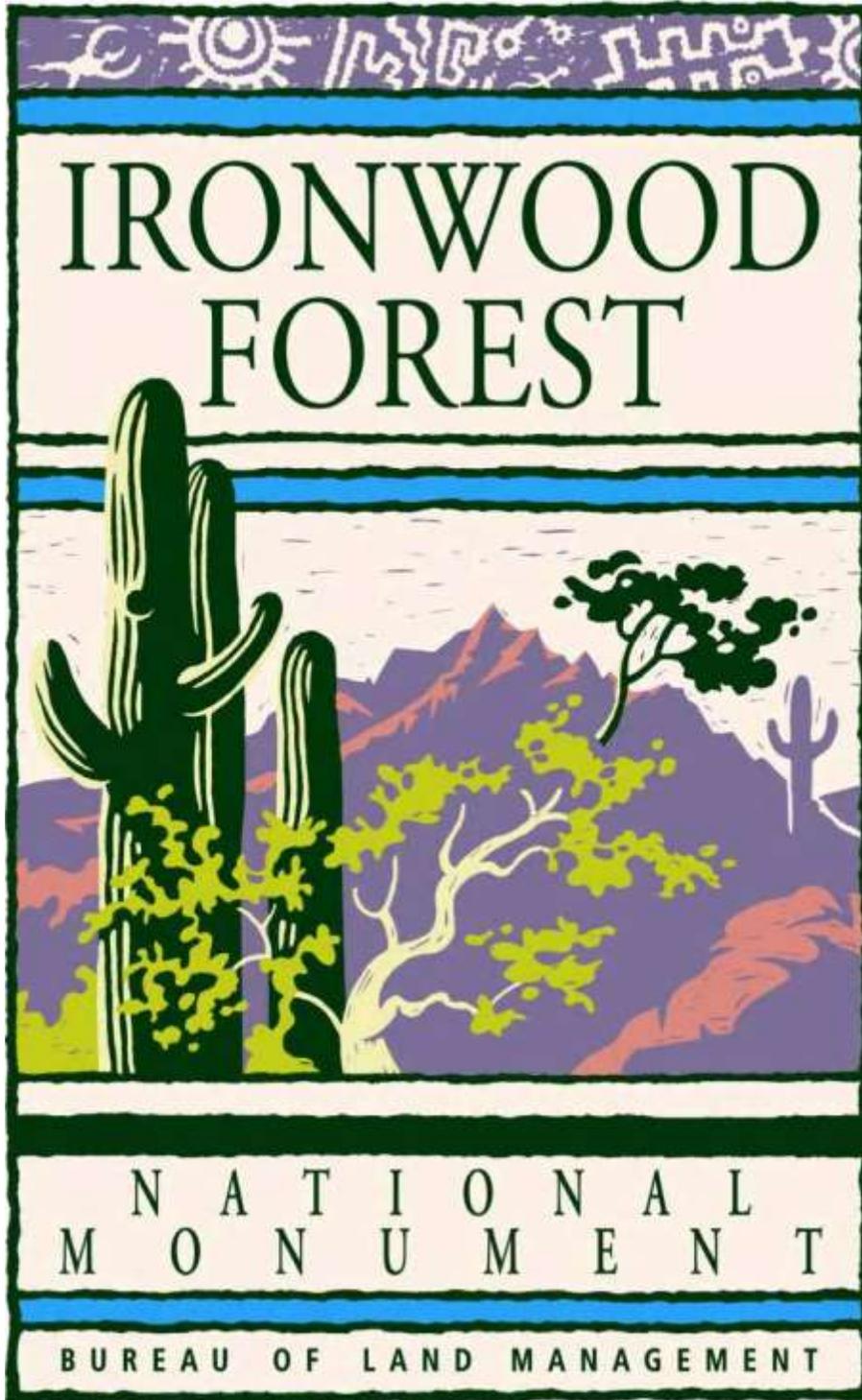


BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM



**Ironwood Forest National Monument
FY 2009 Manager's Report**

Introduction

- Unit: Ironwood Forest National Monument
Tucson Field Office
Gila District
BLM Arizona State Office
- Contact Information: 12661 E. Broadway Blvd.
Tucson, AZ 85748
(520) 258-7200
www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/blm_special_areas/natmon/ironwood.html
- Manager: Mark Lambert, Monument Manager
- Established: Presidential Proclamation #7265, June 9, 2000
- Acreage: 128,398 BLM acres
- Annual visitation: 19,300 visits

