



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

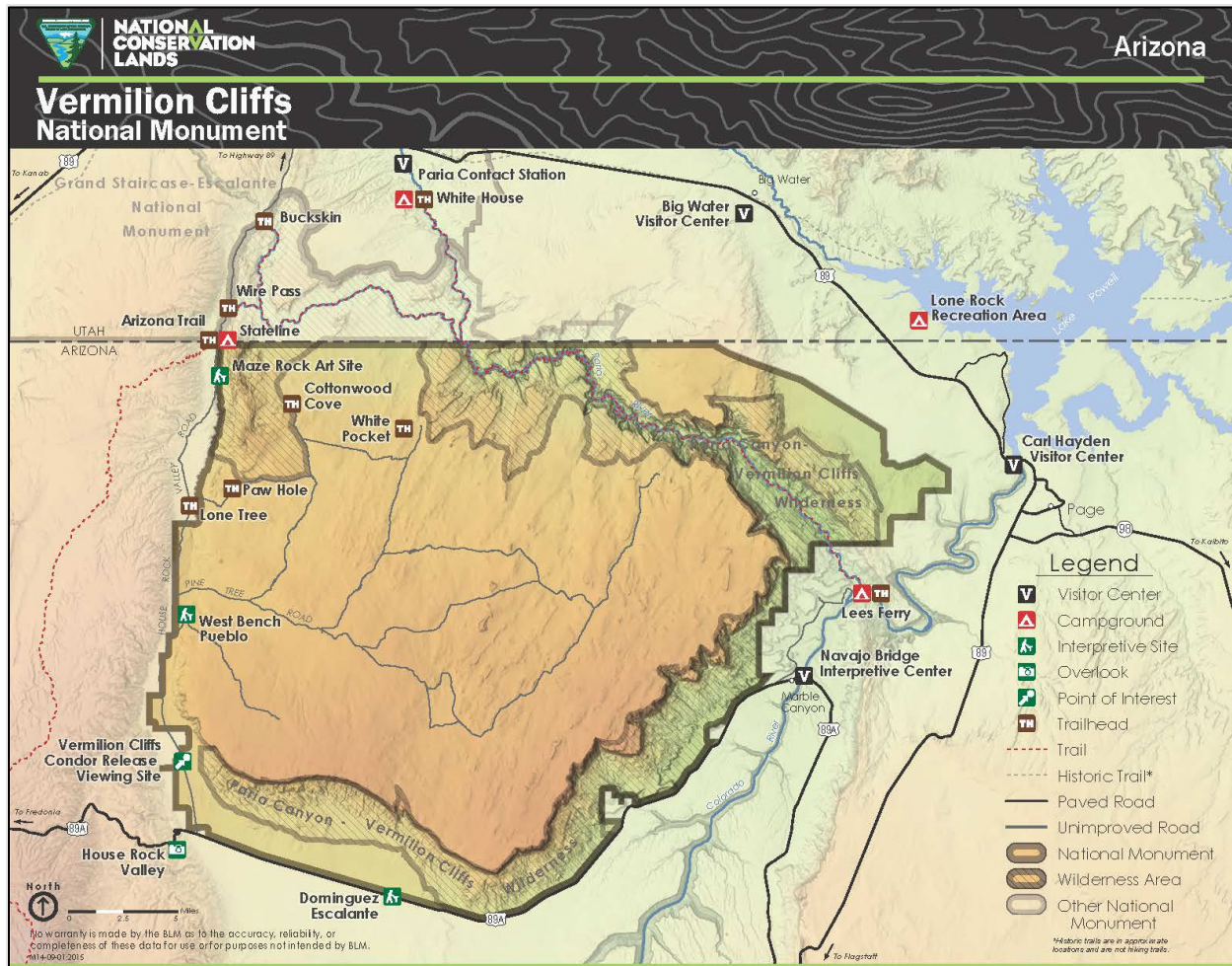
Arizona
2022: Annual Manager's Report

Vermilion Cliffs

National Monument



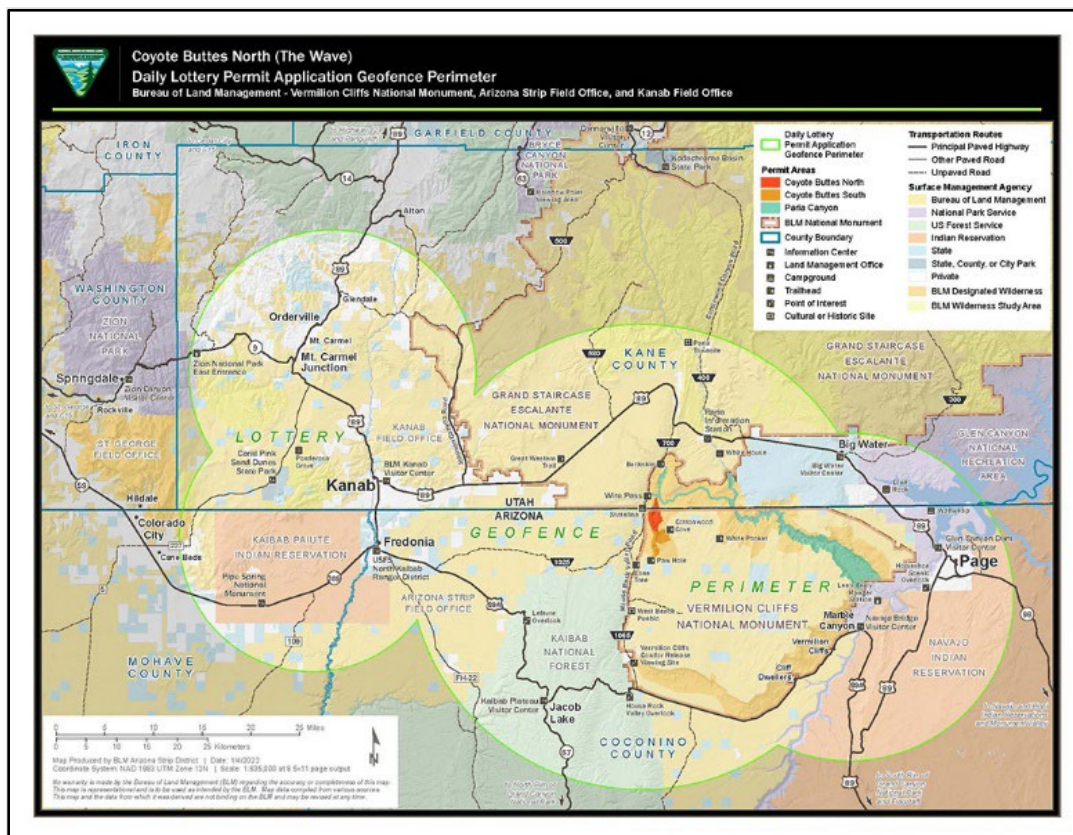
Map



Accomplishments

The Vermilion Cliffs National Monument (Monument) had many accomplishments this year, one of which is listed below.

On March 15, 2022, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) implemented a new mobile geofence system for obtaining daily lottery permits to Coyote Buttes North, where the Wave is located. The BLM Arizona and Utah worked with city and county governments, as well as Recreation.gov to pilot this new, innovative way for the public to apply for and secure a permit. The mobile geofence system allows applicants to use the location-based service to apply for a permit to hike to the Wave from their cell phone or other location-enabled mobile device, while maintaining elements of the legacy “walk-in” system. Permits are only available to people using the system within intentionally set geographic boundaries (see boundaries in map below). This new system provides a safer and more convenient process than the in-person lottery system, where hundreds of hopeful lottery applicants would wait in a designated facility. Upon successful submission of an application for a permit within the designated geofence area, applicants will continue to receive notifications while they explore the surrounding communities and public lands. Successful applicants are required to pick up permits within an allotted time at either of the permitting offices located in Kanab, Utah, and Page, Arizona. During this time, applicants receive a required safety brief.



Challenges

In August of 2021, the Monument lost one outdoor recreation planner and one of its two park rangers. Through careful planning, the Monument Manager was able to add a second outdoor recreation planner to the table of organization. Replacing the two staff members and filling the newly created position proved to be very difficult in fiscal year 2022. The two outdoor recreation planners started in February and March with the park ranger starting in June. With a newly created position and new staff, much of the remainder of the year was bringing people up to speed with the Monument.

In addition, on August 28, 2022, the Monument lost its manager who took another position serving the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument. The position was immediately filled with a 120-day detailer who closed out the year.



Visitors

With COVID-19 travel restrictions coming to an end, international visitors made a return to the Monument. Visitation was estimated at 228,655 visits, an increase of 17,332 from the number of visits reported in the previous year. This estimate is based on numerous traffic counters across the Monument and information provided to us by authorized guides and outfitters. Monument staff developed new protocol to collect visitation data and completed much needed maintenance to the traffic counter program. These efforts increased the accuracy of visitation data being collected and help staff better understand when and where visitation is occurring throughout the Monument. In addition, staff are pursuing other methods and technologies to gather more accurate data relative to recreational activities and numbers. Besides a few hunters and grazing permittees, special recreation permit holders and the recreating public comprised the majority of visits to the National Monument.

