



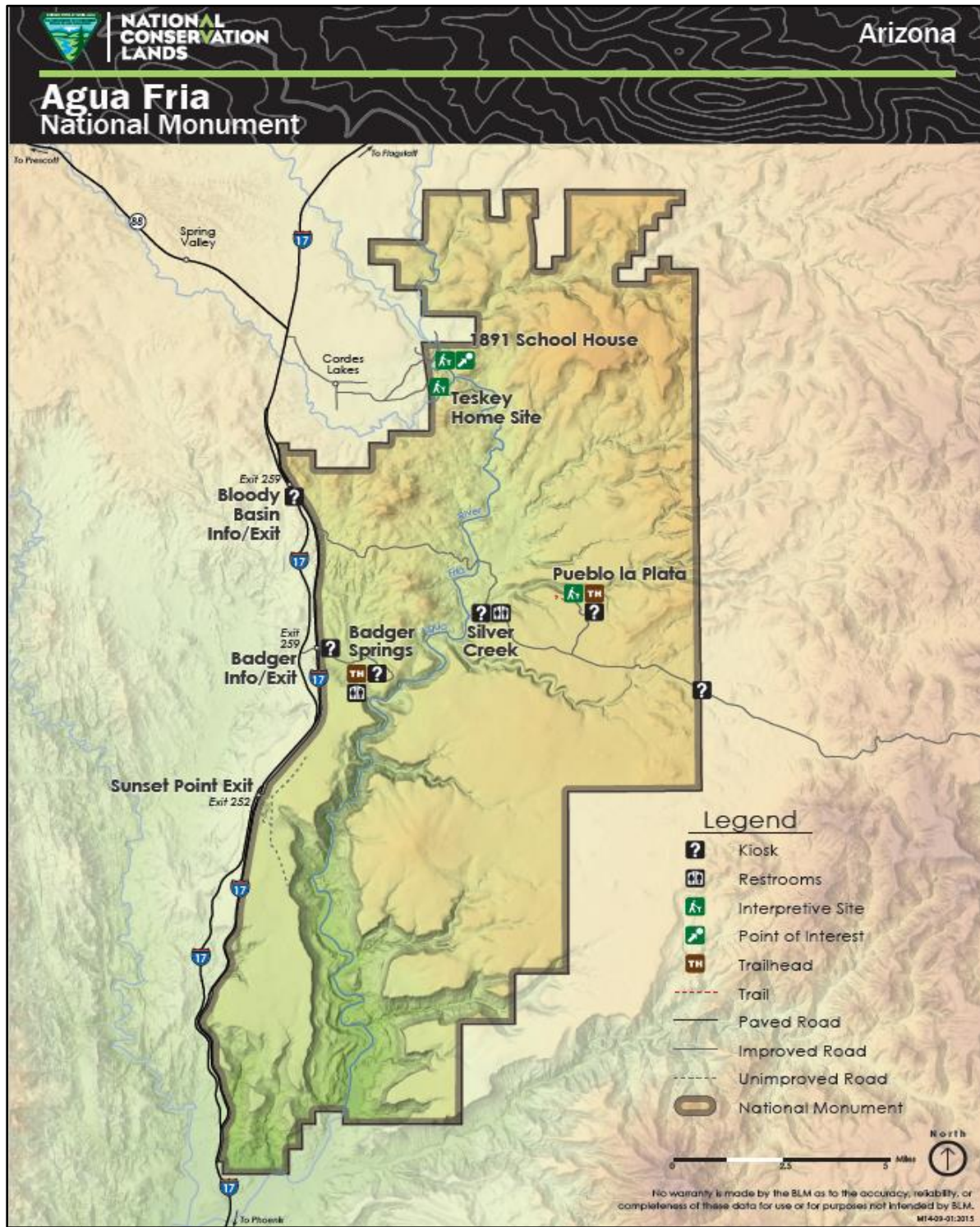
# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Arizona  
2023: Annual Manager's Report

## Agua Fria National Monument



# Map



# Accomplishments

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In 2023, the Agua Fria National Monument (Monument) staff, partners, and volunteers continued to implement a program of work to provide for public use and enjoyment while also protecting resources. The public outreach events and partner engagement activities highlighted below accomplish the National Conservation Lands strategy of raising awareness of the value and benefits of the Monument, and collaboratively manage the land as part of the larger landscape.

