

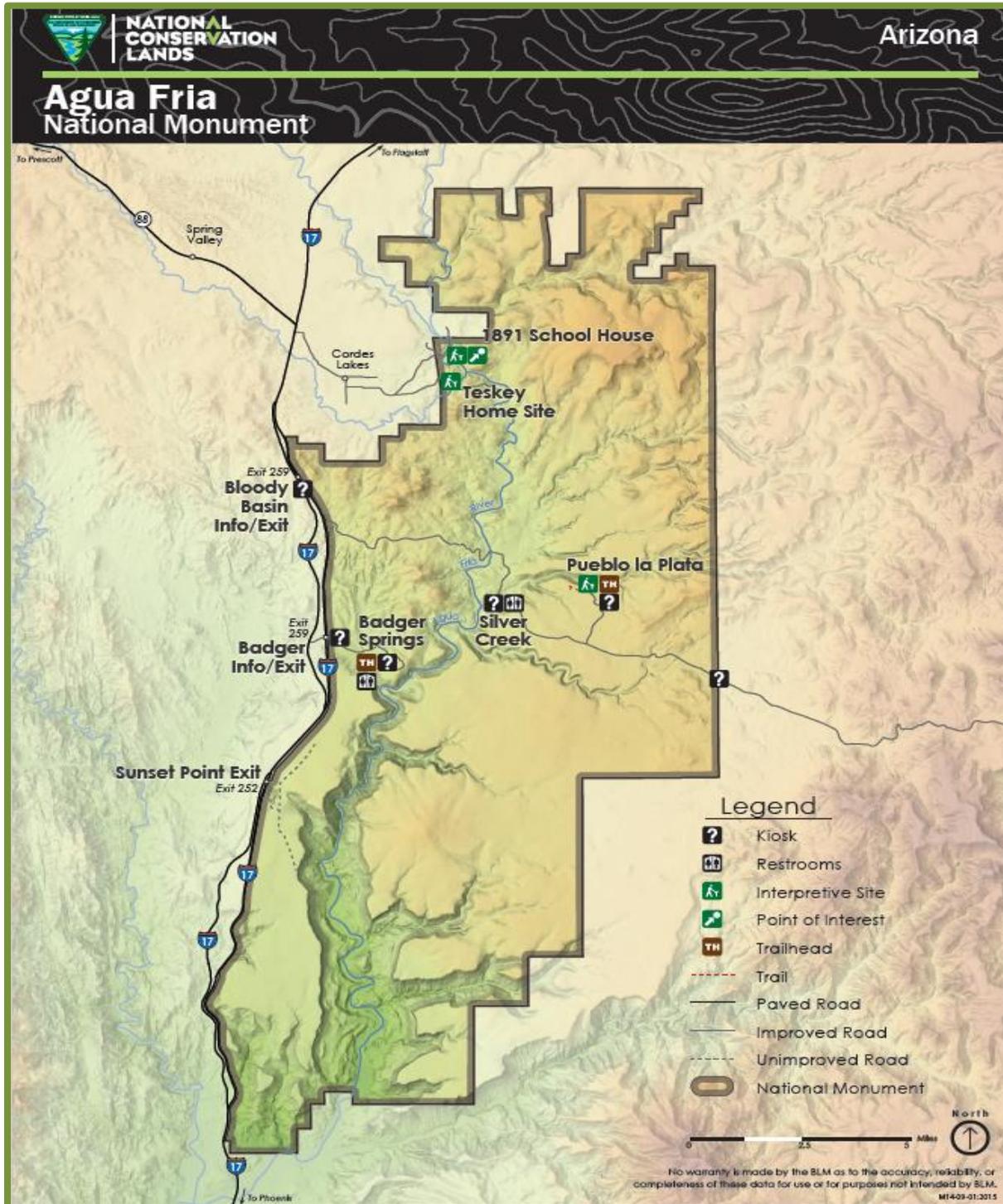
NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Arizona
2022: Annual Manager's Report

Agua Fria National Monument



Map



Accomplishments

In 2022, the Agua Fria National Monument (Monument) staff, partners, and volunteers continued to implement a program of work to provide for public use and enjoyment while also protecting Monument resources. The public outreach events and partner engagement activities highlighted below accomplish the National Conservation Lands strategy of raising awareness of the value and benefits of the Monument, and collaboratively manage the Monument as part of the larger landscape.

