



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

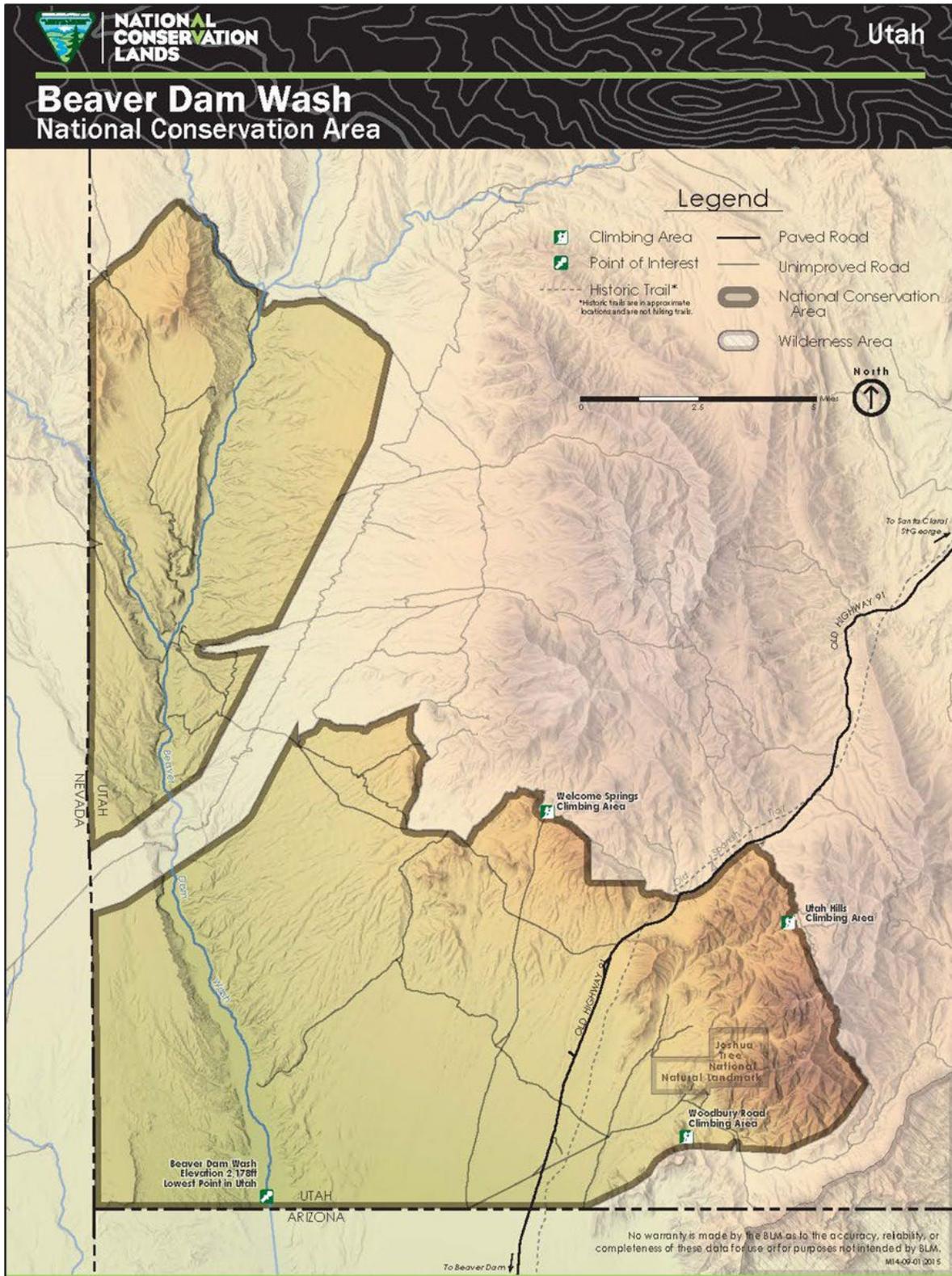
Utah
2024: Annual Manager's Report

Beaver Dam Wash

National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

This year, Beaver Dam Wash National Conservation Area (NCA) staff and Conserve Southwest Utah (CSU) coordinated a large-scale habitat rehabilitation project in fire-damaged Mojave desert tortoise habitat. The project involved 30 American Conservation Experience youth crewmembers and 50 volunteers from CSU, The Nature Conservancy, and The Conservation Lands Foundation planting 3,000 native plants to benefit tortoises and other at-risk wildlife species in the NCA (see figure below).

