

NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

California
2023: Annual Manager's Report

Carrizo Plain National Monument



Accomplishments

The Carrizo Plain National Monument had many accomplishments this year. Interpretive displays and environmental educational materials continue to be developed as part of the expansion of the Goodwin Education Center, the monument’s visitor center. New educational media in the visitor center included the production and implementation of a continuous video loop of wildlife species playing on a monitor in the conference room. Visitors expressed their delight in seeing some of the native animals such as Tule Elk and Pronghorn highlighted in the video.

Carrizo Plain staff successfully managed a “super bloom” event with the highest ever visitation to date. Over 120,000 visitors came to the Carrizo between the middle of March and end of April. During this time there were also numerous requests for filming and photography. With additional efforts from staff and interns, visitor impacts were managed while still allowing freedom to experience the super bloom and enjoy their recreational experience.

Several positions were filled in 2023, including a park ranger and administrative support specialist. These positions are instrumental in the ongoing management of the monument.



Interior of Goodwin Education Center

Challenges

One challenge that continues to impact the Carrizo is the increase in social media coverage during the spectacular blooms. The media draws more visitors to the area and can overwhelm the monument's recreational facilities. The spike in visitation during a bloom event results in tens of thousands of dollars of additional expenses in the monument. Increased expenses include additional patrols and visitor center staff, more restroom facilities, and educational maps, brochures, and flower information. To help with the pulse of high visitation, signs have been developed to reduce and mitigate impacts to the monument's natural and cultural resources.

Increased rainfall in 2023 provided optimal conditions for both native and unwanted invasive plant species. New locations of invasive species are monitored and eradicated to the extent Carrizo staff can, however the spread of invasive species to so many locations made it challenging to identify and treat them all in a timely way.



Visitors in middle of field of wildflowers



Invasive Yellow Starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*)

Visitors

Carrizo Plain National Monument received 179,896 visits in 2023, the highest-ever number of visitors to the monument in a single year. In prior spectacular wildflower years, the monument received an average of 120,000 visits. By comparison, in years without the impressive wildflower blooms Carrizo Plain hosts between 50,000 and 60,000 visitors annually. The increase in visitors is attributed to the renowned wildflower bloom, wide associated media coverage, and social media with images of the bloom, and the appreciation the public has for the wide-open spaces the monument provides.

Dispersed camping, hiking, wildlife, and wildflower viewing, hunting, and exploring continue to be the most popular recreational activities in the monument.

Guided tours to significant cultural sites are very popular and fill up every year. Self-guided tours are also available to cultural sites throughout most of the year.



Soda Lake, with Temblor Range in background

Partnerships

The monument is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) with important cooperative partnerships with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). In these strong working relationships, each organization builds off their strengths to contribute to the overall management of the monument. The monument's Friends group, The Friends of the Carrizo, works closely with the BLM to support priority projects on the monument. They contributed significantly to developing new interpretive displays for the visitor center. They continue to support volunteer efforts as well as provide interpretive brochures and signs for the monument.

The Native American Advisory Council supports the management of the monument. They continually provide input on projects and natural resources protection which helps guide the overall direction of management. The Council is actively engaged in providing educational and interpretative materials for Carrizo Plain.

Gateway communities continue to support the monument by distributing interpretive and educational information to visitors in their communities throughout the year. Volunteers support workdays, give tours, and update interpretive materials.



San Joaquin Kit Fox workshop (CDFW)

Science

Research continues to be an important component of monument programs. Long term studies in collaboration with local universities aid in the management of some of the endangered species found within Carrizo Plain. Studies underway include research on demographics of the Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard, Giant Kangaroo Rat, and San Joaquin Valley Kit Fox populations. Annual surveys are conducted for local populations of LeConte's Thrashers, a Breeding Bird Survey route, the California Bumble Bee Atlas, and North America Bat Acoustical Surveys while winter surveys assess the temporary winter habitat use of migrating raptors, Long-billed Curlews, and Mountain Plovers.



Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard (*Gambelia silia*)

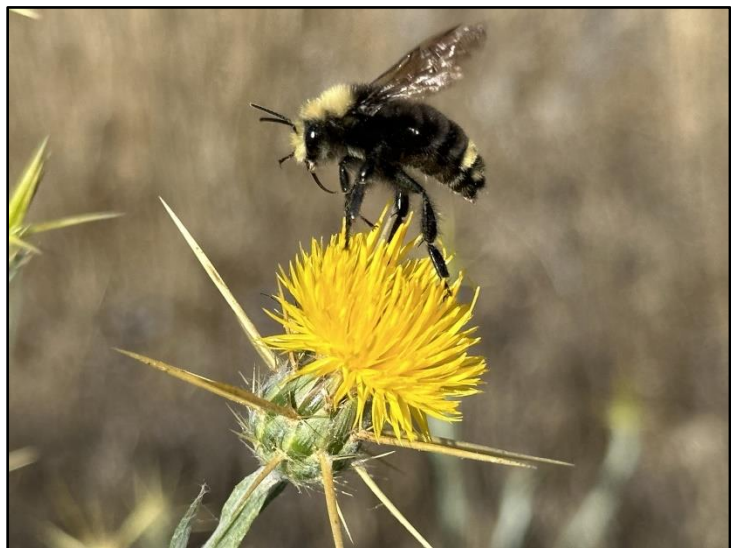


San Joaquin Kit Fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*)

Monument staff are also working with botanical researchers (Santa Barbara Botanical Garden and California Native Plant Society) on monitoring several endangered plants. Long-term vegetation plot monitoring offers glimpses into a changing landscape that's affected by periodic drought.



Monarch caterpillar (*Danaus plexippus*)



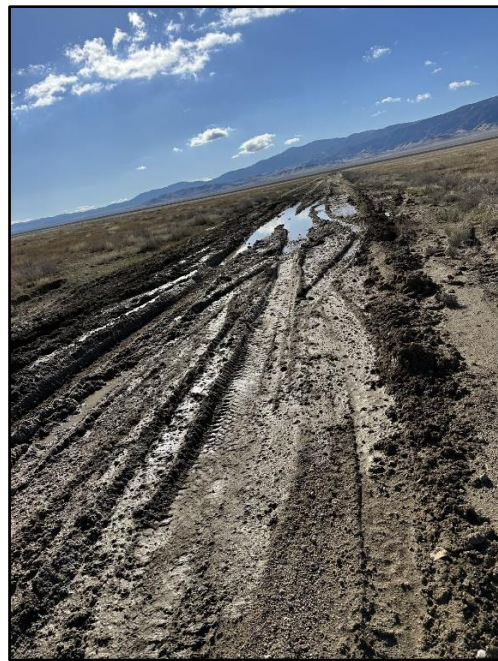
Yellow-faced Bumble Bee (*Bombus vosnesenskii*)

Climate Impacts

The Carrizo Plain National Monument continues to be influenced by climatic extremes. For the past few years, extreme heat and drought affected the amount of vegetation and wildflowers, decreasing the visitation to the monument. In contrast, in 2023 Carrizo Plain experienced higher levels of precipitation which produced beautiful wildflower displays drastically increasing the amount of visitation. This has been challenging because visitors often have to navigate muddy, impassable dirt roads resulting in many visitors getting literally “stuck in the mud.” Additionally, with the increase in rainfall, the vegetation density may have negatively impacted those wildlife species that are adapted to sparsely vegetated habitats.



Snow runoff from Caliente Mtns.



Impassable muddy road after recent rain.

Climate Resiliency

The Presidential Proclamation, which established the Monument, charges the BLM with protecting its flora and fauna. BLM is working with various researchers, both independent and associated with universities, to explore the effects of the changing climate and the effects on the ecosystem. This work will guide the management of these resources and help BLM and partners mitigate changes such as hotter and drier summers and wetter winters.

Monument staff continue to shift some of the water wells that were traditionally pumped by gas-powered generators to solar pumps. Staff have identified additional wells to transition to solar in the next few years.



Researchers on Carrizo Plain National Monument

Social and Environmental Justice

Many youth groups engage in conservation projects on the monument. Youth groups, scouting groups and home school groups ensure protection of resources by helping with projects or engaging in educational activities.

Continued involvement of the region's Native American communities enhances the management of the significant resources in the monument.

Over the course of a calendar year, Carrizo hosts tours for the general public, various organizations, and school groups. The Friends of the Carrizo offers funding to bus local schools to the monument that otherwise would not be able to come due to lack of funding.



Soda Lake Overlook

Events

In addition to this year's super bloom, Carrizo Plain hosted a great National Public Lands Day event. The support from the public was overwhelming. The event was held at the Saucito Ranch. Many tasks were accomplished including trail work, removing dead and invasive vegetation, and a general area clean up. The Friends of the Carrizo supported the workday by volunteering and providing lunch to all participants. Volunteers came from local communities and metropolitan cities. Lots of work was accomplished and a good time was had by all.



Volunteers cleaning up brush at Saucito Ranch for Public Lands Day.



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National Monument

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blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/california/carrizo-plain-national-monument

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