1. Natural and Heritage Resources Conditions

Natural resources trends: The overall upland, xeroriparian, biological diversity, special status species, and other natural resource trends on the IFNM are stable. In 2009, monitoring was conducted on three allotments through a contract with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension service, and upland assessments were conducted on another three allotments covering 6 of the 11 allotments in the monument. Field inspections were completed on all eleven allotments. The population of the Endangered Nichols Turks head cactus is monitored annually by researchers from the University of Arizona who reported finding a stable population in 2009.

Approximately 54 non-native plant species occur on IFNM. A number of these plants have special adaptations that allow them to quickly invade and out-compete many native species. Species that pose the greatest threats include buffelgrass, Sahara mustard, and Bermuda grass. Buffelgrass poses the greatest risk to the IFNM through increased risk of catastrophic fire and crowding out of native vegetation. BLM enlisted the help of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in 2009 to complete an inventory and assessment of buffelgrass in the IFNM that will indicate the rate of spread and help BLM prioritize treatment. A major interagency effort is underway to reduce the problem in the region, and additional multi-year funding will be necessary to effectively address the infestation.

Heritage resources trends: Historic resource conditions vary from good to fair to declining. Within the past five years, sites have been damaged from target shooting, natural erosion, and unauthorized roads related to illegal drug and immigrant smuggling. ARPA violations have also occurred, such as the theft of petroglyph boulders from a prehistoric site. One

significant site on the IFNM has enjoyed greater protection since a boulder blockade was placed around it in FY 2007 to prevent illegal smugglers from driving over it. No breaches have been reported or observed. Cultural properties continue to be monitored by Arizona Site Stewards, BLM archaeologists, and BLM Rangers. Within the last two years, BLM has contracted archeological surveys on and around about 90% of the roads within the IFNM, giving us a very good picture of the archeological resources in these sensitive areas. Travel management on the IFNM has been modified as a result.

Land Health Assessments: All of IFNM's acreage has been assessed using land health standards, and almost 100% is meeting standards. There is one area on the Agua Blanca allotment that is not meeting standards because of impacts from recreational shooting and OHV use. These activities have removed vegetation in the area and have led to an increase in surface erosion within a cultural resource management area. In 2009, all allotments within the IFNM were field checked and three underwent new assessments. For the assessments, ecological sites and the key areas within them were reviewed using BLM's standard Upland Assessment procedures.

Inventory: BLM enlisted the help of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in 2009 to complete an inventory and assessment of buffelgrass in the IFNM that will indicate the rate of spread and help BLM prioritize treatment. Within the last two years, BLM has contracted archeological surveys on and around about 90% of the roads within the IFNM, giving us a very good picture of the archeological resources in these sensitive areas. Recreation site inventory also occurs on an annual basis.

Restoration: Landscape and site-specific restoration is currently BLM's top priority for the IFNM. In 2009, BLM conducted restoration projects on 235 acres of the monument infested by buffelgrass. Sixty acres of buffelgrass were sprayed with herbicide as part of an effort to control this invasive species. Contracts have been let to treat an additional 40 acres in 2010 that could not be treated in 2009 because of lack of rainfall. Buffelgrass was removed manually by volunteer groups on about 175 acres. This includes about 50 acres of buffelgrass invasion within the Waterman ACEC in an area occupied by an endangered species of cactus.