## Legacies on the Landscape

- Arizona State University (ASU) and the Friends of the Tonto National Forest have continued the *Legacies on the Landscape* project. The focus has shifted in recent years to the pre-Classic prehistoric sites that predate the pueblo builders of the Perry Mesa Tradition. Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 also included additional collection and analysis of pottery sherds to assist in determining the production and distribution of the earlier pottery as well as studying areas adjacent to the Monument. Pictured below is the prehistoric Lousy Canyon Fort, with Agua Fria River in the background.



### Section 110 Surveys

- The Phoenix District Cultural Resources Working Group continued working on intensive surveys within the Perry Mesa Archaeological District. Work again focused just north of Bishop Creek. This survey was carried out to meet the requirements of Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act which calls on federal agencies to perform proactive surveys in support of scientific research. All the sites identified are prehistoric and appear to be related primarily to agriculture. Research questions regarding the prehistoric economic cycles of Perry Mesa will greatly benefit from this ongoing effort to synthesize this Section 110 data.

### Arizona Site Steward Program-Agua Fria Region

- The Agua Fria Region site stewards had another successful year of recruitment and retention with interested volunteers coming in from all over Arizona to participate in monitoring of the region's important cultural sites. The site stewards monitor 30 major sites (and numerous smaller ones) multiple times a year to ensure that they are protected to the greatest extent practicable. If damage is observed, the stewards are trained on what to look for and how to report it to the Monument staff. Many of these site stewards became familiar with the region's significant cultural resources prior to the Monument proclamation.

### Grazing Management

- Implementation of the management actions outlined in the Horseshoe Allotment grazing decision and the Environmental Assessment are now under way with assistance of the permittee and Arizona Game and Fish Department. These management actions include new range improvements such as riparian exclosures, wells, pipelines, improved drought management triggers, and vegetation study plots among others. Exclusion of livestock from Silver Creek continued to be a priority in 2023. In addition to the Horseshoe grazing renewal, the range program completed monitoring on five grazing allotments including allotment and range improvement inspections. The range program also began the process for the rangeland health evaluation for the Cordes Allotment.

### Fire Management

- The Phoenix District Fire Management Program completed 200 acres of pile burning related to juniper thinning in the Black Hills wash area. An additional 200 acres of piles were cut along Indian Creek near the Prescott National Forest boundary for treatment in upcoming years. In 2023, there were nine wildland fires on the Monument. All of these fires were along the highway corridor, and none exceeded 2 acres in size on the Monument.

# Challenges

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Current requirements for volunteer agreements have continued to cause a reduction in official volunteer hours on the monument. Work has continued through the Friends of the Agua Fria National Monument (FAFNM) group, with the result that archaeological and natural resources within the Monument have continued to receive stewardship treatment that includes public participation in their protection.

The Arizona Department of Transportation has removed the temporary rest area they installed in 2022. The area was appropriately remediated but has led to an increase of visitation and overstays in this area.

Implementation of riparian exclosures has been delayed due to ongoing issues in finding contractors willing to do backcountry fence construction. No completed bid packages were submitted for this workload, and internal staffing is unable to complete projects of this size.

# Visitors

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Based on visitation at developed recreation sites, the Monument received an estimated 75,111 visits and 70,703 visitor days in 2023. Visitation has been steadily increasing in recent years, with a 5% visitation increase from 2022 to 2023. Primary visitation revolves around points that are the easiest to access, including Riverbend near Cordes, Badger Springs Trail, and Pueblo La Plata on Perry Mesa. Hunting is also a major draw for visitors at different times of the year.

