

**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

**Nevada**  
2023: Annual Manager's Report

---

# Red Rock Canyon

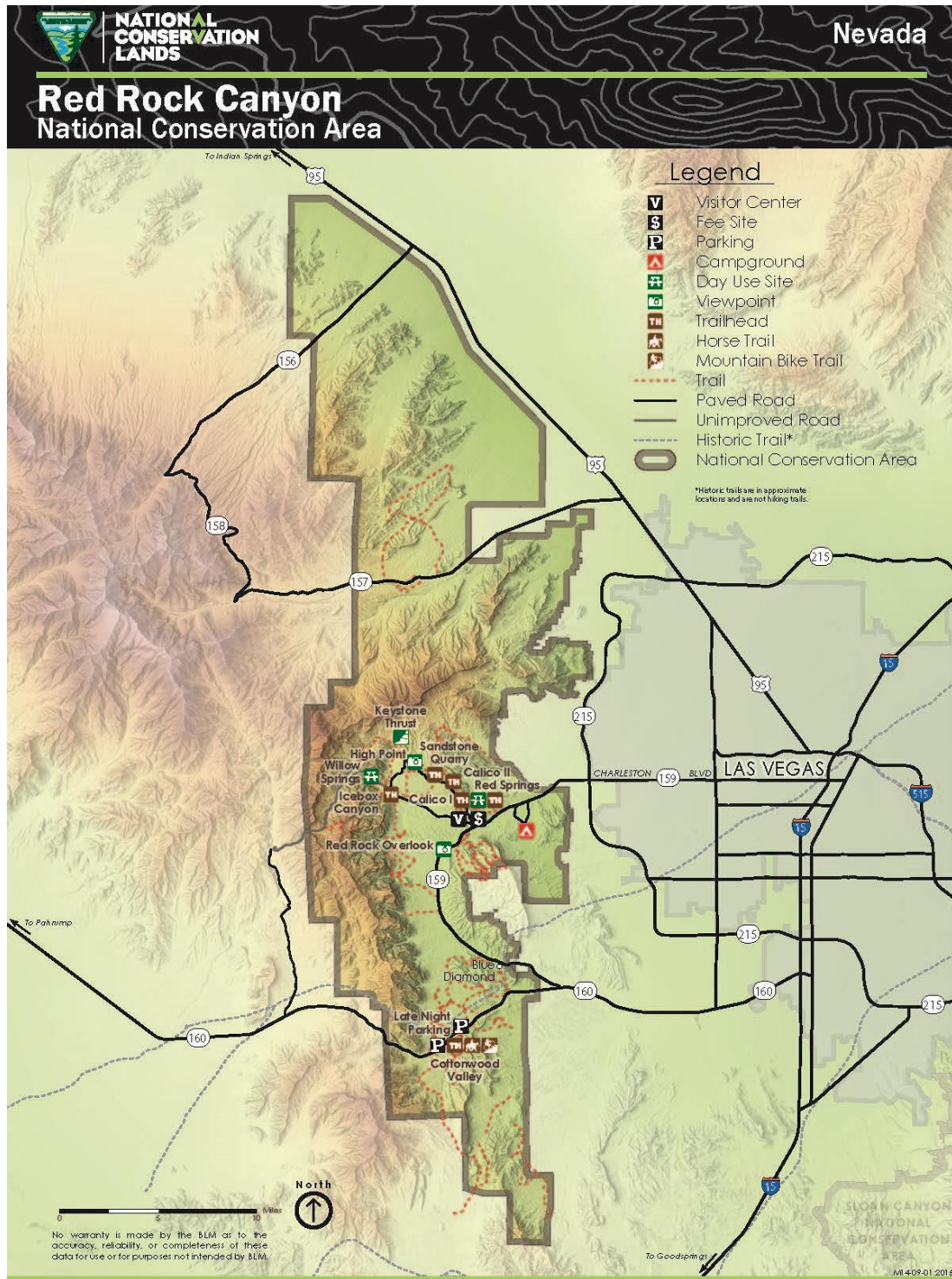
## National Conservation Area

---





# Map



# Accomplishments

---

Fiscal year 2023 continued to be a year of change and growth for Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area (Red Rock Canyon). We had nine staff members take promotions outside of Red Rock Canyon, five staff members were promoted from within, and we had six new hires. We hosted several trainings including the National Operations Center's "Wetland and Riparian Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring" (AIM)" training, as well as BLM's first soft-surface trail accessibility training. Besides the training itself, we were also able to host the executive board members of the Leave No Trace (LNT) organization who chose Red Rock Canyon for their annual meeting. Based on these efforts Red Rock Canyon is pursuing LNT Gold Standard certification. Significant progress was made with ongoing projects, such as the Long-Term Interpretive Plan, trail repair projects with partners, including the Access Fund and Southern Nevada Mountain Biking Association. Our goal is to make most of our front country trails accessible for users that rely on mobility devices.

Red Rock Canyon participated in the Teachers on Public Lands program. Our volunteer teacher developed curriculum for in-class and environmental education for grades K–5. The Red Rock Canyon team also expanded their outreach efforts with the Women in Science Speaker Series hosted in collaboration with our onsite partners, Friends of Red Rock Canyon and Southern Nevada Conservancy.



**Instructing Trail Repair Crew**



# Challenges

---

Challenges abound in Red Rock Canyon largely due to the wildland-urban interface with the rapidly growing population in the Las Vegas Valley. One of the pressing visitor-use issues for the Red Rock Canyon team is the proliferation of social trails and non-sanctioned mountain biking trails. Recent inventories indicate that non-sanctioned mountain biking trails outnumber designated trails within Red Rock Canyon. This proliferation of redundant and unplanned routes is causing soil compaction, drainage issues, and damage to both natural and cultural resources. The Red Rock Canyon outdoor recreation team is working on two Recreation Area Management Plans to address the issues at hand and to designate trails in two popular mountain biking areas of the area.

