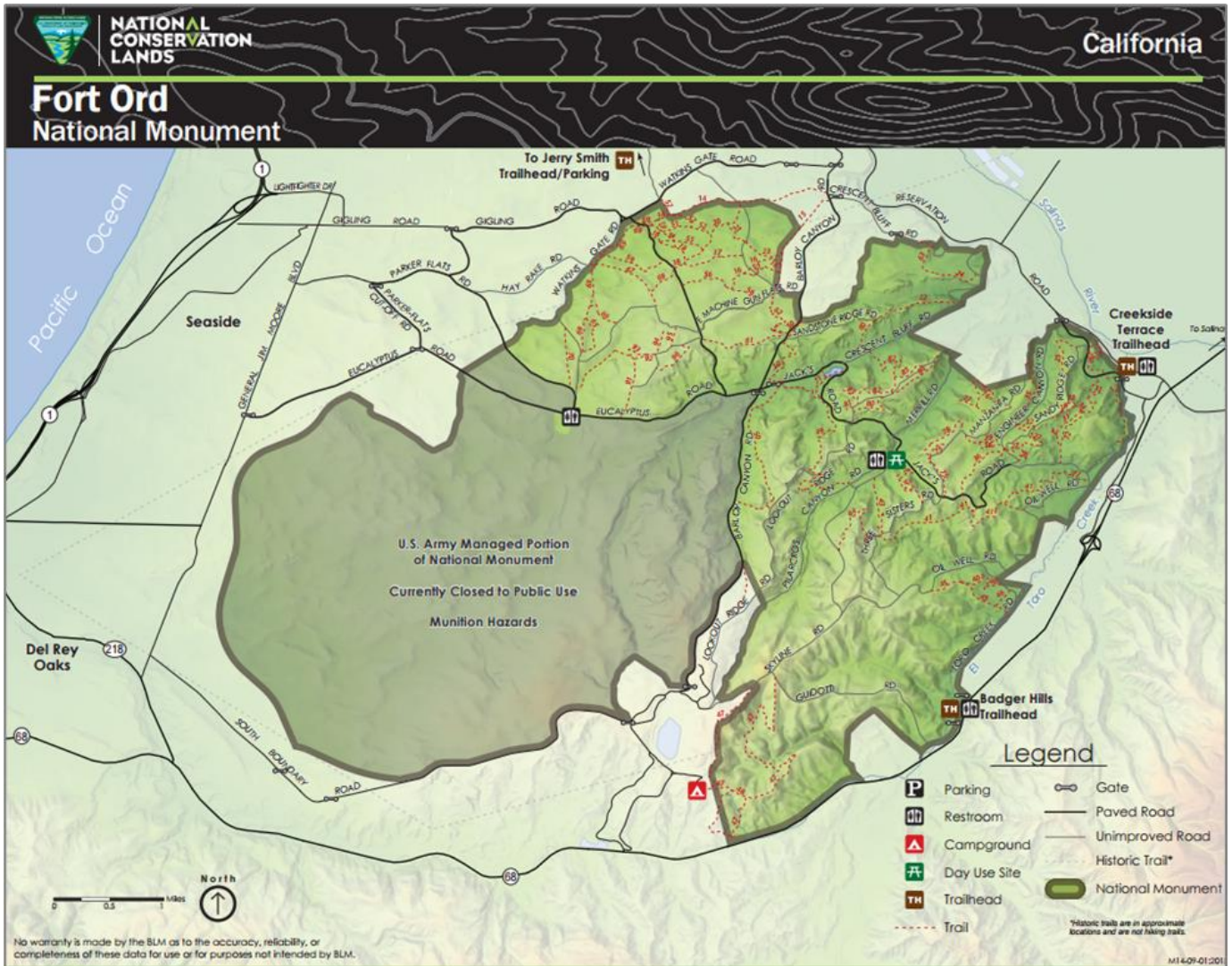
# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

California  
2021: Annual Manager's Report

## Fort Ord National Monument



# Map



# Accomplishments

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The monumental team and partners at the Fort Ord National Monument worked hard in 2021 to repair trails, enhance and restore native habitats, reduce hazards, provide quality visitor services, and improve connections with visitors from far and near. Ten miles of trails were maintained in partnership with the Monterey Off Road Cycling Association (MORCA). Five acres of degraded habitat were restored in partnership with the CSU Monterey Bay's Return of the Natives program. The Safe PASSAGES trail manners program in partnership with MORCA, FORT Friends and REI continued to be a success. Thousands of acres of fire hazards were treated by a carefully monitored goat grazing operation. Hundreds of acres of invasive weed treatments were skillfully implemented by the Monument weed crew in partnership with the U.S. Army. Dozens of elementary schools continued their partnership with BLM and hosted over 400 enrichment programs in local schools for students.