NCA staff continued working with partners including the Back Country Horsemen of America (BCHA) and the St. George Climbing Coalition (SGCC). NCA staff have started a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with SGCC to formalize this partnership. This MOU will assist both the climbing community and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the management of the NCA including data collection, mapping of climbing routes, development of a communication network between climbers and land managers, providing volunteers to assist with maintenance of trails, trailheads, and related facilities, providing training opportunities for trail maintenance and proper bolting techniques, and notify the BLM of illegal trail construction or intentional vandalism to public lands in any form.

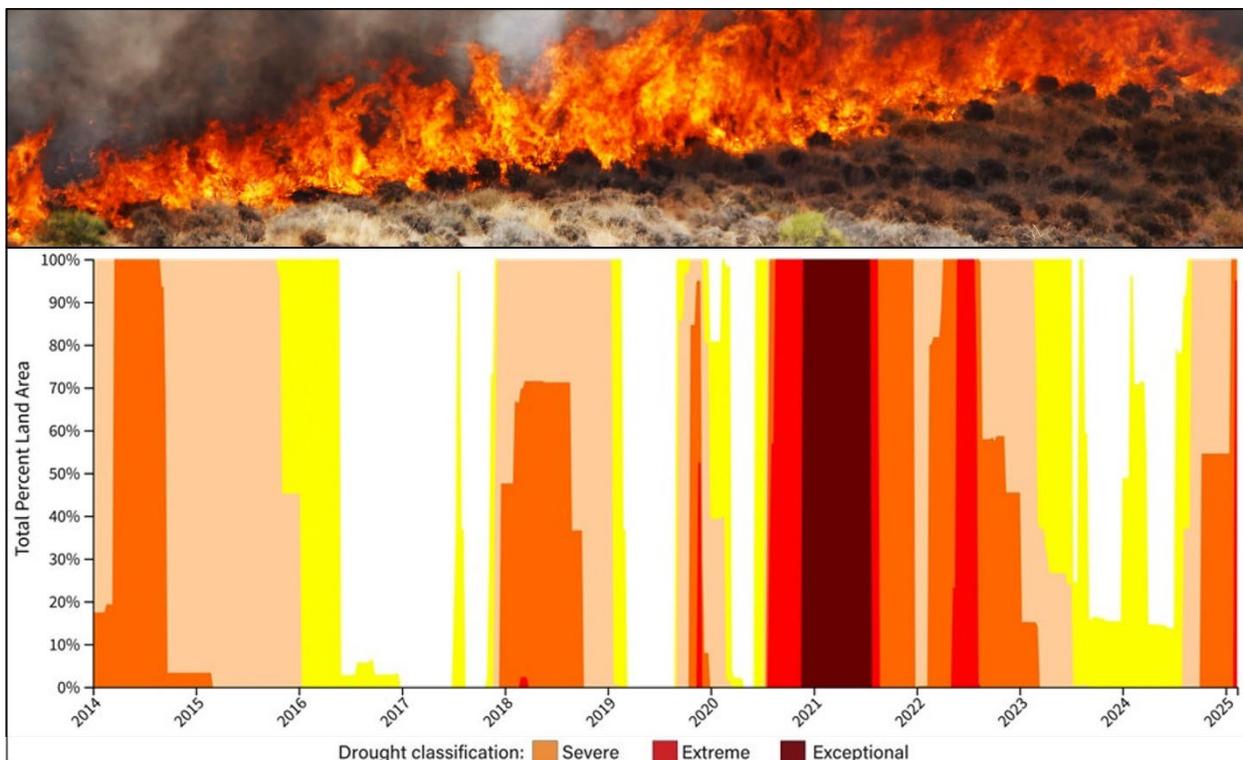
The BLM continues to partner with the BCHA under an MOU that has existed since 2015. During FY24, park rangers and BCHA members worked to identify trail-related issues that impact the visitor experience for equestrian-related recreation and determine appropriate strategies to address these issues. This partnership continues to provide valuable information and strategic problem solving to realize the recreational values of the NCA.