Other issues include the temporary closure of the Administration Building at Red Rock Canyon, due to aging, resource affects, and normal wear and tear. A start date for the repair of the building is to be determined. Currently, Red Rock Canyon park rangers have been working out of the classroom in the Visitor Center, while resource staff and outdoor recreation planners have been primarily teleworking. The staff at Red Rock Canyon is doing an amazing job but with the limited space and resources we have it is very challenging to manage the most visited National Conservation Area in the BLM. Some National Park Service units with similar visitation as Red Rock Canyon have two to three times more staff. In addition, the cost of living in the local community is 9% higher than the national average, and housing prices are 40% higher than the national average. Nevada also has the highest childcare costs in the nation. These economic factors have impacted employee recruiting.



**View of Las Vegas from the NCA boundary**

# Visitors

---

Red Rock Canyon had approximately 3.6 million visitors in 2023. This data was gathered from recreation.gov, our fee booths hand-counts, and about 40 infrared and vehicle counters placed around Red Rock Canyon including selected roads, trailheads, and busy social trails. This drop in visitation count numbers is due to improved data collection and calculation.

This year, Red Rock Canyon staff added more counters at social access points into the Red Rock Canyon, to improve the accuracy of our data collection and understanding of visitation. The Red Rock Canyon field staff plans to install additional counters in the coming year to continue to improve our tracking of visitation especially on the more popular trails. The visitation differs in the varying parts of Red Rock Canyon: In the north (Harris Spring) we have mostly OHV users; in the South (Cottonwood Valley) mountain bikers and climbers are our main users; the western section, which is our wildland urban Interface, hikers and mountain bikers are dominant throughout; Calico Basins is primarily used by hikers and climbers; our scenic drive gets mostly national and international visitors that rely on our main roads and well-established hiking trails; climbers access our world-renowned climbing routes from the scenic drive; equestrian use is spread throughout the NCA with the exception of our scenic loop drive/core area.



