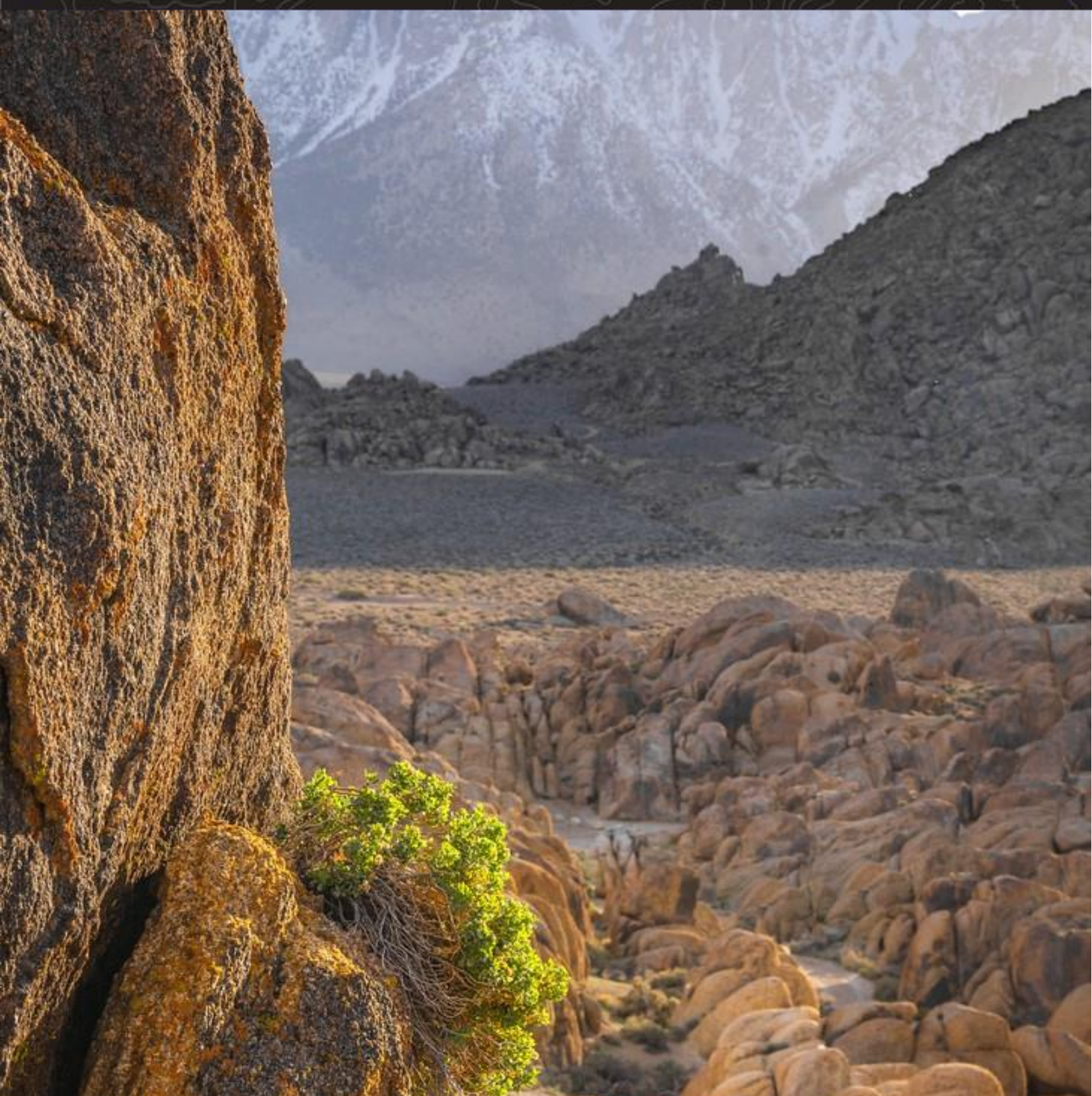


NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

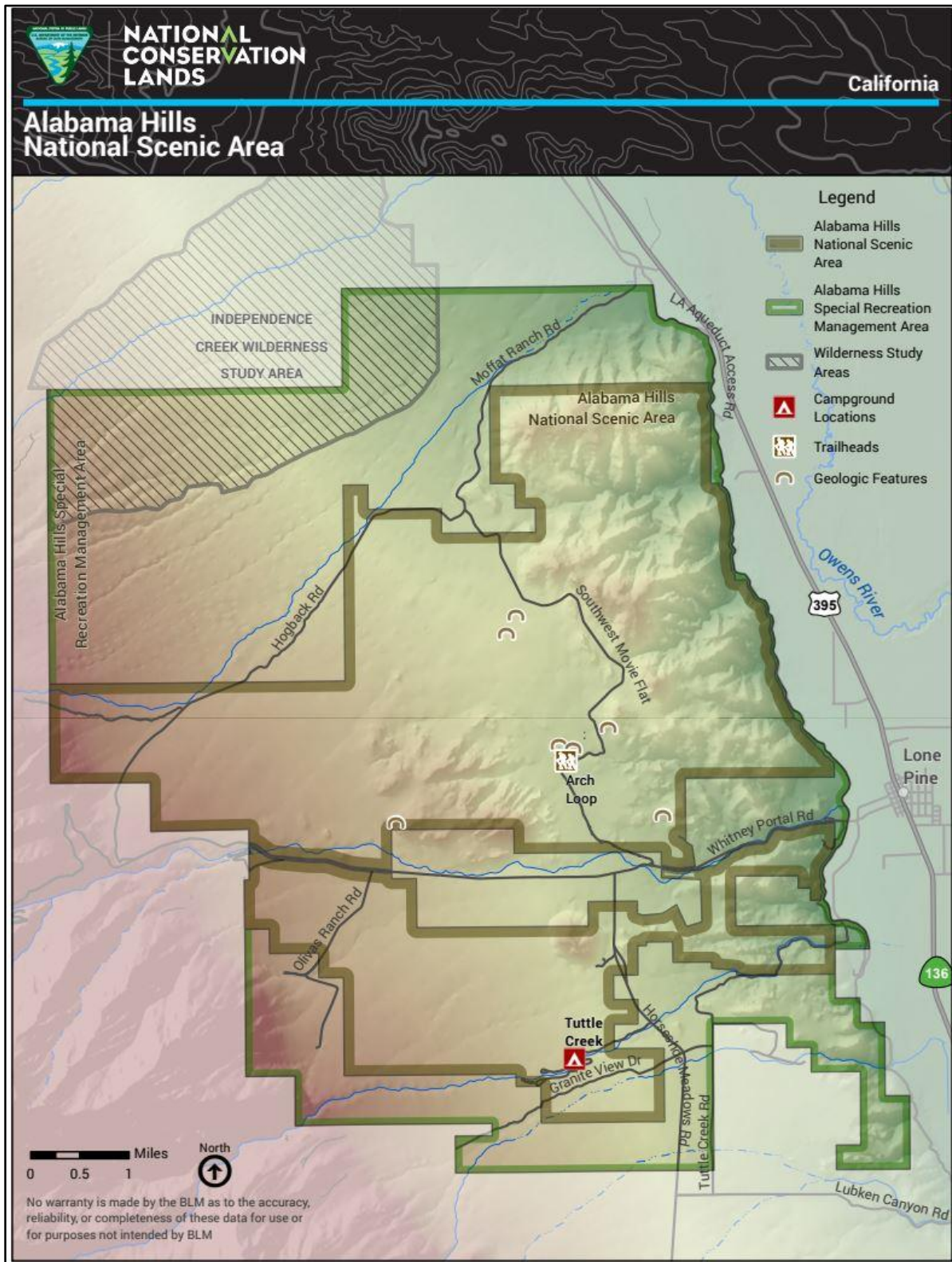
California
2023: Annual Manager's Report

Alabama Hills

National Scenic Area



Map



Accomplishments

The major accomplishments in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 were linked to the continued efforts to implement management actions from the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area Management Plan, including maintenance of designated dispersed campsites, establishment of free camping permits, and restoration of heavily impacted areas. The following are a few FY 23 highlights in the Alabama Hills:

- **December 2022:** An AmeriCorps crew worked with BLM to improve Tuttle Creek Campground by adding horse corrals to equestrian sites and tent pads to the group sites.
- **January-Summer 2023:** Road repairs were made in several areas of the Alabama Hills that were washed out in record setting winter storms.
- **March 2023:** 90 acres of fuel breaks were implemented in strategic locations around the community either adjacent to the private property or along the existing Tuttle Creek Road.
- **May 2023:** The National Operations Center and Headquarters provided visual resource and landscape architect specialists to design an attractive comfort station enclosure for future installation at the historic entrance station, the Shark Fin bathroom kiosk, and the Mobius Arch parking lot.
- **July 2023:** Triple digit temperatures caused rapid mountain snow melt that resulted in high water flows. Several campgrounds were under the threat of being flooded but proactive mitigation measures BLM kept all campgrounds open year-round.
- **September 2023:** Over 900 lbs. of the invasive Russian thistle, a non-native species, were removed with the assistance of the Alabama Hills Stewardship Group.
- **Year-round:** The Alabama Hills National Scenic Area (NSA) continued to be a destination for production companies to film movies and commercials. In FY23, the BLM monitored 28 film permits in the NSA, from large production car commercials to small-budget zombie movies and student productions.



