



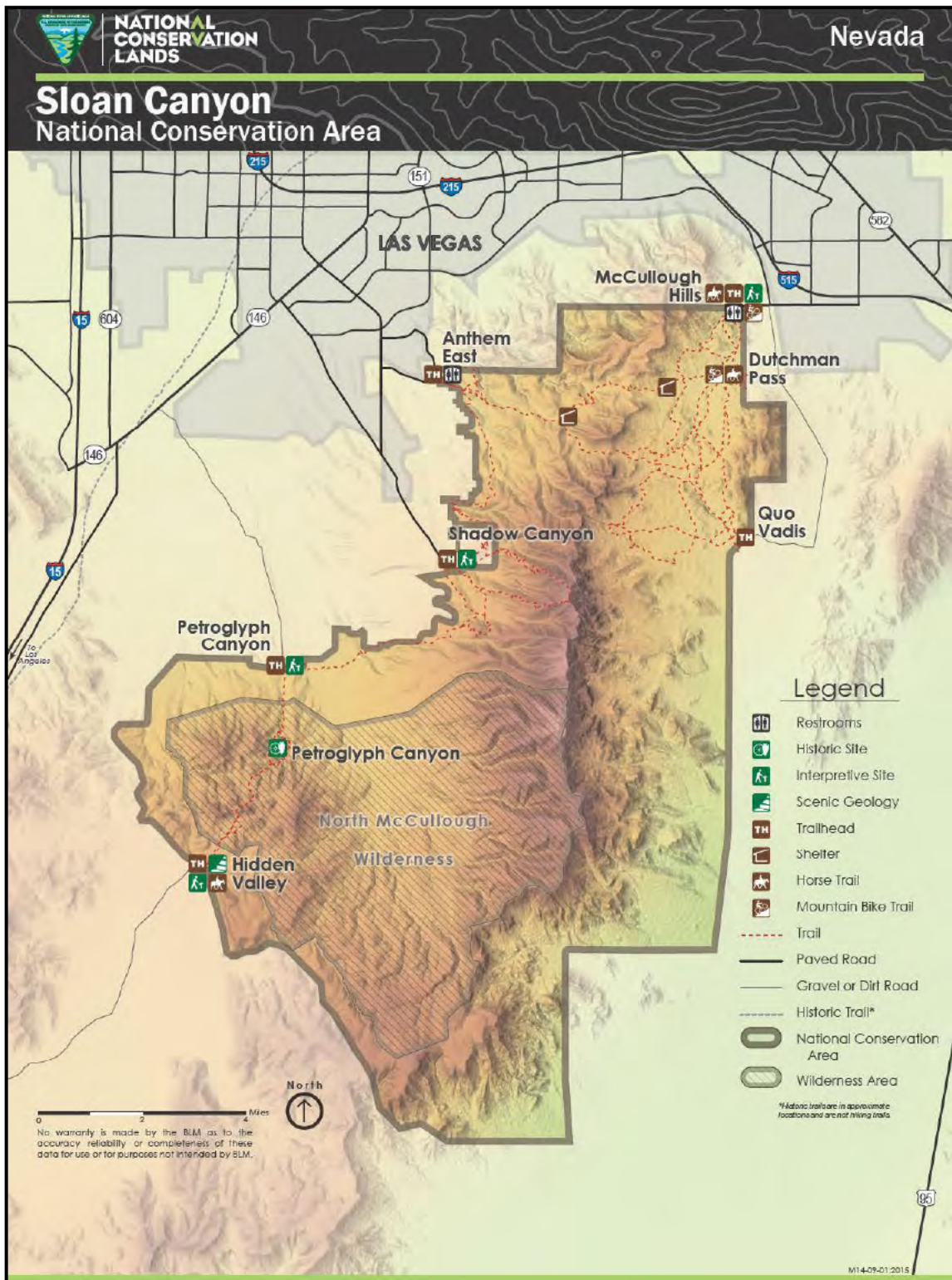
NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Nevada
2023: Annual Manager's Report

Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

2023 was a year of growth and change for Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area (NCA) (Sloan Canyon hereinafter). Jenna Giddens was hired as the new NCA Manager, the vacant Outdoor Recreation Planner role was filled, and a term Project Manager was hired to manage the Visitor Contact Station construction project. Significant progress was made with ongoing projects, such as the Junior Ranger book and the Strategic Interpretive Plan, both in collaboration with our Tribal partners. Projects impacted by the pandemic, including the supplemental rules and outreach with neighboring homeowner's associations were reinvigorated, and new projects, such as a comprehensive trails plan and an ethnography were initiated.

Sloan participated in the Teachers on Public Lands program. Our volunteer teacher developed curriculum for in-class and environmental education for grades K – 5. The Sloan team also expanded their outreach efforts with the Sloan Speaker Series hosted in collaboration with a new partner, the West Henderson Library. The Friends of Sloan Canyon remain a dynamic partner collaborating on more than 30 volunteer and outreach events during the year. The Sloan team looks forward to expanding the relationship with a new partner, the Southern Nevada Mountain Bike Association.