# Partnerships

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The Friends of Agua Fria National Monument (FAFNM) is organized exclusively for charitable, scientific, and educational purposes; more specifically to protect, preserve and promote appreciation and enjoyment of the ecological, archaeological, scenic, and scientific resource values on the Monument. The organization plays a critical role in assisting the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) with mission support for Monument activities. They organize outings and perform service projects, such as monitoring cultural resources, conducting threatened wildlife surveys, organizing hikes and interpretive tours for its members and the public, removing non-native plants, performing trash cleanups, recording rock art sites, conducting annual Wet-Dry mapping (mapping extent of surface water), and acting as Monument advocates and stewards.



Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership (UAFWP) is a group of citizens and government representatives concerned with stewardship of the aquatic resources within the Agua Fria Watershed. Specialists from the Monument attended meetings and presented scientific findings on soil, water, and vegetation resources to foster understanding of the current ecological condition of the watershed.

The Arizona Site Steward Program, Agua Fria Region, is comprised of a group of coordinated volunteers who are assigned various archaeological sites on the Monument and in the surrounding region to monitor and report back to the BLM regarding condition, suspicious activity, vandalism, or other forms of degradation, both natural and human caused. The Arizona Site Stewards were established by the Governors' Advisory Council for Archaeology and have been an instrumental fixture on public lands for nearly 40 years. The program is operated under the direction of the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office within Arizona State Parks.

# Science

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The ongoing *Legacies on the Landscape* project continues to be a success on the Monument. As part of the partnership among the BLM and ASU, retired Tonto National Forest Archaeologist, Scott Wood, and retired ASU professor, David Abbott, have been utilizing a cadre of volunteers and students to conduct surveys in locations across the Monument and beyond. The information being gathered is teaching archaeologists a great deal about how and why this piece of the central Arizona highlands became so important in the late prehistoric period.

BLM resources staff and volunteers continue to monitor the riparian areas on the monument for threatened and endangered species, water availability, vegetation recruitment, and livestock use. Monitoring of riparian drainages included game cameras initially installed in 2022.



In 2023, Monument staff worked towards completion of the Monument science plan. This plan has been in various stages of development over the past 12 years. The current planning effort has led to a review of the current and past science needs, as well as several outreach meetings. This effort is expected to conclude in 2024.

# Climate Impacts

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Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 continued a trend of small wildfires on the Monument. Nine wildfires occurred on the monument, with the largest being less than two acres. Pictured below are bedrock grinding implements located in an area recently burned. Rainfall in 2023 was greater than in prior years, and slightly above average for the area. This increased rainfall was primarily winter rains and increased fuel loading on the Monument.



# Climate Resiliency

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In FY 2023, Monument staff had not directly or indirectly assessed the adaptive capacity for monument resources and management in relationship to climate change. However, as mentioned above in the Partnerships section, we continue to obtain assessments of surface water extent during dry periods using Wet/Dry mapping.



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## Social and Environmental Justice

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Consultation with 13 federally recognized tribes is maintained on a consistent basis to ensure that proposed uses and enhancements are carefully analyzed with tribal viewpoints incorporated into the decision-making process. This includes all livestock grazing, recreational opportunities, wildlife enhancements, and cultural resource use and protection. Additionally, tribes are notified of emergency actions such as suppression activities related to wildfire.

The local gateway communities of Black Canyon City and Cordes Lakes, Arizona, also benefit from annual events sponsored by both the BLM and volunteer groups. Black Canyon Heritage Park has worked closely with the BLM for several years to ensure that there is a local presence of knowledge regarding this important national treasure.

## Events

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Trash Collection along Interstate 17 was carried out on multiple occasions by the FAFNM, who have signed up for the Adopt-A-Highway program sponsored by the Arizona Department of Transportation.

A National Public Lands Day event was held in 2023. Public turnout was low, but lessons learned during this event will lead to greater public engagement in upcoming years.

## Words from the staff

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The Monument is such an amazing and important asset of not only the BLM, but the nation we serve. Its unique qualities are exemplified by the multitude of important natural and cultural resources found here. Important work takes place year-round and could not be accomplished without the assistance of our partners.



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

## **Agua Fria**

### **National Monument**

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