



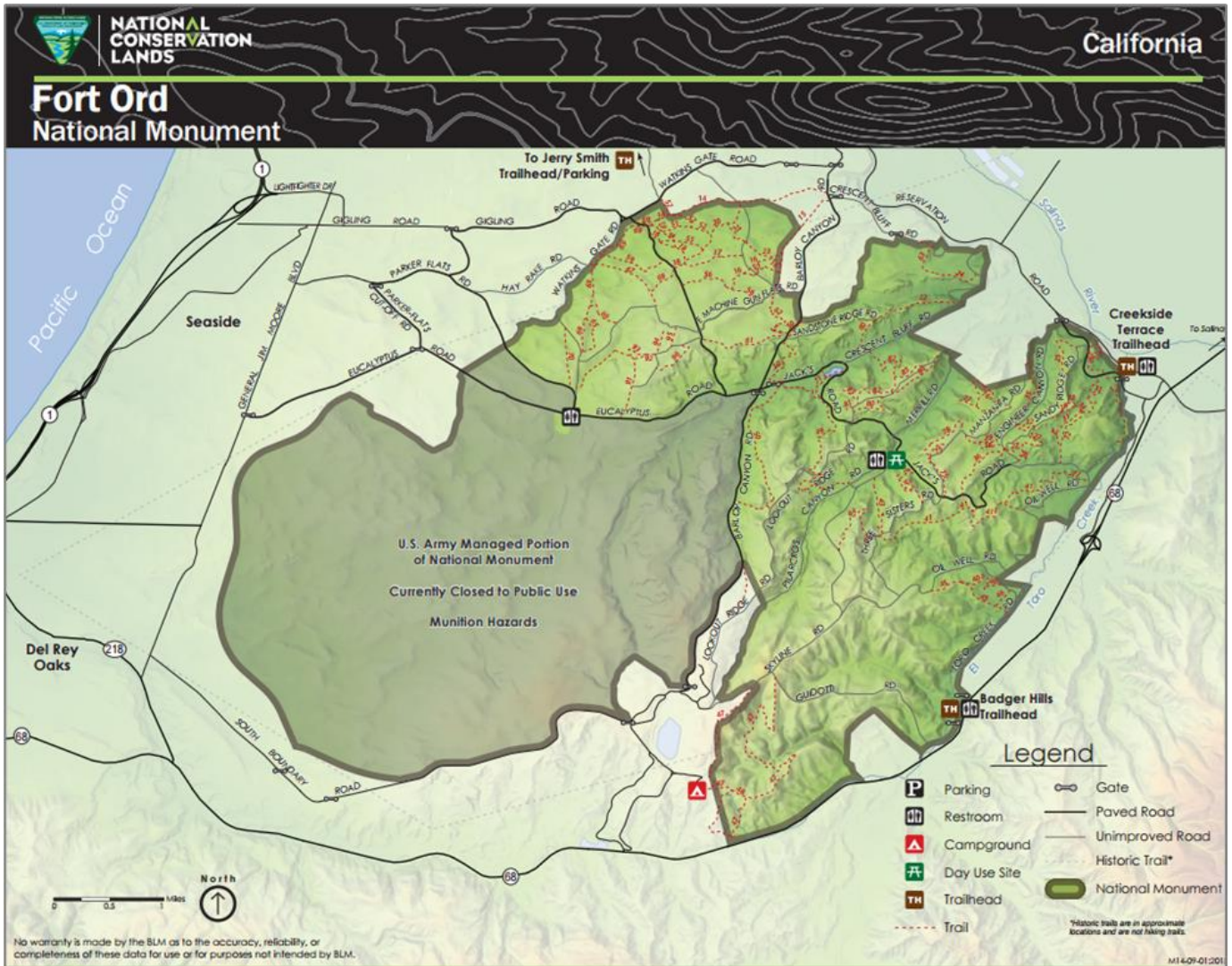
NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

California
2023: Annual Manager's Report

Fort Ord National Monument



Map



Accomplishments

Extensive fuels treatments, restoration projects, and trail building occurred at Fort Ord in 2023. More than 3,000 acres of fire hazards were treated by a carefully monitored goat grazing operation and 25 miles of fuel breaks were refreshed with heavy equipment. About 3,000 acres of invasive weed treatments were implemented by the Monument weed crew in partnership with the U.S. Army (Army). Three acres of degraded habitat were restored in partnership with the CSU Monterey Bay's Habitat Stewardship Project. Eight miles of trail were maintained in partnership with the Monterey Off Road Cycling Association (MORCA) and a bridge was constructed. Finally, dozens of elementary schools continued their partnership with BLM and hosted over 400 enrichment programs in local schools for students.