Restoration of areas impacted by illegal smuggling activities on the IFNM is a huge undertaking and a major program for IFNM management and staff. In 2009, as in several years past, BLM relied heavily on the services provided by two Student Conservation Associates (SCAs) that were hired to locate and restore these areas. SCAs alone cleaned up 10,690 lbs. of trash and 97 tires left by illegal drug and immigrant smugglers. They also organized and worked with a variety of organizations and volunteer groups to do cleanup, repairs, and restoration, including a crew from the Town of Marana that performs clean-up work on a weekly basis. In 2009 the Marana crew collected 24,690 lbs. of trash and removed and disposed of 162 tires.

In addition to clearing areas of waste and debris, IFNM staff and volunteers engaged in road restoration and rehabilitation of areas impacted by illegal intrusions. Illegal roads totaling over half a mile were rehabilitated.



Illegal off-road intrusion; before and after



Illegal off-road intrusion; before and after



Undocumented migrant site cleanup and restoration; before and after

2. Recreation Facilities, Roads, and Trails Conditions

Overview: Physical facilities in the monument are limited to access roads and trails and minimal ancillary improvements to support dispersed recreational opportunities in an undeveloped, semi-primitive recreation setting (i.e., parking turnouts and rustic campfire rings). The road system includes several routes maintained by Pima and Pinal counties, which are in fair condition. The majority of the roads are primitive, single lane and minimally maintained for resource access, and suitable only for use by high clearance, 4WD, or off-highway vehicle use. There are no recreation facility developments.

Assets in the IFNM include roads and trails, boundary fencing, and small earthen dams impounding water for livestock and wildlife. None of these are currently included in the Tucson Field Office Asset Business Plan, but will be added once the Resource Management Plan is finalized. Assets and corresponding Asset Priority Index/Facility Condition Index will be reported once the Asset Business Plan is updated to reflect assets and needs in the monument. The update is planned to be completed in 2010.

Construction: There were no Bureau construction projects in the monument in 2009.

Maintenance: Maintenance work in 2009 consisted of repairing fences and vehicle barriers to prevent vehicle use in closed areas. While no deferred maintenance program has yet been identified for IFNM facilities, the Tucson Field Office deferred maintenance plan will be updated this year to reflect the needs in the IFNM. The monument's roads have been only minimally maintained during the past ten years, and maintenance needs will be defined once the transportation plan is completed following completion of the Resource Management Plan. Minor road maintenance has been provided by grazing permittees on some roads to facilitate access to range improvements, with minimal maintenance provided by the BLM. After the Resource Management Plan is completed, Monument roads will be added to the Facility Asset Management System and placed on a maintenance schedule appropriate for the specific type of each route.

Signage: An interim signing plan approved for the IFNM in 2003 guides installation of boundary, regulatory, informational and safety signing. A final signing plan is pending approval of the Resource Management Plan. Portal signs are installed at the main monument entrances along principal access roads. The portal signs meet NLCS unit signing requirements. Kiosks have not been installed, though there are plans to install several in 2010. Signing is in conformance with the BLM Sign Manual. BLM installed several new signs in 2009 warning visitors of illegal smuggling activity.



New caution signs were installed in the IFNM in 2009 in response to an increase in illegal activity and encounters on the monument.

3. Outreach, Environmental Education, Interpretation, and Volunteers

Outreach: There is very little direct contact with the visiting public due to a small IFNM field staff, safety restrictions due to widespread illegal activity, and the presence of essentially no facilities in the IFNM. Presence of BLM personnel on the IFNM is minimal, with the exception of regular patrols by Law Enforcement Rangers. While portal signs are posted on most primary entrances into the monument, jurisdictional issues have prevented BLM from posting signs in some key areas. Signage within the monument is limited, and kiosks are almost nonexistent. Most signage within the monument warns of the prevalence of illegal smuggling activities, or educates motorized users to stay on roads. IFNM is working in 2010 to update and improve onsite information available to visitors through installation of kiosks. Visitor contacts do occur through various efforts including field patrols, outreach at Tucson's annual Ironwood Festival and the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show, and local news coverage on various events. IFNM also organizes several volunteer events throughout the year and advertises these through flyers and partnerships. We have found that planning and executing volunteer events offers abundant opportunities to do outreach.

