



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

**New Mexico**  
2024: Annual Manager's Report

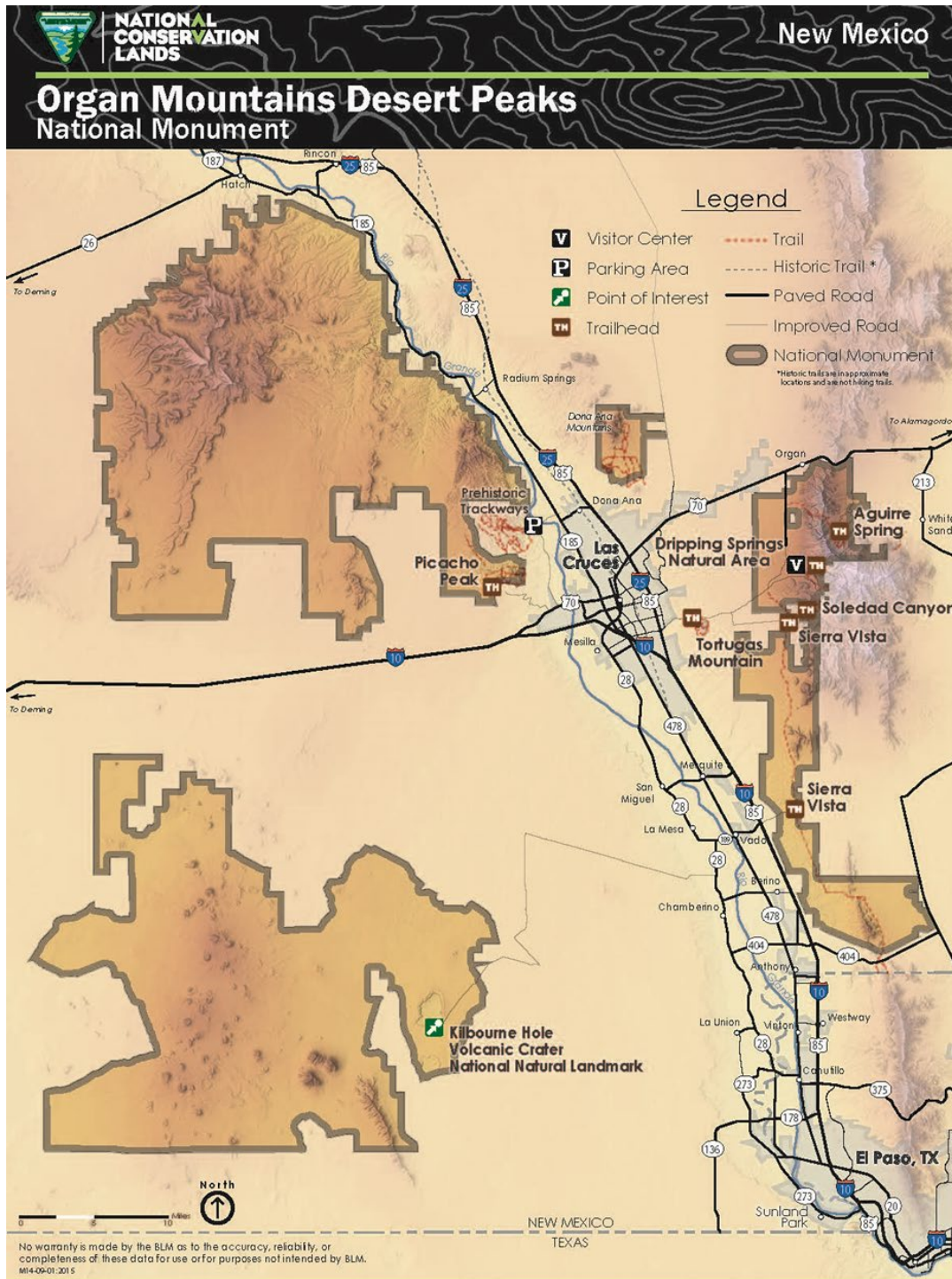
# Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks

National Monument





# Map



# Accomplishments

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During the past fiscal year, one of the most significant workloads for the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument (Monument) was the continued development of the Monument's Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/FEIS). During the fiscal year, there were several public comment periods for the PRMP/FEIS. Monument staff and its contractor, AECOM, hosted multiple virtual and in-person meetings to engage with and gather input from the interested public. The Record of Decision for the EIS will be signed in 2025.