Challenges

Heavy winter downpours at the beginning of 2023 ushered in the year and threatened to cut off highways that connect the Monterey Peninsula to the Salinas Valley with waters breaching levees along the Salinas River. These tumultuous storms and above normal rainfall totals resulted in damage to recreation trails and lush vegetative growth throughout the year. The trails were repaired and the vegetation received fuel treatments.

The BLM cooperatively manages the Fort Ord National Monument with the Army and continues to work with the Army to clean up munitions and explosives of concern. Since 1994, the Army has made tremendous progress implementing cleanup remedies and transferring 11,500 acres of the former installation to local jurisdictions, public universities, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and others for public and economic reuse purposes. The Army has transferred 7,227 monument acres to the BLM and has been cleaning up the remaining 7,358 acres they continue to oversee. Since 2020, the Army has had limited funding to perform the requisite prescribed burns needed to initiate cleanup of the remaining munitions sites on the monument. The Army hopes to have the cleanup program completely up and running in 2025 to complete the remaining cleanup. Until that occurs and the area is safe, more than half of the Monument, presently located behind barbed-wire fences, will remain largely inaccessible to the public.



Visitors

Although visitation declined in 2023, Fort Ord continued to be the most highly-visited BLM-managed national monument in California. Approximately 881,600 cyclists, hikers, joggers, and equestrians recreated on the monument's trails. On busy weekends, trailhead facilities exceeded their design capacity. Continued high use, coupled with heavy winter rains, caused trail treads to unravel and small gullies to form. In response, the BLM staff and MORCA partners stepped up efforts to harden and stabilize trail tread surfaces. This trail stabilization effort is expected to continue for the next several years and is one of the projects supported by the Great American Outdoors Act.



Partnerships

The BLM enjoys so many monumental partners at Fort Ord that it is difficult to imagine managing this spectacular area without them. Long-time partners with the U.S. Army, MORCA, Fort Ord Recreation Trails (FORT) Friends, CSU Monterey Bay and the Conservation Lands Foundation all make incredible contributions each year.

Each year the BLM holds a celebratory event to recognize these partners on National Public Lands Day (NPLD). In 2023, over 150 volunteers and partners joined the BLM to collect native seeds, construct a bridge, remove invasive French broom infestations, restore native habitat, and tidy up the monument trailheads. This was the 21st annual NPLD celebration on the monument.

In 2023 the BLM inducted volunteers Jim Morton, Lily Lapham and Barry Elkins into the Fort Ord National Monument Hall of Fame as recognition for their outstanding service to the monument. The BLM also recognized Phil Smith with a Legacy Award for her twenty-plus years of volunteer public service in Fort Ord.



Science

Fort Ord National Monument formalized a new partnership with California State University (CSU) Monterey Bay in 2023. The university was awarded a grant from the BLM and established an eight-person crew of graduate and undergraduate students to perform important research and monitoring on the monument. Each crew was led by a graduate student pursuing a master's degree. One crew studied the effectiveness of various grazing and manual treatments of grasslands. Another studied the effectiveness of previous habitat restoration treatments since 1996, and the other two crews inventoried, monitored, and studied rare plant and oak woodland health. Accomplishments of this new university partnership were highlighted in the online seminars the students provided to the public where they shared the results of their research together with their BLM mentors.