A limited number of visitors do contact the Tucson Field Office prior to their visit to the IFNM. About 75% of all incoming calls to the Tucson Field Office front desk request information about the IFNM. In addition, a significant number of users retrieve information from the IFNM website (site visitation is tracked monthly by BLM). A rudimentary map of the IFNM is available on the website, which has been mentioned by several visitors as being the primary reference used for their visit to the area.

IFNM relies heavily on the Friends of Ironwood Forest (FIF) for community outreach beyond what we provide on the ground or in the office. Outreach is a core part of FIF's

mission and they have been successful at developing partnerships with local communities and other groups to increase awareness and support the mission of the IFNM.

Due to the high profile of border issues, the National Landscape Conservation System, and other issues related to the IFNM, BLM staff conducted numerous tours of the IFNM for the media, DOI and BLM officials, members of congress and congressional staffers, and others in 2009.

Visitor Center: There is currently no visitor center facility for the IFNM. BLM has had initial discussions with the Town of Marana about the potential for shared space or other joint partnering opportunities in the future, but no concrete plans have been developed.

Environmental education: Information geared toward youth was provided during several local festivals and events where IFNM set up a booth. Other environmental education events included the following:

On January 21-23, 2009, twenty-five high school student volunteers and six teachers from the Rocky Mountain Expeditionary School removed 42 bags of trash (580 lbs.) from a site near Cocoraque Butte, one of IFNM's premier archeological areas. In addition to cleaning up trash, the participants were also visited by speakers from five distinct groups offering different perspectives on border issues. Through interactive presentations, the speakers discussed issues ranging from undocumented migrant (UDM) activity and law enforcement to humanitarian and environmental issues along the US/Mexico border.



Students from the Rocky Mountain Expeditionary School clean up UDM garbage and listen to a presentation by a BLM Law Enforcement Ranger.

Interpretation: The primary message we try to deliver is focused on the unique biological resources of the monument and the fragility of the Sonoran Desert ecosystem. We also emphasize awareness of resource protection concerns, and the unique safety concerns related to illegal border activity affecting the monument and visitors. This message includes tips on how to minimize impacts to the resources while recreating, and avoiding encounters with borderland activity. On-site interpretation and public involvement in interpretation is limited, largely awaiting completion of the management plan.

Volunteers: IFNM’s volunteer program continues to grow, with total volunteer hours in 2009 quadrupling 2008 numbers. A variety of different volunteer projects occurred, including these highlights:

- Friends of the Ironwood Forest organized the very successful “Save the Watermans” project which consisted of numerous volunteer buffelgrass removal events, treating hundreds of acres.
- The Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, with help from local ranchers, Arizona Game and fish Department, and Friends of Ironwood Forest, constructed vehicle barriers to protect bighorn sheep and installed signs on unauthorized routes.
- Local and in-holder communities such as Red Hill Community and Silverbell Estates neighborhood groups participated in several cleanups of UDM trash and target shooting debris.
- The Southern Arizona Geocachers participated in a Public Lands Day service project on the IFNM. The group cleaned up a site impacted by dispersed picnicking and target shooting.
- Local ranchers worked on roads and cleaned up refuse left by illegal smuggling and target shooting activity
- Humane Borders, a humanitarian aid group working in the borderland areas, contributed over 200 volunteer hours, cleaning up trash in remote locations.
- Sonoran Desert Weed Whackers, the Sierra Club, Friends of Ironwood Forest, and Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society participated many buffelgrass removal projects.
- Friends of the Ironwood Forest organized volunteers to complete restoration of unauthorized routes, brushing out vehicle tracks and planting dead native plants.



Volunteers from Humane Borders clean up UDM garbage on the IFNM.



Volunteers from Friends of Ironwood Forest and a local church group clean up a target shooting site on the IFNM.