In August 2024, the Monument installed four electronic remote off-grid fee collection kiosks at Dripping Springs Natural Area and Aguirre Spring Recreation Area. These kiosks provide visitors with the convenience of paying for day-use passes and camping fees via credit card. While standard recreation use permits for cash payments remain available and accepted, the Monument has already observed an increase in fee compliance following the implementation of this new payment option.

Following are FY24 accomplishments related to livestock grazing in the Monument:

- 5 earthen tanks were cleaned out on the Sierra Alta Allotment.
- 1.1 mile (5,762 feet) of new allotment boundary fence was constructed on the Doña Ana Mountains Allotment along with the installation of one new cattleguard.
- Restore New Mexico vegetation treatment monitoring was completed on the Mimms Well Allotment by the Jornada Agricultural Research Station. One plot was read to monitor effects of the 2008 Tebuthiuron vegetation treatment totaling 1,973 acres.



**Monument staff pose next to the new kiosks.**

# Challenges

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Nearly 75% of the Monument's 239,596 acres of designated Wilderness are located within the Potrillo Mountains, a remote and rugged landscape near the U.S./Mexico border that has experienced an increase in cross-border violations in recent years. This has raised safety concerns for staff working in the area, leading to a local policy of pairing up while on duty. Recently staff reported vandalized wilderness and monument boundary signs, as well as unauthorized UTV use on closed routes. The Monument's park rangers continue to work to inventory, replace, repair, standardize, and update wilderness boundary and road closure signage in all ten wilderness areas.

Over the past year, the integrity of cultural resources within the Monument has continued to be adversely impacted, due in part to visitor recreation (foot traffic, vehicular traffic) and cattle activity (hoof action). Historic structures in remote sites and in highly visited areas are frequently targeted by vandalism, often requiring careful remediation. Recreational activities like campfires, bouldering, and graffiti have damaged archaeological sites, including prehistoric rock shelters and caves. Monument staff are actively addressing these concerns through public education initiatives and installation of appropriate signage.

Another significant challenge in Fiscal Year 2024 was increased UTV use, mountain biking, and recreational shooting in the Doña Ana Mountains. With the expansion of residential developments near the area, these types of uses are expected to increase, potentially leading to more user conflicts and safety concerns. To mitigate conflicts, the goal is to promote responsible recreation. To do this, the Monument is focusing on travel and transportation planning, public education, and user group engagement.

A damaged allotment boundary fence between Fort Bliss and the Monument allowed livestock to encroach onto the military reservation. This caused problems with facilities on Ft. Bliss and leading to animals being hit on Highway 213. In October 2023, BLM met with the Command staff from Fort Bliss to find a solution. In Fiscal Year 2024, Fort Bliss began replacing and repairing the fence, with 1.4 miles still left to fix. They are also building an additional fence as a backup barrier. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is working on an agreement with Fort Bliss and the local grazing permittees to help maintain the fence in the future.