Highway 89A is the only highway near the Monument. It runs along the southern edge of the Monument while providing a spectacular view of the Vermilion Cliffs. Access to the Monument is limited off the highway, as the cliffs and wilderness area butt up to the highway. The roads that do access the Monument are unpaved and minimally maintained, often requiring high-clearance, 4WD vehicles.

Many who seek to visit the Vermilion Cliffs strive to obtain permits to three of the special management areas (Coyote Buttes North, Coyote Buttes South and Paria Canyon Overnight). The majority of those that venture out on the Paria Plateau visit the spectacular White Pocket rock formation, pictured below.



Partnerships

The Monument continues partnering with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and other organizations, in the North American Non-Lead Partnership program. Lead poisoning is the leading cause of mortality in California condors. This program consists of voluntary incentive-based outreach and education aimed at increasing the use of non-lead alternatives, as well as supplying hunters in northern Arizona with lead-free ammunition to use on their big game hunts in hunting areas that include areas within the Monument. The program is voluntary, but shows participation rates close to what they are in states that ban lead ammunition (i.e. California). The lead reduction program is critical to the success of the California condor recovery program.

The Peregrine Fund continues to manage the California condor reintroduction program and population in Arizona and Utah. The Monument is home to the condor's release site, where The Peregrine Fund brings captive raised condors to be released into the wild. This partnership has existed since 1996 and has been a tremendous success. From a low point of 22 birds in 1982, The Peregrine Fund releases approximately 12-15 birds annually into the wild. There are now 124 free-flying condors in Arizona and Utah, including 4 documented wild-fledged condors in 2022. Through an assistance agreement and a Memorandum of Understanding with The Peregrine Fund, the Monument continues to contribute funds, time, and other resources to support this effort.



The Glen Canyon Conservancy provided valuable services for the Monument and the visiting public. Through funding from the BLM, Glen Canyon Conservancy supported two full time seasonal employees stationed at the Paria Contact Station in March through November of 2022. These employees were critical points of contact for the public entering into the Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness and the Monument. They disseminated information on current conditions, discussed wilderness safety, ethics and local rules while distributing hiking permits, etc.

Volunteer projects managed by the Monument's staff included the following: safety patrols at Coyote Buttes North, monitoring route conditions and wilderness boundaries in the Ferry Swale area, travel management (i.e., sign installation and maintenance), assisting at the Condor Release on Public Land Day, and a Paria Canyon clean-up. Additionally, the Monument's volunteers continuously staffed the Public Lands Information Center in St. George, Utah, answering questions from members of the public via phone calls, emails, and in-person visits. Common questions were related to backcountry permits, safety, Leave-No-Trace, Tread Lightly, restrictions, and weather conditions. The total volunteer hours contributed to the monument in 2022 were 290, still down significantly from years past as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Climate Impacts

Drought conditions persisted from 2021 into 2022, although later summer and early fall monsoonal moisture brought some relief. Perennial vegetation experienced drought-related impacts with many juniper trees showing drought stress. Future monitoring will tell if drought induced mortality occurred.

Rangeland trend monitoring indicated that many grasses and forbs did not grow or put forth seed during the spring and summer months. However, as the late summer and fall monsoonal moisture arrived it finally allowed for re-growth, showing the resiliency of drought-tolerant species. Livestock operators, for the most part, reduced their herds accordingly to compensate for the lack of forage. Cumulative drought impacts may be felt into the next growing season, pending winter and spring conditions.

Events

On Saturday, September 24, 2022, the 27th annual California condor release took place. This event takes place annually on National Public Lands Day. Hosted by the Monument, captive bred condors are released into the wild for the first time from the holding pens atop Vermilion Cliffs. Until 2020, spectators watched in person from below the cliffs at the California condor release viewing site. In 2019, an estimated 1,000 individuals attended the in-person release. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the team explored additional ways to reach the thousands of interested publics throughout the world, and in conjunction with more advanced streaming technology, hosted a live-stream virtual release. Due to the success of that event, the team decided to continue the live streaming options, in addition to taking the event back to in-person at the condor release site. This year an estimated 650 to 700 members of the public attended the in-person release with about 400 live viewers online. Since then, the virtual event has been viewed over 3,700 times.





NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Vermilion Cliffs National Monument

Arizona Strip District Office
Bureau of Land Management
345 East Riverside Drive
St. George, UT 84790
Phone: 435-688-3200

Report compiled by:

Brandon Boshell, Monument Manager until August of 2022
Peggy O'Reilly, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Timothy Pananos, Outdoor Recreation Planner
James Anderson, Park Ranger
Stephanie Grischkowsky, Wildlife Biologist

The mention of company names, trade names, or commercial products does not constitute endorsement or recommendation for use by the federal government.