Volunteers logged 4,379 hours in 2009 working on the above projects and several others. Volunteers consisted of members of 15 organized groups and 26 unaffiliated individuals. Groups included the Arizona Site Stewards, Arizona Native Plant Society, Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, Dove Mountain Hiking Club, Unitarian Congregation of Northwest Tucson, Friends of the Ironwood Forest, Sierra Club, the National Conservation System Foundation, Southern Arizona Geocachers, Tucson Weed Whackers, Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society, Red Hill Community, Silverbell Estates, Rocky Mountain Expeditionary School and Humane Borders.



Members of the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society did several projects on the IFNM this year in cooperation with BLM, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and local ranchers.

4. Science

The IFNM has consistently drawn scientific inquiry since its designation in 2000, and 2009 was no exception. We received and approved several new requests for research on the IFNM, primarily focused on the monument's unique vegetative resources. Other projects are looking into the movement of migrants through the area, and the effects of road density on wildlife in the Sonoran Desert. See attached Excel table "Science" for a complete list of ongoing science projects taking place within the IFNM.



A member of University of Arizona's Nichols Turks head cactus research team surveys and measures the endangered cactus in the IFNM.

5. Partnerships

BLM relies heavily on partners to achieve management goals and objectives for the IFNM. From migrant trash clean-up to accompanying park rangers on patrols for safety reasons, there is critical work that would never be accomplished were it not for our partners and their willingness to contribute to the mission of the IFNM. BLM is developing a major, long-term partnership with Friends of Ironwood Forest to achieve a variety of goals, including restoration of impacted lands and community outreach. IFNM also partners consistently with other government agencies such as the Border Patrol and Arizona Game and Fish Department. See attached Excel table "Partnerships" for a complete list of partnership activities in the IFNM.

6. Planning and Business Practices

Planning: The IFNM Draft RMP/EIS was published in March 2007, and the Proposed IFNM RMP/Final EIS is currently being prepared for publication in April 2010. Work on the RMP in FY09 has consisted of developing responses to over 12,000 comments received on

the Draft, and conducting additional analysis and studies to support/revisit the controversial RMP preferred decision to prohibit target shooting throughout the monument. BLM also made significant changes to the RMP to better reflect its focus on the protection of monument objects as identified in the IFNM Presidential Proclamation. The Record of Decision and Approved Plan should be published in the fall of 2010. This planning effort will also include the completion of a travel and transportation management plan.

Budget and Staffing: IFNM operates on a modest budget and a small staff of four. All employees assigned to the IFNM contribute significant time toward other lands managed by the Tucson Field Office. The IFNM Manager also oversees the management of the Arizona National Scenic Trail and the 213,000 acre Middle Gila Canyons area, a popular dispersed recreation management area near the Town of Florence and Superior. The lone IFNM Park Ranger is also assigned to Tucson urban lands, three wilderness areas, the Arizona National Scenic Trail, two developed campgrounds, and the Middle Gila Canyons area. The Outdoor Recreation Planner devotes most of his time the Middle Gila Canyons area by necessity and demand, and the IFNM Natural Resource Specialist also contributes significant hours to the field office range program. Most of the hours devoted to these other areas are not paid for with IFNM funds.

Critical staffing needs for the IFNM include an additional Park Ranger, Land Use Planner, and Archeologist. For safety reasons, BLM personnel (with the exception of Law Enforcement Rangers) do not enter the IFNM alone. This greatly hampers BLM's ability to establish an on-the-ground presence in the IFNM, especially on the weekend, when two employees are rarely able to patrol together. An additional Park Ranger would address this issue. IFNM did staff one Land Use Planner until that position was vacated in August 2008. Since then, the position was taken off of the Table of Organization and plan development has suffered as a result. Right now, the IFNM Manager is responsible for RMP project management. Finally, the incredible and diverse archeological resources on the IFNM, the boundary shared with the Tohono O'odham Nation, and the area's rich, misunderstood history constitute a critical need for an IFNM-dedicated archeologist. The Tucson Field Office's current archeologist is divided between three major units of the National Landscape Conservation System, in addition to other Tucson Field Office lands. Because of this, virtually no archeological work has been done on the IFNM in about three years, with the exception of cultural resource inventories for monument transportation routes completed under contract.