Event at the West Henderson Library

Challenges

Challenges abound in Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area largely due to the wildland-urban interface with the rapidly growing population in the Las Vegas valley. A pressing visitor-use issue for the Sloan Canyon team is the proliferation of social trails. Recent inventories indicate that social trails now outnumber designated trails within the NCA. This “spaghetti bowl” of redundant and unplanned routes is causing soil compaction, drainage issues, and damage to both natural and cultural resources. The Sloan team is working on a statement of work for an updated trails plan with abundant community engagement opportunities to address this challenge. Outdoor Recreation Planner Betsy Bangert also was featured on an episode of [PBS’s Outdoor Nevada](#) which dove into the issue with partner group the Southern Nevada Mountain Bike Association.

Other visitor-use issues include damage to the irreplaceable cultural resources, motorized and electric vehicle incursions into the NCA and the North McCullough Wilderness Area, and encampments made by unhoused people. Expanding the seven member Sloan team with additional park rangers will help address these challenges. The cost of living in the local community, however, is 9% higher than the national average, and housing prices are 40% higher than the national average. These economic factors may impact employee recruiting.



View of Las Vegas and Henderson growing ever closer to the NCA boundary

Visitors

The NCA had approximately 155,758 visits in 2023. This represents a drop in visitation from 2022. The data was gathered from 15 infrared and vehicle counters placed around the NCA at trailheads and busy social trails. This drop in visitation is partially due to the steady decline in public land visitation after its peak during the COVID-19 pandemic, and partially due to improved data collection and calculation.

This year, Sloan Canyon staff added more counters at social access points into the NCA to improve the accuracy of our data collection and understanding of visitation. The Sloan Canyon field staff plans to install additional counters in the coming year to continue our improved tracking of visitation into the NCA. The staff also completed a visitor use monitoring plan this year to help standardize our methodology. The completion of the new Visitor Contact Station is likely to contribute to a growth in visitation that typically follows the development of site amenities.



Visitors enjoying the Wilderness

Partnerships

The Friends of Sloan Canyon (FOSC) remain a vital partner for Sloan Canyon. Volunteers donated over 570 hours assisting visitors at the temporary Visitor Contact Station. FOSC volunteers also helped at multiple outreach events, including our annual Earth Day and National Public Lands Day (NPLD) events. Get Outdoors Nevada is an active partner leading curriculum-based field trips for students and assisting with the planning and execution of our NPLD event. Friends of Nevada Wilderness also participated in outreach events and including a guided hike with Nevada-based non-profit Blacks in Nature. The Red Rock/Sloan Field Office signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Southern Nevada Mountain Bike Association to collaboratively educate members about conservation lands and to address issues with social trail building.

The Sloan staff actively sought new partners this year. The West Henderson Library hosts the Sloan Speakers Series in their community space. They also assist with advertising this event. Late in the year, Sloan staff met with a local homeowner's association community planning team to brainstorm ways to share information and participate in their community events. The resulting newsletter contributions and event participation started in late 2023.



Friends of Sloan Canyon volunteers at an outreach event

Science

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is working with the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System to develop Science Plans to prioritize scientific research to better manage these unique places. USGS initiated the Science Plan for Sloan this year. Work on the Science Plan will continue through FY2024 and into FY2025.

The cultural resources program spent a significant amount of time preparing for a test excavation at a site on the eastern side of the North McCullough range. This included drafting the testing plan and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Plan of Action. Tribal partners and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer were consulted on the proposed excavation. In addition, the BLM archaeologist completed over 70 miles of trail surveys, which resulted in identifying two new sites within the Anthem East portion of the NCA.

The Sloan Canyon NCA wildlife biologist discovered a new, undescribed species of scorpion that occurs in sandy habitat in Ivanpah and Hidden Valley of California and Nevada. Sloan Canyon NCA has a small fragment of habitat that supports this new species of scorpion in Hidden Valley. The biologist is working with researchers in California to get the new species described and published.



New scorpion species

Climate Impacts

Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area lies within the driest desert in the driest state in the country. Current environmental trends within Sloan Canyon have shown rising temperatures, with decreased regularity in precipitation, resulting in historic droughts over the last couple of decades.

Under widely accepted climate projections, it is anticipated that temperatures will continue to increase, precipitation will continue to become less reliable and more extreme, and wildfire risk will increase. As the urban interface of the Las Vegas metro area continues to surround the boundary of Sloan Canyon, urban area heat effects will increase temperatures even more within Sloan Canyon. This will result in increased evapotranspiration from vegetation. We can also anticipate an increase in non-native and invasive species in the native ecosystem at Sloan Canyon NCA, further increasing the wildfire risk.



Sloan's heat-soaked Mojave Desert landscape

Climate Resiliency

Climate resilience is the ability of individuals, communities, and systems to withstand, adapt to, and recover from the impacts of climate change. It is about building the capacity to cope with the effects of climate change, such as more extreme and unpredictable weather events and rising temperatures.

