



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

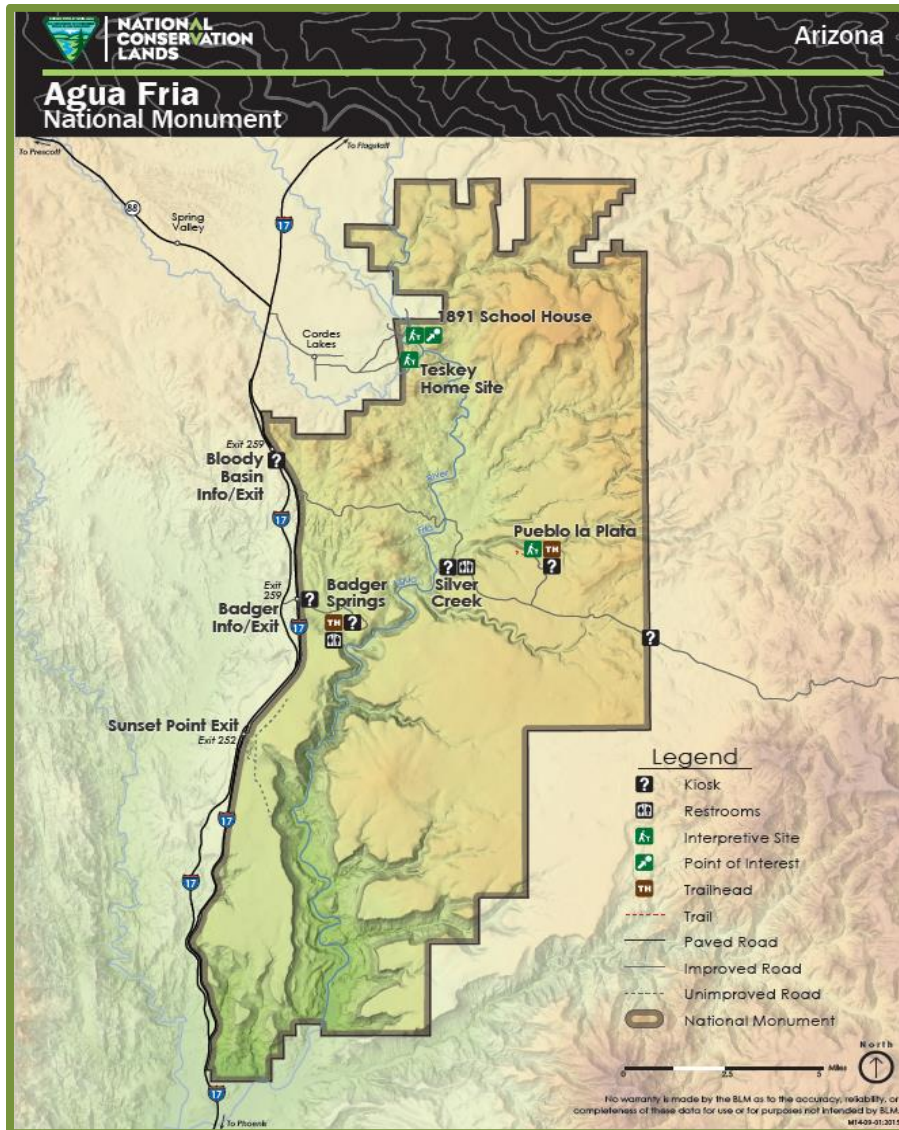
Arizona
2021: Annual Manager's Report

Agua Fria

National Monument



Map



Accomplishments

In 2021, the Agua Fria National Monument (AFNM or Monument) staff, partners and volunteers continued to implement a program of work to provide for public use and enjoyment while also protecting AFNM 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 Monument as part of the larger landscape.

Pueblo La Plata Interpretive Project

- Work continued in fulfillment of the Pueblo La Plata Interpretive Plan (2009) with the relocation of the visitor register box and the addition of a map box to hold the guided tour brochures prepared by the Friends of the Agua Fria National Monument (FAFNM) Cultural Resources Committee. Additionally, the FAFNM utilized Financial Assistance Agreement money to produce a video which is now available on YouTube and the FAFNM website, which takes people on a virtual tour of Pueblo La Plata. Additional grant funding is being pursued for the coming fiscal year. If granted, future money will be devoted to road improvements, an Americans with Disabilities Act compliant trail around the pueblo and interpretive signage. In addition, there are plans to expand and modernize the parking area to include shade ramadas, picnic tables, a bathroom and a set of panels that provide information about the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) mission and the AFNM.

Aerial View of Pueblo La Plata



Legacies on the Landscape

- AFNM staff continued working with Arizona State University (ASU) and the Friends of the Tonto National Forest on the *Legacies on the Landscape* project. The focus has been continuing to search for pre-Classic prehistoric sites that predate the pueblo builders of the Perry Mesa Tradition. Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 included additional collection and analysis of pottery sherds to assist in determining the production and distribution of the earlier pottery.