**Visitors enjoying the views on horseback**



# Partnerships

---

The Friends of Red Rock Canyon (FRRC) remain a vital partner for Red Rock Canyon. Volunteers donated over 8,000 hours assisting visitors at our Visitor Station Front Desk. This year, FRRC volunteers helped at 20 outreach events (events with over 20 volunteers), including our annual Earth Day, National Trails Day and National Public Lands Day (NPLD) events. Southern Nevada Conservancy and Get Outdoors Nevada are active partners leading curriculum-based field trips for students and assisting with the planning and execution of our NPLD event. The Red Rock/Sloan Field Office signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Southern Nevada Mountain Bike Association to collaboratively educate members about conservation lands and to address issues with social trail building.

Southern Nevada Conservancy also operates our Fee Booth and the bookstore in the Visitor Center. Other partners include the Southern Nevada Climbing Coalition and the Backcountry Horsemen. We are currently working with these two groups on a Memorandum of Agreement.



**Friends of Red Rock Canyon volunteers at our Volunteer Appreciation event**

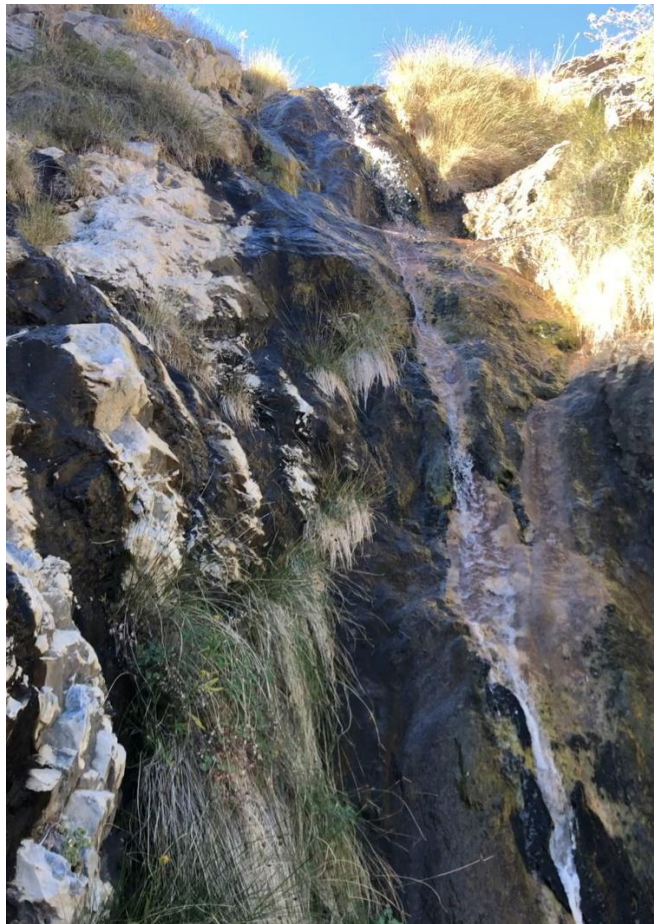
# Science

---

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is working with the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System to develop Science Plans to prioritize scientific research to better manage these unique places. USGS initiated the Science Plan for Red Rock Canyon this year. Work on the Science Plan will continue through FY2024 and into FY2025.

Our Field Office archaeologist oversaw two contracts to complete trail surveys for two of our active Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) Environmental Assessments, namely the Cottonwood Valley RAMP in the Southern portion of Red Rock Canyon and the La Madre Foothills RAMP in the western portion. Both surveys resulted in the need to reroute existing social trails away from archeological sites.

The Desert Research Institute conducted Cloud Seeding in the Spring Mountains, which resulted in an increased water discharge in several springs within Red Rock Canyon . We currently have an agreement with the USGS to measure the spring discharge and water quality in one of our springs, which is considered as one of the alternate locations for one of our endemic spring snail species.



**Three Sisters Spring**



# Climate Impacts

---

Red Rock Canyon lies within the driest desert in the driest state in the country. Current environmental conditions within Red Rock Canyon have shown rising temperatures, with decreased regularity in precipitation, resulting in historic droughts over the last couple of decades.

Under future climate projections, it is anticipated that temperatures will continue to increase, precipitation will continue to become less reliable and more extreme, and wildfire risk will increase. As the urban interface of the Las Vegas metro area further encroaches on the boundary of Red Rock Canyon, urban area heat effects will increase temperatures even more within Red Rock Canyon. This will result in increased evapotranspiration from vegetation. We can also anticipate an increase in non-native and invasive species in the native ecosystem at Red Rock Canyon, possibly increasing the wildfire risk.