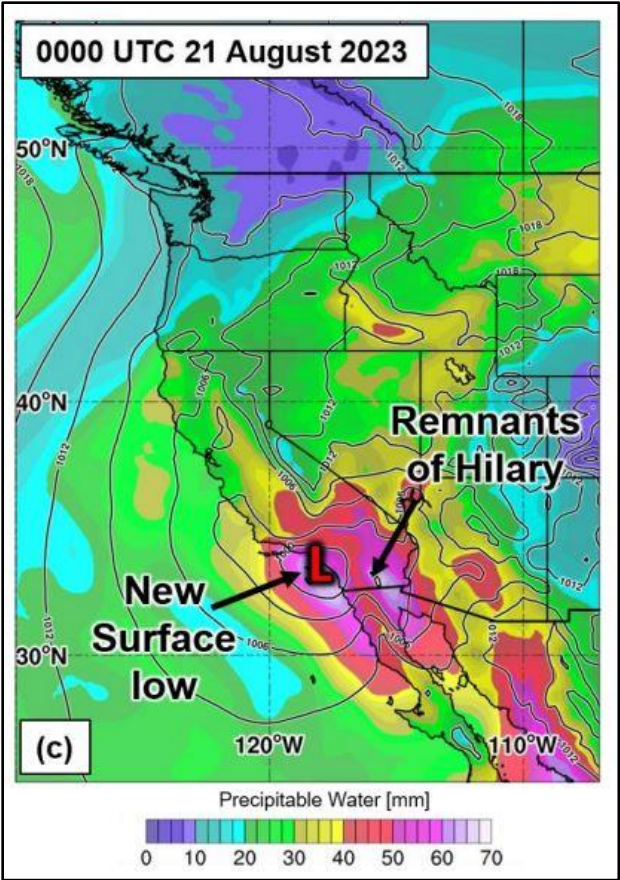
Challenges

The primary challenge in fiscal year 2023 was maintaining public access to the NSA after multiple record setting winter storm event heavy spring run-off, and landfall of the remnants of Hurricane Hilary. These events damaged and closed several access roads, including Movie Road, the main access through the NSA and Whitney Portal Road, the main access to the NSA. After several flooding events in the winter of 2022-2023, spring run-off from high temperatures continued to damage roads, trails, and parking areas in the months of June and July. The final storm event of the fiscal year was Tropical Storm Hilary which dropped nearly 5 inches of rain in the Scenic Area on August 16th, damaging additional roads, trails, and parking areas, and resulting in the closure of Whitney Portal Rd after a two-mile-long section of road was destroyed.

Repairing these roads fell to both Inyo County and the BLM. Inyo County was inundated with road repairs throughout the region, making it difficult to prioritize the Scenic Area and open the roads quickly. Many roads required multiple repairs due to ongoing precipitation events.

With the dedication from staff and help from partners and volunteers, BLM was able to continue repairing and opening roads back up for public access.

A challenge for the BLM in repairing roads was that the Bishop Field Office does not have heavy equipment. The field office was able to borrow equipment from the Forest Service to complete these repairs. Other challenges included operating with one Law Enforcement Ranger for nearly half of fiscal year 2023 and responding to continued misinformation from erroneous website, blogs, and social media posts that require staff to correct, educate, and instruct on what is allowed and not allowed within the Scenic Area.



Visitors

The Alabama Hills National Scenic Area (NSA) is one of many popular attractions that draws outdoor recreation enthusiasts to Inyo County. The Alabama Hills is a destination for overnight or day use and a stopover on the way to hiking, camping or other outdoor activity in Inyo and Mono Counties. Recreational opportunities in the Alabama Hills include but are not limited to hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, sightseeing, photography, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, and motor touring.

Traffic counter data has been collected for over a decade to count vehicles and hikers. According to the long-time data, April and October are the most visited times of the year in the NSA. Visitor counts are derived from the vehicle counters assuming approximately 2.5 people per vehicle. For FY23, this resulted in approximately 114,000 visitors. This is a substantial decrease in visitors from past years, much of this a result of roads being washed out, causing several areas to be inaccessible or closed for multiple months due to flood damage.