Legacies on the Landscape

Arizona State University (ASU) and the Friends of the Tonto National Forest have continued the *Legacies on the Landscape* project. The focus has shifted in recent years to the pre-Classic prehistoric sites that predate the pueblo builders of the Perry Mesa Tradition. In 2022, staff included an additional collection and analysis of pottery sherds to assist in determining the production and distribution of the earlier pottery as well as studying areas adjacent to the Monument.

Section 110 Surveys

The Phoenix District Cultural Resources Working Group continued working on intensive surveys within the Perry Mesa Archaeological District. Work again focused just north of Bishop Creek. This survey was carried out to meet the requirements of Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act which calls on federal agencies to perform proactive surveys in support of scientific research. All the sites identified are prehistoric and appear to be related primarily to agriculture. Research questions regarding the prehistoric economic cycles of Perry Mesa will greatly benefit from this ongoing effort to synthesize this Section 110 data.

Arizona Site Steward Program-Agua Fria Region

The Agua Fria Region Site Stewards had another successful year of recruitment and retention with interested volunteers coming in from all over Arizona to participate in monitoring of the region's important cultural sites. The Site Stewards monitors 30 major sites (and numerous smaller ones) multiple times a year to ensure that they are protected to the greatest extent practicable. If damage is observed, the stewards are trained on what to look for and how to report it to the Monument's staff. Many of these site stewards became familiar with the region's significant cultural resources prior to the Monument's [proclamation](#).

Grazing Actions

Implementation of the management actions outlined in the Horseshoe grazing renewal decision and Environmental Assessment is now under way with assistance of the permittee and Arizona Game and Fish Department. These management actions include new range improvements such as riparian exclosures, wells, pipelines, improved

drought management triggers, and vegetation study plots among others. Exclusion of livestock from Silver Creek was the priority in 2022. In addition to the Horseshoe grazing renewal decision, the range program completed monitoring on nine grazing allotments including allotment and range improvement inspections. The range program also began the process for the rangeland health evaluation for the Cordes Allotment.

Fire Program

The Phoenix District Fire Management Program completed 200 acres of pile burning relating to juniper thinning in the Black Hills wash area. An additional 200 acres of piles were cut along Indian Creek near the Prescott National Forest boundary for treatment in upcoming years. In 2022, there were two wildland fires on the Monument. Both of which were less than 5 acres in size.

Challenges

The Monument experienced a complete staff turnover in 2022. New specialists have been brought on board and are being brought up to speed on ongoing projects. Staffing changes have delayed several ongoing projects relating to range and wildlife.

Changes in requirements for volunteer agreements have caused a reduction in official volunteer hours on the Monument. Subsequently, work has continued through unofficial volunteers and the Friends of Agua Fria National Monument (FAFNM), with the result that archaeological and natural resources within the Monument have continued to receive stewardship treatment. This also includes public participation in their protections.

Late in 2022, Arizona Department of Transportation installed a temporary rest area along Badger Springs Road, to facilitate remodeling of the Sunset Point rest area to the south. While this rest area has increased visibility of the Monument to the public, some increased disturbance to the immediate area has been noticed. The FAFNM has increased trash clean up days in this area to address the issue.

Visitors

Based on visitation at developed recreation sites, the Monument received an estimated 71,734 visits and 67,616 visitor days in 2022. Visitation has been steadily increasing in recent years, particularly during the pandemic. Primary visitation revolves around points that are the easiest to access, including Riverbend near Cordes, Badger Springs Trail, and Pueblo La Plata on Perry Mesa. Hunting is also a major draw for visitors at different times of the year.