The legislation that created Sloan Canyon charged the BLM with conserving, protecting, and enhancing the “cultural, archaeological, natural, wilderness, scientific, geological, historical, biological, wildlife, educational, and scenic resources of the Conservation Area.” The BLM is working internally and with partners to develop plans for future scientific studies and landscape-level mitigation strategies. These strategies are good for both ecosystem health and understanding human connections to the landscape. Strategies include:

- Developing a Science Plan that includes climate, environmental justice, and indigenous environmental knowledge.
- Designing exhibits and signage to educate visitors about climate change impacts, adaptations, and ideas for reducing human impacts.
- Monitoring and treating the NCA for the presence and spread of non-native and invasive species, which would impact the native ecosystems within the NCA.



Desert Tortoise in Sloan Canyon

Social and Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice (EJ) includes meaningful involvement with all people, particularly Tribes and low-income and minority populations, in BLM decision-making processes. The BLM remains dedicated to improving access and reaching out to all members of the public we serve. In partnership with Friends of Nevada Wilderness, Sloan staff led a well-received hike with the non-profit group Blacks in Nature, which creates accessible outdoor experiences for people of color.

Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area is part of the ancestral lands of more than a dozen local Tribes. In 2023, the BLM continued monthly Government-to-Government consultation with the Moapa Band of Paiutes and monthly informal coordination meetings with the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians. Sloan staff also engaged in informal coordination with Tribal partners on projects based on interest, including development of a Junior Ranger book, a strategic interpretive plan, Visitor Contact Station designs, and trail (re)naming. Continued consultation and coordination was a priority and vital to the successful management of Sloan Canyon NCA.



Blacks in Nature event in Sloan Canyon

Events

In 2023, Sloan hosted and participated in a wide variety of educational and outreach events. We lead guided hikes into Petroglyph Canyon for a variety of special groups, including BLM staff, university students, and scouting groups. We hosted events for Earth Day and National Public Lands Day where volunteers helped with trail rehabilitation and trash clean-up. Sloan staff also started a monthly speakers' series with BLM specialists sharing their areas of expertise. It included a "Meet the Manager" event to introduce the new manager and to learn about the BLM's National Conservation Land system. This series was well-received and will continue next year.

Sloan staff also attended dozens of outreach events in the local community. We partnered with Friends of Sloan Canyon at Wetland Park for "Discovery Day," where we contacted 860 attendees and led activities with over 100 kids. The Heathy Kids Festival reached over 800 participants. Staff also attended 10 career fairs at local schools. We coordinated with BLM Fire and Law Enforcement staff for a special event with elementary students highlighting vehicles and equipment where we connected with more than 750 students and faculty.



Staff and volunteers on one of many volunteer events in Sloan Canyon NCA

Words from the staff

Greetings!

I am honored to serve as the new manager for Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area. I started in the position on a detail in January 2023, and was hired into the role permanently in July. I joined a motivated team dedicated to protecting and conserving this unique place. When you read what they love about Sloan, it will be obvious why I feel so fortunate...

"I really enjoy the diversity of recreation opportunities at Sloan. It is one of the best places in Southern Nevada to go hiking, mountain biking, trail running, and view wildlife." *Greg Feathers, Park Ranger*

"I love being a contemporary steward, learning how to manage land-use and conservation through the inclusion of tribal voice that has maintained a spiritual and environmental balance in this area since time immemorial." *Brian White, Park Ranger*

"My favorite thing about working at Sloan Canyon is how beautiful my "office" is and that I get to help people make memories in this landscape." *Mandy Royal, Park Ranger.*

"Very few places have a wilderness area so close to an urban center. I love the challenge of providing multi-use recreation opportunities while ensuring the wilderness values of the NCA are preserved." *Betsy Bangert, Outdoor Recreation Planner.*

"I love working at Sloan for tranquility, walking in nature, and the beauty of all the wildlife. Sloan staff members are such amazing people to work with. It feels like a second home, not just a place to work." *April Duncan, Administrative Specialist*

"Sloan is a peaceful haven beyond the busy streets of Las Vegas. It is also a sacred and treasured site for the indigenous Native American tribes. As a result, my work here is enriching, far more than just a job." *Roy Fune, Project Manager*

A beautifully diverse landscape and an amazing team. What else could a manager ask for?

Thank you for reading,

Jenna Giddens
Sloan Canyon NCA Manager



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area

Southern Nevada District Office
Red Rock/Sloan Field Office
Nawghaw Poa Road, Las Vegas, Nevada
Phone: 702-515-5000

[Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area | Bureau of Land Management](#)

Report compiled by:

Jenna Giddens, Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area Manager, in collaboration with: Amanda Royal, Park Ranger (Interpretation and Education); Betsy Bangert (Outdoor Recreation Planner); Brian White, Park Ranger (Outreach and Volunteers); Greg Feathers, Park Ranger (Outreach and Trails); Annette Bennett, Archaeologist; Corey Lange, Natural Resource Specialist (Wildlife); Mary Boyle Natural Resource Specialist (Botany); Aaron Hoppler, Outdoor Recreation Planner (Wilderness).

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