Section 110 Surveys

- The Phoenix District Cultural Resources Working Group conducted over 160 acres of Class III intensive survey on Perry Mesa 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. As a result of these efforts, five previously undocumented sites were discovered and intensively recorded. All of the sites are prehistoric with one possible historic indigenous site observed. The newly discovered sites appear to be related to agriculture and resource processing. Research questions regarding the prehistoric economic cycles of Perry Mesa will greatly benefit from this ongoing effort to synthesize this Section 110 data.



Artifacts discovered as a result of survey: (L) Archaic projectile point (R) two grinding implements (manos) found side by side

The Horseshoe Grazing Authorization renewal was completed in May of FY 2021, after the second appeal of the final grazing decision. The BLM also prevailed on the separate weeds management decision for the allotment. Implementation of the management

actions outlined in the grazing decision and Environmental Assessment is 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. In addition to the Horseshoe grazing renewal, the range program completed monitoring on nine grazing allotments including allotment and range improvement inspections. The range program also began the process for the rangeland health evaluation for the Cordes Allotment in FY 2021.

Challenges

The ongoing pandemic has been especially difficult on BLM volunteers who assist us with our responsibilities in managing the AFNM. Both the FAFNM and the Arizona Site Steward Program have been instrumental in both protecting important places and providing education and outreach to the public. Most of our volunteers are retirees, who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, but they still managed to conduct business without hesitation. As a result, archaeological and natural resources within the AFNM have continued to receive stewardship treatment that includes public participation in their protection.

One of the major challenges for the AFNM range program in FY 2021 was the ongoing drought. As the drought intensified during the winter and spring, several operators were forced to haul water for their livestock. Based upon having to haul water, the operators had limited time to respond to other livestock issues such as gates being left open, and trash removal. The BLM worked with the operators on the monument by putting up signs on gates and monitoring for other obstacles.

Visitors

Based on visitation at developed recreation sites, the AFNM an estimated 64,948 visits and 63,408 visitor days in 2021. Visitation has been steadily increasing in recent years, especially during the ongoing pandemic. 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

The 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 AFNM. The FAFNM play a critical role in assisting the BLM with mission support for AFNM

activities. They organize outings and perform service projects, such as monitoring cultural resources, conducting threatened wildlife surveys, organizing hikes and interpretive tours for FAFNM 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 AFNM 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 AFNM attended meetings and presented scientific findings on soil, water, and vegetation resources to foster understanding of the current ecological condition of the watershed.

Black Canyon Heritage Park (BCHP) serves as the gateway and visitor contact station for the area adjacent to the monument. The BCHP is staffed by volunteers and is located in Black Canyon City, Arizona. The heritage park highlights the rich natural and cultural resources of the area through interpretive displays on topics such as the AFNM, cultural artifacts and petroglyphs, local history, riparian areas, wildlife, and places to visit. In FY 2021, BCHP was able to host a few public outreach events during the COVID-19 pandemic, including “Water, Black Canyon City & Me” and Winterfest. The park also planned volunteer projects such as aquatic invasive plant removal, the planting of additional butterfly gardens, and interpretive plant displays.

The Arizona Site Steward Program, Agua Fria Region, is comprised of a group of closely knit volunteers who are assigned various archaeological sites on the AFNM 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