Partnerships

The FAFNM is organized exclusively for charitable, scientific, and educational purposes; more specifically to protect, preserve, and promote appreciation and enjoyment of the ecological, archaeological, scenic, and scientific resource values on the Monument. The FAFNM play a critical role in assisting the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) with mission support for Monument activities. They organize outings and perform service projects, such as monitoring cultural resources, conducting threatened wildlife surveys, organizing hikes and interpretive tours, removing non-native plants, performing trash cleanups, recording rock art sites, conducting annual Wet-Dry mapping (mapping extent of surface water), and acting as Monument advocates and stewards.



The Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership (UAFWP) is a group of citizens and government representatives concerned with stewardship of the aquatic resources within the Agua Fria Watershed. Specialists from the Monument attended the partnership meetings and presented scientific findings on soil, water, and vegetation resources to foster understanding of the current ecological condition of the watershed.

Black Canyon Heritage Park (BCHP) serves as the gateway and visitor contact station for the area adjacent to the monument. The BCHP, located in Black Canyon, Arizona, is staffed by volunteers. The BCHP highlights the rich natural and cultural resources of the area through interpretive displays on topics such as the Monument, cultural artifacts and petroglyphs, local history, riparian areas, wildlife, and places to visit. The park also planned volunteer projects such as aquatic invasive plant removal, the planting of additional butterfly gardens, and interpretive plant displays.

The Arizona Site Steward Program, Agua Fria Region, is comprised of a group of closely knit volunteers who are assigned to monitor various archaeological sites on the Monument and in the surrounding region and report back to the BLM regarding condition, suspicious activity, vandalism, or other forms of degradation, both natural and human caused. The Arizona Site Stewards were established by the Governors' Advisory Council for Archaeology and have been an instrumental fixture on public lands for nearly 40 years. The program is operated under the direction of the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office within Arizona State Parks.

Science

The ongoing *Legacies on the Landscape* project continues to be a success on the Monument. As part of an ongoing partnership among the BLM and ASU, retired Tonto National Forest Archaeologist, Scott Wood, and ASU Professor Emeritus, David Abbott, utilized a cadre of volunteer students to conduct surveys in select locations in the Monument. The information being gathered is teaching archaeologists a great deal about how and why this piece of the central Arizona highlands became so important in the late prehistoric period.



The BLM resources staff and volunteers continue to monitor the riparian areas on the Monument for threatened and endangered species, water availability, vegetation recruitment, and livestock use. Monitoring included the deployment of several wildlife cameras to survey for species present in the major riparian drainages.



Climate Impacts

In 2022, the fire season was reduced in this part of Arizona. Two wildfires occurred on the Monument. Both were 5 acres or less. Rainfall of less than average annual amounts reduced water availability in both upland and riparian areas.



Climate Resiliency

In 2022, Monument staff had not directly or indirectly assessed the adaptive capacity for respective social and biological factors.

Social and Environmental Justice

Consultation with 13 federally recognized tribes is maintained on a consistent basis to ensure that proposed uses and enhancements are carefully analyzed with tribal viewpoints incorporated into the decision-making process. This includes all livestock grazing, recreational opportunities, wildlife enhancements, and cultural resource use and protection. Additionally, tribes are notified of emergency actions such as suppression activities related to wildfire.

The local gateway communities of Black Canyon City and Cordes Lakes, Arizona also benefit from annual events sponsored by both the BLM and volunteer groups. Black Canyon Heritage Park has worked closely with the BLM for several years to ensure that there is a local presence of knowledge regarding this important national treasure.

Events

Trash Collection along Interstate 17 was carried out on multiple occasions by the FAFNM, who have signed up for the Adopt-A-Highway program sponsored by the Arizona Department of Transportation.

Words From The Staff

The Monument is such an amazing and important asset of not only the BLM, but the nation we serve. Its unique qualities are exemplified by the multitude of important natural and cultural resources found here. Important work takes place year-round and could not be accomplished without the assistance of our partners.



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

Agua Fria

National Monument

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