Last year Red Rock Canyon had multiple extreme weather events including snow, ice and heavy precipitation. We had to close our scenic drive (either all day or part of the day) 5% of the time. The year prior we had 224 days without precipitation.



**Scenic Loop Closure due to flooding**



# Climate Resiliency

---

Climate resilience is the ability of individuals, communities, and systems to withstand, adapt to, and recover from the impacts of climate change. It is about building the capacity to cope with the effects of climate change, such as more extreme and unpredictable weather events and rising temperatures. Longer warmer seasons have resulted in endangered Desert Tortoses coming out off hibernation earlier and starting hibernation later. We have seen an increase in human caused tortoise injuries and fatalities during these shoulder seasons.

The legislation that created Red Rock Canyon charged the BLM with conserving, protecting, and enhancing for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations “the unique and nationally important geologic, archaeological, ecological, cultural, scenic, scientific, wildlife, riparian, wilderness, endangered species and recreation resources” of the Conservation Area. The BLM is working internally and with partners to develop plans for future scientific studies and landscape-level mitigation strategies. These strategies are good for both ecosystem health and understanding human connections to the landscape. Strategies include:

- Developing a Science Plan that includes climate, environmental justice, and indigenous environmental knowledge.
- Designing and updating exhibits and signage to educate visitors about climate change impacts, adaptations, and ideas for reducing human impacts.
- Monitoring the NCA for resource damage, impacts to wildlife, as well as the presence and spread of non-native and invasive species within the NCA.



**An injured endangered Desert Tortoise being cared for by Park Ranger at Red Rock Canyon**

# Social and Environmental Justice

---

Environmental Justice (EJ) includes meaningful involvement with all people, particularly Tribes and low-income and minority populations, in BLM decision-making processes. The BLM remains dedicated to improving access and reaching out to all members of the public we serve. In partnership with Friends of Red Rock Canyon, the volunteer coordinator organized our National Public Lands day and invited a diverse group of volunteers that included organizations, such as Blacks in Nature and Latino Outdoors.

Red Rock Canyon is part of the ancestral lands of more than eleven local Tribes. In 2023, the BLM continued monthly Government-to-Government consultation with the Moapa Band of Paiutes and monthly informal coordination meetings with the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians. Continued consultation and coordination, especially on major projects, is a priority and vital to the successful management of Red Rock Canyon. Additionally, Red Rock Canyon embarked on a new cultural ethnography project to understand the history of the NCA more completely.



**A diverse group of volunteers at National Public Lands Day event in Red Rock Canyon**



# Events

---

Besides a wide variety of educational and outreach events Red Rock Canyon was also the location of many sporting events that require a Special Recreation Permits (SRP). These events included several foot races, mountain bike races and road bike races, and many weddings. In 2023, the L'Etape de Las Vegas by Tour de France, was the first SRP for which Red Rock Canyon closed the Scenic Drive and allowed exclusive use for a sporting event on the Scenic Drive. As the popularity of Las Vegas for sporting events continues to grow, so does the expectation to be able to host these events, at least in part, at Red Rock Canyon. In general, local communities are very supportive to have these events.

In addition, Red Rock Canyon began a program for corporate volunteer events. There has been a desire by many corporations that are either based in Las Vegas or that come to conventions to Las Vegas to provide their employees the opportunity to give back to nature. While the program only started in 2023, the requests for these types of events in the current fiscal year has already more than quadrupled, requiring us to dedicate a full-time staff member to organize these corporate volunteer events.



**Amateur bicycle race on the Red Rock Canyon NCA Scenic Drive**



# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

## **Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area**

Southern Nevada District Office  
Red Rock/Sloan Field Office  
1000 Scenic Drive, Las Vegas, Nevada  
Phone: 702-515-5000

### **Report compiled by:**

Boris Poff, Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area Manager

The mention of company names, trade names, or commercial products does not constitute endorsement or recommendation for use by the federal government.