



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Nevada
2024: Annual Manager's Report

Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

2024 was a big year for Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area (Sloan Canyon or NCA). The NCA's first ever Jr. Ranger book was completed. Winner of two 2024 National BLM Awards for Excellence in Education and Excellence in Partnership, the book was the result of two years of creative, innovative, and patient collaboration between the BLM, our Tribal Partners, and Friends of Sloan Canyon. The book was translated into Spanish by a BLM staffer. The Strategic Interpretive Plan was also finalized providing big picture guidance for future interpretive offerings and exhibits. The team used this plan to put together a comprehensive Statement of Work for the design and fabrication of exhibits for the new Visitor Contact Station, which is now under construction.

2024 was also a year for laying the groundwork for the future success of Sloan Canyon. The District Wilderness Specialist worked with the Sloan team to complete three Minimum Requirements Analysis Framework studies. These analyses focused on appropriate options for managing access to the Petroglyph Management Area, which sits entirely within the North McCullough Wilderness.

The long-awaited groundbreaking event for the new Visitor Contact Station happened in FY24! Representatives from our non-profit partners, Tribal Partners, and partner agencies at the federal, state, and local level joined us to celebrate this milestone. The Sloan team is proud of the time and effort invested in cultivating these valuable relationships.



Jr. Ranger book and groundbreaking event for the Visitor Contact Station

Challenges

The wildland/urban interface of Sloan Canyon and the growing population of the Las Vegas Valley continually present challenges for managing a conservation area. While the proliferation of social trails continues to be a challenge, the Sloan team made positive inroads with a local mountain biking group and an International Mountain Bike Association chapter. They have become an ally of the NCA volunteering time to install new counters and signs around the NCA. Sloan also developed a relationship with the administrators of the Trails Forks trails app. After educating the developer on the concerns with social trails, they helped us in blocking illegal, social trails from being added to the app. These efforts demonstrate the positive outcomes of investing in relationship building and collaboration.

On more administrative notes, the Sloan staff gritted through a host of challenges associated with the start of the VCS construction, including closing and moving all the contents of the temporary office space and prepping for reroutes of popular trails around the NCA. The Sloan team is also grappling with the question of how the NCA will be funded long-term.



Mountain bikers enjoying a ride on a designated trail.

Visitors

The NCA had approximately 188,621 visits in 2024. This represents a 20% increase in visitation from 2023. The data was collected from 16 infrared and vehicle counters placed around the NCA at trailheads. Visitor use increased at the temporary visitor contact station and at trailheads nearest new housing developments. It remained consistent with prior years at trailheads and access points in already developed neighborhoods.

This increase in visitation numbers is also due in part to improved visitor data collection. Additional counters were installed this year on popular but unauthorized trails. Record breaking heat in Las Vegas negatively impacted visitation numbers. Visitation plummeted in June and were comparatively lower than 2023 due to the high temperatures lingering through fall. In the coming year, Sloan Canyon field staff plans to install additional counters along the North McCullough Wilderness boundary to improve our Wilderness monitoring.

On a fun (and slightly stressful) note, the Former Director of BLM and other BLM leaders enjoyed a guided hike in Petroglyph Canyon this spring. The BLM's Executive Leadership Team also came for a visit to learn about the challenges of managing public lands in the wildland/urban interface.



Visitors enjoying the Petroglyph Trail.

Partnerships

The Sloan staff continued to cast a wide net seeking new partnership opportunities. This year, the Sloan staff partnered with the senior class from the UNLV Architecture School. During the spring semester of 2024, students either designed their dream VCS for Sloan Canyon or created a 3D model from the current VCS design. BLM staff provided a guided hike and attended class every other week during the semester to provide feedback. The 3D model was a game changer in terms of envisioning how to maximize the very limited exhibit space in the new VCS. Sloan staff also established a partnership with the Clark County Library District. They did a story walk for kids at an event and are planning education programs in the NCA.

Sloan staff also built on existing partner relationships. Staff hand delivered over 2,000 copies of the new Jr. Ranger book to four different Tribal Partners and hosted events for Tribal youth during two of those visits. These events received a lot of positive feedback for making the effort to visit them. The Friends of Sloan Canyon (FOSC) remain a vital partner for the NCA. Volunteers donated over 800 hours assisting visitors at the temporary Visitor Contact Station and supporting multiple outreach events, including our annual Earth Day and National Public Lands Day events. Sloan continued the work with West Henderson Library in hosting monthly Speaker Series. Partners are essential to the work at Sloan Canyon.



Jr. Ranger Book event with the Moapa Cultural Committee and the UNLV Architecture Class.