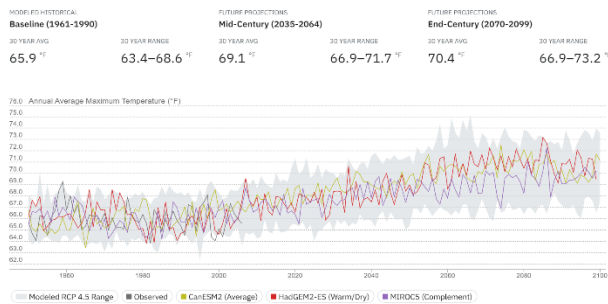


Climate Impacts

Climate models show that the Fort Ord National Monument region may experience only slight annual temperature increases, and minor changes in average precipitation as compared to other regions. These projected climate impacts may affect the hydroperiod of vernal pools that can stress wildlife and affect some annual plant communities. The Federally endangered Contra Costa goldfields (a vernal pool associate) has diminished on the monument and BLM botanists are trying to understand the causes with hopes of reestablishing some of the former populations.

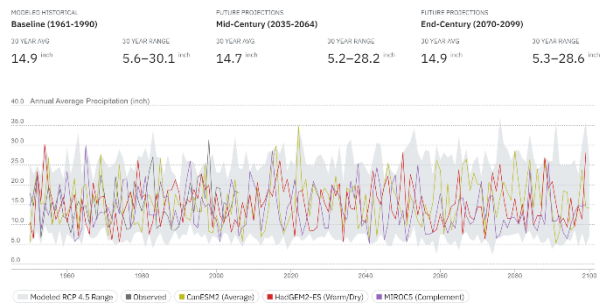
LOCA Grid Cell 36.59375, -121.78125

Projected changes in Annual Average Maximum Temperature under a Medium Emissions (RCP 4.5) Scenario.



LOCA Grid Cell 36.59375, -121.78125

Projected changes in Annual Average Precipitation under a Medium Emissions (RCP 4.5) Scenario.



Climate Resiliency

Changes in climate and the associated increase in the number and size of wildfires across the state and country creates a heightened concern regarding wildfire risk. Fort Ord is surrounded by a residential population of approximately 100,000 people living within five miles of the monument boundary. The BLM continues to use goat and sheep grazing to reduce fire hazards and has an ongoing monitoring program to gauge the effects these treatments are having on the fire risk and species composition. In 2023, the BLM maintained 25 miles of fuel break using heavy equipment and treated 3,000 acres of grassland fuels using goats and sheep. These treatments were funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The BLM worked with Cal Fire and the Monterey County Regional Fire District to identify the projects prioritized for treatment.



Social and Environmental Justice

In 2023, the monument team continued to engage traditionally underserved populations from around the region in order to enhance their understanding and appreciation of the natural environment. In 2023, the Fort Ord interpretive specialist provided over 400 lessons at area elementary schools. Additionally, the monument botanist continued to engage at-risk high school students in volunteer projects through a partnership with the Monterey County Department of Education and the Community Day School Program throughout the year. Finally, the CSU Monterey Bay Habitat Stewardship Project continued the long-term partnership of busing fifth and sixth grade students onto the Monument to participate in habitat restoration projects by planting seedlings.



Events

With most COVID-19 restrictions lifted across the state, events and activities resumed in 2023 at full speed. The Sea Otter Classic cycling event brought 3,400 mountain bike and road bike racers and tour participants to the world-class trails of Fort Ord. Inside Trail held two running races across 100k, 50k, 25k and 10k courses on the monument and 800 runners laced up their sneakers for the challenge.

In addition to these competitive events, the BLM partnered with the Monterey Off Road Cycling Association (MORCA), Fort Ord Recreation Trails (FORT) Friends, Blue Zones Monterey, Girls Rock Santa Cruz, California Native Plant Society, CSU Monterey Bay, and the U.S. Army on several group hikes and tours. Commercial tour operators also joined the scene in 2023 when permits for guided cycling tours along monument trails were issued to two new operators.



Words from the staff

We are proud to be managing the Fort Ord National Monument between the beautiful Monterey Bay and bountiful Salinas Valley in California. Our stewardship of this special place will honor all who have passed through the gates of the former Fort Ord, and those who were here prior to our nation's soldiers. We have a great team to make this happen, and that team includes the communities of the Monterey region, and the many recreation, education and conservation partners we work with.

We have been managing this monumental place since 1996 and feel so blessed to be part of a wonderful community. We know that we have a special responsibility to have a positive impact. We will continue to work collaboratively with our neighbors and partners and give back to the communities where we live. We do this through our inspired work and our mission of serving the American family.





**NATIONAL
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LANDS**

Fort Ord

National Monument

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