Partnerships

Partners were essential to the accomplishments in the Alabama Hills in FY23. The BLM's agreement with the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association (ESIA) was instrumental in providing information to the public and hosting volunteer events. ESIA continued to provide a BLM-funded Alabama Hills Steward who monitored the NSA and helped develop and disseminate messaging through a monthly Alabama Hills Newsletter. The Steward also led volunteer work projects, developed an information kiosk at the Eastern Sierra Visitor Center, and lead several interpretive talks throughout the year.

The Alabama Hills Stewardship Group (AHSG) continued to support the BLM with their long-standing partnership and helped to disseminate public information. The AHSG partnered with the BLM on a volunteer event where fire rings were removed and cleaned and new signs installed.

As mentioned in the Challenges section above, Inyo County was critical to ensuring access to the Alabama Hills through tireless work to repair Movie Road and Whitney Portal Road.

The BLM worked with Death Valley National Park to hire two shared employees who provided public assistance at the Eastern Sierra Interagency Visitor Center, led interpretive talks, and monitored the Alabama Hills.



Science

BLM staff and partners completed numerous surveys and inventories of wildlife and vegetation in the Alabama Hills in 2023. The information collected will help inform and improve management and conservation efforts by the BLM in the future.

- Townsend's big-eared bat, a BLM Sensitive species, maternity colony surveys were completed. These bats live in abandoned mine shafts in the NSA, among other places. A categorical exclusion was completed to place gates on the mine shafts where the bats live. The gates are designed to prevent entry by humans while allowing space for bats to enter and exit, protecting bats from human disturbance and keep visitors safe from mining hazards.
- Interpretation of Indicators of Rangeland Health monitoring, the science of assessing rangeland changes as concepts and protocols evolve, and Proper Functioning Condition Assessments continued in FY23.
- The BLM completed Lentic and Lotic Assessment, Monitoring, and Inventory (AIM) vegetation plots to assess the baseline condition of vegetation and focus on water quality and stream condition.
- Rare plant surveys at multiple locations were completed by the Santa Barbara Botanic Gardens through an assistance agreement with BLM.
- A Monarch Joint Venture field crew did survey work in the Alabama Hills with a goal to "Map the distribution and quality of monarch habitat and use on CA BLM land."



Climate Impacts

Current models of climate change show potential changes such as increasing temperatures, changes in precipitation amounts, increased frequency and severity of wildfires and more frequent extreme weather events. The Alabama Hills is not immune to these threats.

- In the winter of 2023, the Sierra Nevada, adjacent to the NSA, had a snowpack of up to 250% of normal, recording the snowiest season in over 50 years.
- On August 16, Tropical Storm Hilary (remnants of Hurricane Hilary) traveled directly over the Eastern Sierra of California. The Alabama Hills were directly in the path of the storm, and over the course of one day the area received nearly 5 inches of rain. This torrential downpour caused mass flooding and destruction.
- The highest recorded temperature in the Alabama Hills area was 111 degrees in 2021. In 2023, the temperature reached 109 on July 15 and 16, recording the third hottest temperature in the area on record.

This immense snowpack coupled with some of the highest recorded summer temperatures caused spring and summer run-off that created flooding along creeks, causing campgrounds to close and limiting access in the Alabama Hills. Several roads, trails, parking lots, and camping areas were destroyed.

Field staff are increasingly adjusting work schedules to account for extreme heat. Staff start shifts much earlier in the day, and limit outside exposure on the hottest days of the year. Campground hosts also have adjusted to rising summer temperatures, and often terminate their volunteer efforts when temperatures get too hot in the summer.



Climate Resiliency

There are numerous actions described in the management plan that promote climate resiliency, including fuels reduction treatments, restoration with native plants, recreation use management strategies, and increased monitoring of natural resources to detect change over time.

This year the BLM implemented mechanical fuels reduction work around the community of Granite View in the Alabama Hills. This was designed to provide a location that is safer and more effective for fire fighters to use in helping control a potential wildfire. These treatments also help protect the local community and help protect sensitive sagebrush ecosystems in the area. This is one of the highest risk areas in the NSA due to the density of sagebrush and frequency of high winds at the foot of the Sierra Front.

Repairs made to roads and trails were done in a way to withstand higher volumes of Winter rainstorms and spring and summer runoff. Road culverts were enlarged to accommodate greater flows, additional water bars and berms were created, and trails were reinforced or elevated to withstand run off.

Shade structures for campground hosts were installed to offer a small reprieve during the peak temperatures in mid-summer.



Social and Environmental Justice

The Bishop Field Office partnered with the Lone Pine Paiute–Shoshone Tribe for the 2023 annual Earth Day event in Lone Pine, Ca, just outside of the Alabama Hills NSA. We also participated in the Tribe’s annual Youth camp.