Science

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is assisting the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System to develop Science Plans that help prioritize scientific research in these unique places. USGS initiated the Science Plan for Sloan this year and did an onsite visit. Work on the Science Plan will continue through FY25 and into FY26. The cultural resources staff completed a testing excavation at Dripping Springs with the help of volunteers, who reported how exciting it was to see archaeology in action. Next steps include lithic and ceramic analyses, obsidian sourcing, and botanical studies adding to our understanding of the site.

Sloan's Eclipse Event in October of 2023 was a huge success. Attendees enjoyed the interpretive offerings and the free viewing glasses to safely enjoy the moon eclipse the sun. Building on this successful event, the Sloan interpretive team is planning Night Sky Training for FY25 in partnership with the NASA's Earth to Sky. Sloan also continued the well-attended Speaker Series with partner, West Henderson Library. This year, the series covered a broad range of topics with speakers from various federal, state, and local agencies and non-profit organizations.



Sifting at Dripping Springs testing excavation.

Outreach and Special Events

In 2024, Sloan staff continued fostering existing relationships and established new connections within the local community. We hosted and/or participated in a wide variety of educational and outreach events, including career fairs, Discovery Days, Kick-off to Kindergarten, and World Ranger Day. We supported HOA events with thousands of attendees. Our most expansive event was the National Public Lands clean-up in partnership with the City of Henderson, Clark County Library District, and Friend of Sloan Canyon. Volunteers gave hundreds of hours of their time to clean up the McCullough Hills trailhead area.

Sloan expanded the reach of the monthly newsletter adding four more HOAs to the distribution list and posting it to the Sloan website. Sloan staff also supported the annual Gathering for Our Mountains with Tribal Partners, federal agency partners, and Portland State University. The multi-day event brings together multiple generations of Southern Paiute to share cultural skills and renew relationships with one another and the sacred land. The organizers requested copies of the Sloan Jr. Ranger book for each participant, who offered lots of positive feedback and appreciation for the care taken to create the book.



National Public Lands Day Event at McCullough Hills Trailhead.

The Long Game

In 2024, Sloan staff laid the foundation for several high-profile projects with long-term and far-reaching impacts on the NCA. We funded two assistance agreements focused on improving cultural understanding and connections to Sloan. The first project is a 3D modeling of Petroglyph Canyon with story-driven narration to create a web-based, virtual experience. The immersive experience will generate opportunities for users to connect to the history and culture of Sloan. The second is a multi-year ethnographic study of Sloan Canyon with an anthropologist from Portland State University. Both projects will be done in close collaboration with our Tribal Partners.

As mentioned in our Challenges section, social trail proliferation is an ongoing concern. One piece of the solution is an updated Comprehensive Trail Plan. The team created a statement of work for a trail inventory and NEPA analysis. The contract was awarded, and work begins in FY25. Education and outreach with our recreational users are also part of the solution. To that end, Sloan participated in an episode of PBS's *Outdoor Nevada* with partner, Southern Nevada Mountain Bike Association to discuss the damaging impacts of social trails. The host of the program is an Olympic gold medalist in BMX racing. His engagement on this topic was influential in the mountain bike community. As fate would have it, an article covering the same concerns was published in the local paper the same week the episode was released. The dual hit brought attention to this complicated issue.



Filming episode of *Outdoor Nevada* focused on unauthorized trails.

Words from the staff

The small, but dedicated Sloan Canyon team delivered again this year. The work output of this tiny group impresses me each day. Here is what the team had to say about our hectic year...

"2024 at Sloan Canyon was all about collaboration. We had MANY stakeholders put their time, energy, and expertise into projects and events at the NCA. Without their support, our list of accomplishments would have been much shorter this year." *Greg Feathers, Park Ranger*

"Frederick Douglas once said 'If there is not struggle, there is not progress.' This has been both a year of struggles and progress at Sloan. I look forward to the progress and changes we will continue to make in 2025!" *Betsy Bangert, Outdoor Recreation Planner.*

"A LOT is happening at Sloan Canyon, but I am grateful to be a part of this amazing team. We have built strong relationships, grown from our challenges, and have many opportunities waiting for us in 2025." *Mandy Royal, Park Ranger.*

"Napoleon Hill said it best 'Every adversity, every failure and every heartache carries with it the seed of an equivalent or greatest benefit' I feel this sums up Sloan Canyon's struggles to amazing achievements this year." *April Duncan, Administrative Specialist*

"2024 ended with *upheaval, fragmentation* and a *thirst* for a new horizon! In *birthing* our next chapter, those fragments are being *transformed* into a lasting imprint, that future generations can experience and value in a more *comprehensive* light." *Brian White, Park Ranger*

"All great changes are preceded by chaos" (Deepak Chopra). I think controlled, internal chaos covers the past year for me. We accomplished so much. I look forward to what the future holds for this beautiful and unique place, and this amazing team."

Thank you for reading,

Jenna Giddens
Sloan Canyon NCA Manager



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