# Challenges

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Nearly 1.2 million visitors used the extraordinary trails on the Monument on foot, wheel and hoof. This is a tripling of public use over the last five years. Personnel on wildfires across the State, safety restrictions to reduce COVID-19 transmission, and increased wear and tear of recreation facilities were among the challenges experienced at Fort Ord National Monument in 2021. Public visitation to facilities exceeded design capacity and the BLM rushed to mitigate impacts. Safety precautions for large volunteer group gatherings made it difficult to mobilize the community to repair trails and restore native habitats, or otherwise engage the community with group gatherings. Community volunteer work in small and large gatherings has traditionally been a godsend on the Monument, but these opportunities were hampered to a large extent in 2021 to protect workers and slow the spread of COVID-19.



# Visitors

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A tripling of public visitation to the Monument in 2021 was partially attributed to the year-long closure of nearby Toro Regional Park due to a wildfire that burned during the summer of 2020. Nearly 1.5 million cyclists, hikers, joggers, and equestrians hit the trails and packed into trailhead facilities beyond their design capacity. Monument staff responded to the challenges of this increased use and expanded parking overflow areas at the Creekside Terrace Trailhead and installed speed bumps to slow travelers down to this popular access point. Heavy use caused trail treads to unravel, and small gullies began to form and the BLM staff and MORCA partners stepped up efforts to harden and stabilize trail tread surfaces. This effort is expected to continue for the next several years and is one of the projects identified under the Great American Outdoor Act.



# Partnerships

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The BLM enjoys so many monumental partners at Fort Ord that it is difficult to imagine managing this spectacular area without them. In addition to continued work with partners at MORCA, FORT Friends, REI, various elementary schools, high schools and colleges, the BLM is fortunate to co-manage the Monument with the U.S. Army. This long-standing partnership with the Army enabled the BLM to restore five acres in 2021 and treat hundreds of acres of noxious weed infestations on BLM and U.S. Army lands. The BLM has partnered with the U.S. Army's Base Realignment and Closure Office since 1996 and this partnership has resulted in a tremendous amount of habitat enhancement and restoration. Over 250 different restoration sites have been treated on the Monument and thousands of acres of invasive weed abatement has been implemented since the former installation closed.



# Science

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Robert Cooper, PhD candidate at University of California Los Angeles, completed his doctoral thesis on the effects of various hydroperiods to the threatened California tiger salamander (CTS) and hybrids of this species at the ponds he constructed on the Monument three years ago. This study is important in understanding how various hydroperiod durations affect native CTS and their non-native hybrids. Fort Ord represents an entire recovery unit for this Federally listed species and proper care is integral for the recovery of this beautiful creature



# Climate Impacts

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The Fort Ord National Monument and surrounding areas are increasingly showing impacts of elevated annual temperatures, including vegetation changes, and more frequent wildfires. These climate impacts also effect the hydroperiod of vernal pools that can stress wildlife, especially breeding opportunities for the Federally listed California tiger salamander. This rare creature lives in upland burrows but breeds once or twice per life cycle in vernal pools once they begin to fill.





# Climate Resilience

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Changes in the climate and the associated increase in the number and size of wildfires across the region and state creates heightened concern regarding wildfire risk. The Fort Ord National Monument is surrounded by a residential population of around 100,000 within five miles. The BLM continues to use goat grazing to reduce fire hazards and has an ongoing monitoring program to gauge the effects this grazing regime, coupled with sustained drought, is having on the fire risk and species composition.



# Social and Environmental Justice

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In 2021, the Monument demographics shifted significantly with the influx on new visitors. Many new Latino visitors from the Salinas Valley have fallen in love with the trails on the Monument. In response, the BLM made improvements to information delivery with modifying popular brochures and maps into Spanish versions. The BLM continues to visit schools from around the region, including schools of traditionally underserved populations in the Salinas area in order to enhance their understanding and appreciation of the natural environment. In 2021, the Monument Interpretive Specialist provided over 400 lessons at area Elementary Schools.



# Events

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Although COVID-19 restricted some of the events and activities that traditionally happened on the Monument, several competitive events resumed in 2021. The Sea Otter Classic cycling event brought 2,500 mountain bike and road bike racers and tour participants to the world-class trails of Fort Ord. Inside Trail held two running races across 100k, 50k, 25k and 10k courses on the Monument and 600 runners laced up their sneakers for the challenge.



# Words from the staff

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We are proud to be managing the Fort Ord National Monument between the beautiful Monterey Bay and bountiful Salinas Valley in California. Our stewardship of this special place will honor all who have passed through the gates of the former Fort Ord, and those who were here prior to our nation's soldiers. We have a great team to make this happen, and that team includes the communities of the Monterey region, and the many recreation, and conservation partners we work with.

We feel blessed to be managing this monumental place in such a wonderful community, and we know we have a special responsibility to have a positive impact. We will continue to work collaboratively with our neighbors and partners and give back to the communities where we live. We do this through our inspired work and our mission of serving the American family.





**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

## **Fort Ord**

### **National Monument**

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