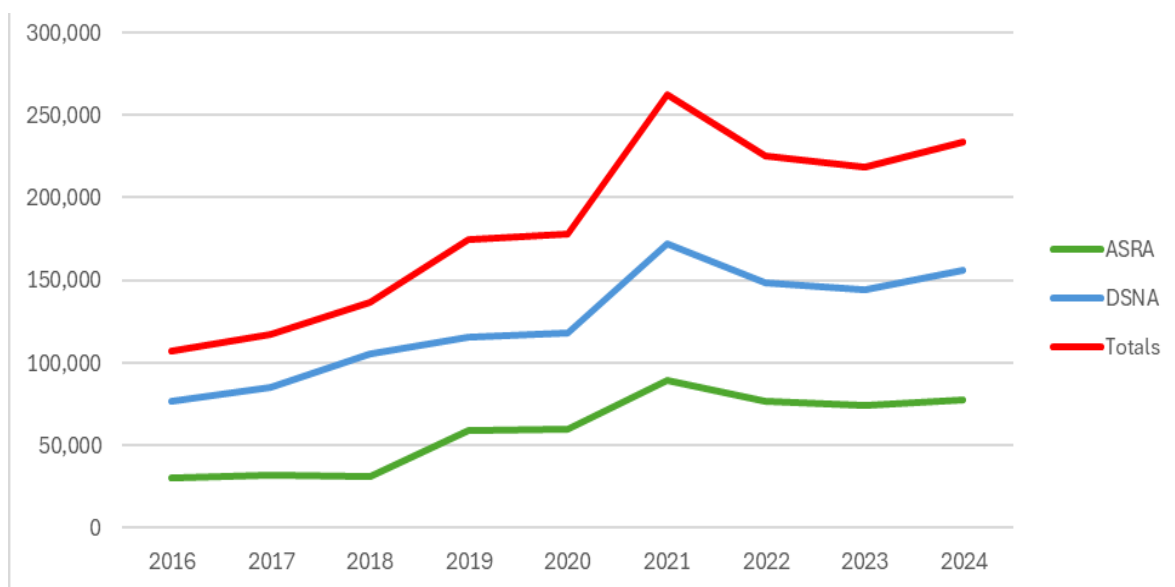
# Visitors

This past summer, particularly at the Aguirre Spring Recreation Area and Campground, there was a significant increase in unhoused campers. This was mainly due to a change in the City of Las Cruces' policy, which led to many displaced, unhoused individuals with vehicles to relocate to Aguirre Spring Recreation Area and other dispersed camping sites within the Monument. Issues arose that included non-payment of fees, drug and alcohol abuse, and uncontrolled pets, leading to user conflicts and some citations. There were also more reports of campers overstaying the 14-day limit in dispersed camping areas such as Modoc Mine Loop, Sierra Vista Trailheads, and Baylor Pass Trailhead.

This year, the Monument launched a new system to promote outdoor education by sending signup forms to fourth-grade teachers for pre-scheduling park ranger-guided field trips. This allowed the BLM and its partner, the Friends of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks (Friends), to bring a few hundred fourth graders to the Monument to learn about public lands. If staffing remains stable, this system is expected to increase student participation by 300-400 percent in future years.

Fiscal Year 2024 saw a very small increase in visitation across the Monument from the previous year with an estimated total of 613,645 visits across all sites, including developed recreation areas. This is an increase of 391 visits from 2023. Visitation to the Monument's developed recreation sites saw a greater increase in 2024, equating to an increase of 12,243 visits to Dripping Spring Natural Area (DSNA) and an increase of 2,869 visits to Aguirre Spring Recreation Area (ASRA). The total visitation at both sites of both sites in 2024 was 233,349.

**Developed Recreation Area Visitation**





# Partnerships

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For Fiscal Year 2024, the Friends continued to work closely with BLM staff in providing outreach and educational services to the visiting public. Events and programs include an Artist-in-Residence program in September and May, as well as the continued success of the BLM/Friends docent program. Through the docent program, volunteers with the Friends attend the National Association of Interpretation's Certified Interpretive Guide training, and then, with guidance from BLM specialists, develop and deliver guided interpretive hikes for the Monument. Over the course of Fiscal Year 2024, the docents led 19 hikes which reached approximately 321 members of the public. Additionally, the Friends provided support for the Monument's May events by helping design a logo, supplying tacos for the "Tacos and Trails" event, a cake for the anniversary celebration, and more.

Monument staff coordinated with the Public Lands Interpretative Association on planning a week-long, seventh-grade, girls camp which had a series of fun and educational outings to Monument lands. The activities included a hike guided by the Monument archaeologist and critter chats with BLM wildlife biologists.



**Monument tokens and visitors celebrating the monument's anniversary.**

Monument Park rangers worked with a crew from Conservation Corps New Mexico (CCNM) on several recreation projects throughout the year. The rangers supervised CCNM on projects that included fence removal in the Doña Ana Mountains, trail work on the La Maria Trail, trail work on Pine Tree Loop at Aguirre Spring Recreation Area, and maintenance of a campsite at Aguirre Spring. The CCNM crew also worked to reduce erosion issues on the Dripping Springs Trail.

# Science

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The BLM Las Cruces District Office concluded an Interagency Agreement with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to conduct baseline surveys for bats across all units of the Monument. This effort served as the first formal study to establish baseline data for bat communities in the Monument. The results of this study will help guide future management decisions and improve understanding of bat habitat.