Challenges

During FY24, the St. George Field Office filled a vacant NCA park ranger position, which provided for two park rangers to patrol and monitor 629,000 acres of public land. New, unauthorized OHV trails were pioneered in areas of the NCA which Congress mandated as “Designated Road Areas” where all public motorized vehicle travel is restricted to specific designated routes within those areas (Public Law 111-11, Section 1975). A small number of new, unauthorized dispersed campsites were also created, particularly near popular climbing sites in the NCA. These user-created campsites had no metal fire-rings, potentially increasing the risk of new wildfire starts in critical habitat for the threatened Mojave desert tortoise and other at-risk species.

Large-scale wildfires (e.g., 2006) and drought (e.g., during 2020–2021) in the NCA (see figure below) have a serious impact on native plant communities and wildlife, including threatened Mojave desert tortoise, via damage to habitat, mortality, and reduced recruitment and population sizes.



Visitors

In FY2024, digital traffic/visitor counters at multiple locations in the NCA recorded 87,605 visits, an increase of 4,105 over fiscal year 2023. Since designation in 2009, the NCA has become an increasingly popular destination for rock climbing, camping, and UTV/4x4 riding on a network of unpaved roads. Welcome Springs, Bulldog Knolls, Kelly's Rock, and Woodbury Crags provide world class climbing opportunities. More than 70 climbs ranging in difficulty from 5.7 to 5.14 are easily accessible via short hikes from the Mojave Desert Joshua Tree Road Scenic Backway in the NCA.

During the spring and fall months, tent and RV campers regularly used the 38 designated dispersed campsites with metal fire rings that are located along maintained backcountry roads throughout the NCA. Visitors can easily find campsite locations by stopping at any of the 11 information kiosks in the NCA, each with an orientation map that shows the campsites and points of interest.

Thirty-nine Special Recreation Permit holders operate in the NCA and offer commercial guiding services for rock climbing, nature photography workshops, and hunting for upland game birds, desert bighorn sheep, and mule deer. Roads within the NCA are part of the racecourse for a long-distance mountain biking event held annually each spring.



Partnerships

The following partners assisted NCA staff with resource conservation, monitoring, and restoration projects: National Park Service-Lake Mead National Recreation Area's Song Dog Native Plant Nursery, American Conservation Experience, The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Lands Foundation, and Conserve Southwest Utah (staff and volunteers shown in figure below).

In partnership with NCA staff, biologists from the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources completed annual population and habitat monitoring for mule deer, Gambel's quail, mourning dove, bighorn sheep, desert sucker, and Virgin spinedace in the NCA.



Science

Under the direction of the NCA Biologist, Conserve Southwest Utah (CSU) recruited and trained 88 volunteers to collect data on threatened Mojave desert tortoise and BLM sensitive species distribution and habitat use in areas of the NCA where no prior field studies had been conducted. These volunteers walked belt transects spaced at 10-meter intervals to identify, collect GPS coordinates, and photograph tortoise burrows, scat, and any live tortoise encountered. They also helped NCA staff establish a camera trap study by installing infrared trail cameras at the entrances of active tortoise and kit fox burrows and along ephemeral washes to document burrow and habitat use.

In 2024, CSU volunteers donated 2,344 hours conducting field surveys, camera placement and servicing, and wildlife data downloading and organization. Their efforts included monitoring 26 burrow sites that resulted in 13 reptile, 15 mammal, and 22 bird species being recorded, including Mojave desert tortoise, and the following BLM Sensitive species: kit fox, Gila monster, Mojave rattlesnake, speckled rattlesnake, and western banded gecko.

This project supports the strategic goals of the BLM's Threatened and Endangered Species and Sensitive Species Programs by providing current and accurate information that will facilitate proactive conservation actions for at-risk species in the NCA.



Events

The Mojave Desert Joshua Tree Road Scenic Backcountry Byway and other unpaved roadways that cross the NCA were part of the racecourse for the annual 84 mile-long “True Grit - Gravel Grinder” mountain bike race, authorized by the BLM through a Special Recreation Permit. On March 23, 2024, 110 racers started and finished the race in St. George, Utah, riding the long course sections through the NCA (see photo below).





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Color Country District Office
Bureau of Land Management
St. George Field Office
345 E. Riverside Drive
St. George, Utah 84790
Phone: 435-688-3200

Report compiled by: Jason R. West, Field Manager; John Kellam, Biologist; Robert Wells, Assistant Field Manager; and Stephanie Trujillo, Lands and Realty Specialist

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