Much of the work that occurs on the IFNM is funded by the Southern Arizona Project (SAP) annual allocation. This work is all geared toward remediation of impacts caused by illegal immigrants. The Tucson Field Office received \$260,000 in SAP funds in 2009, of which \$130,000 was directed toward the IFNM. The majority of IFNM's allocation pays for two to three Restoration Interns (supplied by the Student Conservation Association) that scout for and mitigate the effects of smuggling activity in the monument.

7. Manager's Corner

Border-related issues

Human and drug smuggling activity on the IFNM has an enormous effect on our day-to-day operations and influences just about everything we do on the IFNM. The IFNM is on a highly traveled corridor for undocumented immigrants, who travel on foot, bicycles, and in vehicles. While the area has historically seen less drug trafficking than in other surrounding areas, this activity increased sharply in the IFNM in 2008 and continued at high levels in 2009. This is of great concern to BLM because of the increased violence and aggressive behavior typically associated with drug smuggling. As a result of this increase, BLM personnel were restricted from entering about 70% of the monument for 10 months in 2009. This restriction, coupled with our office policy that all non-law enforcement BLM employees go in pairs when working in the IFNM, has greatly hampered our work and presence on the IFNM, particularly on weekends when visitation is greatest. We currently employ only one park ranger and he cannot work in the IFNM alone. We continually work around this problem with volunteers or other accompaniment but it does lessen our effectiveness on the IFNM.

Money provided through the Southern Arizona Project has allowed BLM to hire 2 to 3 full-time Student Conservation Associates for the last several years. These SCAs spend nearly 100% of their time searching for, inventorying, monitoring, and cleaning up trash on the IFNM related to illegal human smuggling. Their work is invaluable to us, as attested by the fact that even with this amount of labor solely dedicated to the UDM trash problem, we are always finding more. We rely heavily on the work of SCAs to accomplish our mission.

Urban-interface and mixed ownership

Due to its close proximity to Tucson, development is increasingly encroaching on the IFNM boundary. While building has recently slowed, over 2,000 houses are projected to be built in an area adjoining the monument. Five thousand homes in that area are projected over the next several years. This will increase visitation as well as illegal dumping, vandalism, and other illegal, harmful uses. Damage from target shooting and off-road traveling is already significant in the IFNM; as population increases on the outskirts of the IFNM, these problems will be exacerbated. However, urban interface can provide major benefits as well. We are currently working with the Town of Marana, whose boundaries abut most of the primary entrances to the IFNM, to potentially establish that community as a portal community to the IFNM. This could include a visitor center or shared space to facilitate our work in the IFNM. Our office is currently located about 1 ¾ hour drive from the monument boundary, so field-going staff spends a great deal of time traveling to and from the office. We are also working with them to provide shooting and off-road opportunities to the public that would be an alternative to shooting and off-roading on nearby monument lands.

Another characteristic of the IFNM with both advantages and disadvantages is its high level of mixed ownership. Approximately 33% of the land within the monument boundary is owned by the State of Arizona or private individuals. This poses potential threats from development and other incompatible uses. We engage in frequent communication with the Arizona State Land Department and private landowners in order to influence actions that are

compatible with IFNM management goals, but BLM’s lack of jurisdiction on such a large scale does present regular challenges. However, it also offers opportunities to work closely with private landowners who care deeply about the condition of the IFNM because they are surrounded by it. BLM shares numerous common goals with these neighbors and we have fostered positive working relationships with many of them.

With so much mixed ownership, opportunities for acquisition and consolidation of BLM lands do exist. Indeed, this is identified as a top priority in the IFNM Draft RMP. There are some willing sellers on the monument, including an opportunity for exchange with Pima County. IFNM management and staff plan to focus more on potential acquisitions in 2010 and coming years.



Ironwood Forest National Monument’s Ragged Top Mountain