Researchers from the University of Texas at Arlington conducted specimen collection for a project exploring epidermal gland evolution in whiptail lizards (*Aspidoscelis*) across the southwestern United States. Through this study, the research team aims to understand how genetic mechanisms influence the whiptail's chemical communication. Information gathered from the study will contribute to the BLMs knowledge of whiptail lizard populations across the region.

To strengthen collaboration with Tribal Nations, the Monument started an archaeological study of Indigenous rock art sites in two canyons. Conducted with Tribes that have ancestral or cultural ties to the area, the project aims to document and analyze these sites with meaningful tribal input and participation.



**Wildlife Biologist holds a bat (Yuma myotis).**

# Outreach and Special Events

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This year the Monument continued to offer visitors a diversity of outdoor recreational opportunities and special events. There were five active Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) in the Monument for 2024.

These included:

- The Dangerbird 250 bikepacking event – A non-competitive event to support cycling within the Monument that follows a 250-mile route called the Monumental Loop.
- The Horny Toad Hustle – An intermediate mountain bike race with a long (14 mile) and a short (10 mile) racecourse.
- Sessions Climbing – Private company offering guided climbing at the Rough and Ready Hills.
- Fort Bliss Outdoor Recreation – Guided climbing at the Rough and Ready Hills by Fort Bliss Recreation Program.
- Southwest Expeditions – A local company providing guided outdoor recreation experiences across the Monument.

In September, the Monument coordinated with the organizers of the annual New Mexico Outdoor Economic Conference to permit a myriad of tours on the Monument. Conference participants had the option to join guided hikes on the Monument's trails or visit its breathtaking natural landmarks.

Community outreach and public programming remain vital to the Monument's mission. Throughout the year, staff participated in or hosted several outreach events, including:

- Managing a booth at the Water Festival where several hundred fourth graders learned the critical role water plays in our lives.
- Hosting a fossil activity at Math and Science Night at Sunrise Elementary for elementary students and their families.
- Attending several career fairs at local schools.
- Co-hosting a Migratory Bird Day bird walk with the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, as well as a bird banding demonstration with a local master bird bander.

Lastly, for a second year in a row, in November 2023, BLM staff hosted an archaeological fair at Dripping Springs Natural Area. In collaboration with numerous community and regional partners, the fair was a free educational event designed to celebrate and highlight the cultural heritage of Southern New Mexico and West Texas. Visitors had plenty of hands-on activities, demonstrations, exhibits, and booths to enjoy throughout the day. The day's activities included adobe bricking making, atlatl throwing, a petroglyph in plaster activity, wool spinning demonstrations, a blacksmith display, and much more!



# Monumental Anniversary

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The Monument celebrated two very special anniversaries this year: the 5-year anniversary of the establishment of the Monument's 10 wilderness areas via the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation Act of 2019, and the 10-year anniversary of the designation of the Monument by Presidential Proclamation 9131.

During the month of May, in celebration of the 10-year anniversary of the Monument, staff and volunteers, along with the Friends, planned over 25 outreach and interpretive public programs and social media posts. Events included interpretive guided hikes to stunning locations around the Monument, presentations on the Monument's natural and heritage resources, a ranch tour led by a BLM range permittee, an Artist-in-Residence workshop, Bark Ranger hikes, sunset mountain bike rides in the Doña Anas, and more! Alongside these events, the BLM Las Cruces District shared daily posts on its Facebook page, each highlighting a different unique resource, object, or value of the Monument. The weekend prior to the start of May's anniversary events, BLM employees and volunteers staffed an outreach table at a local festival known as !Mira! Las Cruces. It was a fun, high-energy evening, where they made several hundred contacts with visitors from around the region to promote the Monument and the upcoming May events.

The public programming for the Monument's 10-year anniversary had 948 people in attendance. Social media posts had over 4000 reactions and reached over half a million people! The celebrations for Monument were some of the most successful and ambitious public outreach events that the Las Cruces District Office has hosted over the years!



**Monument staff and volunteers in front of portal sign.**



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

## **Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks**

### **National Monument**

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<https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/new-mexico/organ-mountains-desert-peaks-national-monument>

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