A Scan and Pay system was implemented in the Tuttle Creek Campground, which will provide another option for visitors to pay for campsites.

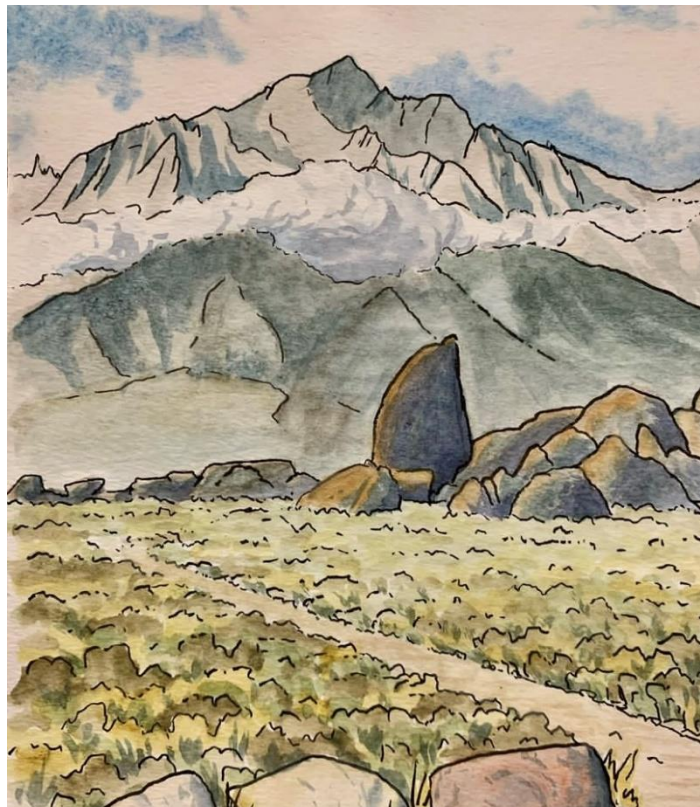
The AmeriCorps National Civilian Conservation Corps (NCCC) team working with BLM in 2023-24 assisted in the Alabama Hills, providing young adults the opportunity to work in various land management capacities, and agency staff the opportunity to provide insight and guidance about future employment.

Our partners at ESIA developed educational material for the Alabama Hills through an assistance agreement with the BLM. They also developed social media content and updated their website to provide information, including videos, about the Alabama Hills and responsible recreation to a wide audience.



Events

- The BLM Artist-in-Residence program selected two artists, Kristen Freeborn and Alyssa Marquez, for Alabama Hills residencies in May. Both artists visited in August for early site visits, followed by a one-week residency in the Alabama Hills in the fall. Each artist showcased their creativity inspired by their time in such a scenic landscape. At the end of each artist's residency, both artists hosted an event to share their artistic process with the public.
- Weekly interpretive talks and programs on topics such as geology, native plants, movie history, and more were held at pop-up tabling events from October through May in the Alabama Hills. Most events were held on weekends, or on Friday and Saturday nights to help incoming weekend campers find a great place to camp and follow the Scenic Area rules.
- Concert in the Rocks is an annual event held in June and hosted by the Museum of Western Film History as a charity benefit. The event attracts several hundred visitors to the NSA.
- One gravel bike and one ultra distance running race were held in the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area. These events were monitored by Bishop Field Office staff.



Words from the staff

Hello everyone!

I am very honored to have been chosen as the new manager for the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area. I am excited to be joining the team and working to protect and conserve this special place.

I started the position in March of 2023 and have been working diligently to get up to speed on the complex issues and unique challenges that come with managing a scenic area that has a diverse group of visitors from hikers, climbers, bikers, artists, OHV users, film historians, and more. Since my arrival, I have been involved in implementing a free camping permit program as well as the Scan and Pay system in our campground. I have also taken part in helping restore redundant roads, improve signage, assist with trail improvements, and meeting countless amazing people that help support the Alabama Hills.

I am passionate about protecting the Alabama Hills cultural values, natural resources, and working with the community and the Tribes. The Paiute - Shoshone peoples are the original inhabitants of the lands that make up the Alabama Hills region. They have a rich culture and history and have a deep connection to this incredible place.

I am committed to working closely with the Tribes, the stewardship group, volunteers, and visitors to develop best practices and implementation level plans for managing the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area to ensure that this place will be protected for future generations.

Thank you,

Philip Gross
Alabama Hills National Scenic Area Manager



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Alabama Hills

National Scenic Area

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