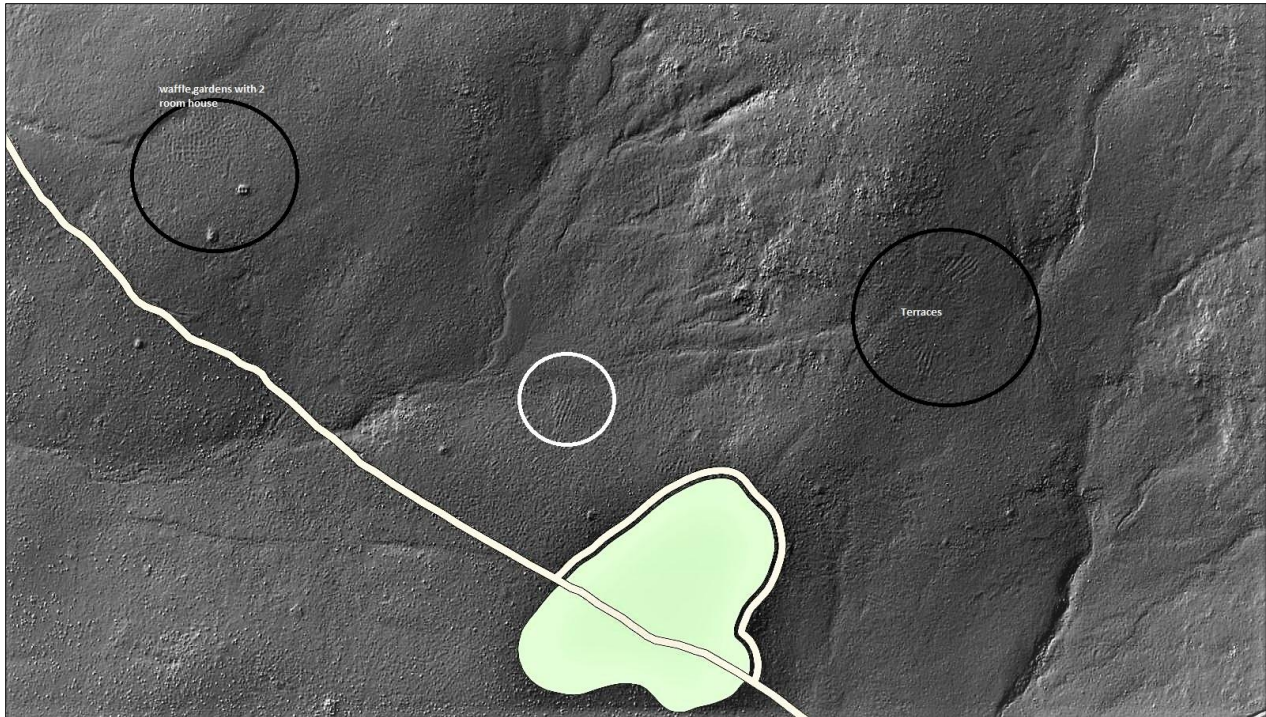
The ongoing *Legacies on the Landscape* project continues to be a success on the AFNM. As part of an ongoing partnership among the BLM and ASU, former Tonto National Forest Archaeologist, Scott Wood and ASU Professor Emeritus, David Abbott have been utilizing a cadre of volunteer students and other avocational enthusiasts to conduct surveys in select locations of the AFNM to take a closer look at “pre-classic” patterns and lifeways (prehistoric establishments that predate the 14th century Pueblos that the AFNM is famous for). These prehistoric sites are located throughout Perry and

Black Mesa as well as throughout the region. Diagnostic artifacts and architectural styles point towards an AD 1100-1250 timeframe.



View of the prehistoric Lousy Canyon Fort, Agua Fria River in the background

Efforts into gaining a better understanding of the agricultural exploits of prehistoric Perry Mesa Tradition is ongoing with satellite assisted remote sensing using Light Detection and Ranging (LiDar) examinations of various portions of mesa followed by ground truthing efforts to identify any physical manifestations preserved in place. Prolific use of terracing and “waffle gardens” appear to predominate with general use of cobble mulching being utilized in vast swaths of land clear of basalt rock (possible intentional clearing). This information will assist archaeologists in determining the level of intensity that was put forth to provide food for the large pueblo communities located across Perry Mesa. Future studies could include using applied anthropology techniques to recreate experimental agave gardens fashioned in the same manner as they would have been in the 14th century, as well as select opportunities for conducting pollen analysis in areas where original cultigens could still be preserved.



LiDar imagery reveals the location of prehistoric agricultural features in the vicinity of a large preclassic (est. AD 1200) pithouse village

Climate Impacts

FY 2021 was another big year for catastrophic wildfires in Arizona. The western portion of AFNM had two fires, both located on Black Mesa. The point of ignition for both incidents were from vehicles travelling Interstate 17, located adjacent to the western boundary. The Phoenix District BLM Fire Program was instrumental in keeping these fires small and ensuring that they did not burn into high-value habitats such as riparian areas.



Avocational and professional volunteers assist the BLM with site monitoring and documentation of fire effects

Climate Resiliency

In FY 2021, AFNM staff had not directly or indirectly assessed the adaptive capacity for a socio-ecological system.

Social and Environmental Justice

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.

Events

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.

Words from the staff

The AFNM 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 archaeological and historical resources found here. From the prehistoric remnants of the Perry Mesa Tradition to the historic Black Canyon Sheep Drives, the AFNM has so many stories to tell. The BLM has a unique trust responsibility to safeguard these treasures for the numerous federally recognized tribes that consider this part of their ancestral homeland while educating the public on the importance of cherishing these places. This important work takes place year-round and could not be accomplished without the assistance of our partners.



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Phoenix District Office
Bureau of Land Management
Hassayampa Field Office
21605 N. 7th Avenue Phoenix, AZ 85027
Phone: 623-570-5568

**Report compiled by: Timothy Watkins, Archaeologist
Roger Joos, Wildlife Biologist
Damon Haan, Wildlife Biologist
Timothy Lyons, Range Specialist
Chris Gammage, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Derrick Youngerman, Fuels Specialist**

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