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BLM safeguards 98.9% of Sonoran Desert National Monument, its Indigenous resources, desert life from recreational shooting

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Late yesterday, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) [announced](#) it will close 480,496 acres (98.9%) of Sonoran Desert National Monument to recreational shooting, once allowed everywhere within this quiet oasis of saguaro cacti, native desert life, ancient petroglyphs, and a rich cultural history just an hour southwest of 5 million people in greater Phoenix.

In 2015, public lands advocates challenged a plan that allowed shooting *throughout* the monument, with the court finding the BLM arbitrarily ignored its own [study](#) concluding that target shooting *could not be safely and appropriately conducted anywhere in the monument* given the patterns and volume of visitors, and the number and variety of historical and natural objects found across this biologically and archaeologically dynamic landscape. After that ruling, BLM revised its plan to allow shooting in 90% of the monument, which the public lands advocates subsequently [challenged](#) in federal court. Today's decision stems from a subsequent 2022 [legal agreement](#) requiring the BLM to re-examine its decision.

“After two rounds of successful litigation, this is really a win for the Sonoran Desert National Monument, the American public and the local Arizona officials who spent years carefully documenting and analyzing the impacts of target shooting on these ecologically sensitive areas rife with Indigenous cultural sites, including the culturally significant Komatke Trail,” said Matthew Bishop at the Western Environmental Law Center. “There are plenty of places in Arizona to target shoot without harming important resources and visitor safety. The Bureau of Land Management made the right call here, and we will ensure this decision survives any legal challenges.”

“The initial analysis and decision by Arizona BLM staff was thorough and appropriate yet they ignored their own conclusions and failed to adopt a final plan that supported their own findings,”



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said Mike Quigley, Arizona State Director with The Wilderness Society. “The previous decision by the BLM left visitors and the natural landscape at great risk but with today’s decision, the BLM is considering the enjoyment of all visitors while also protecting what makes Sonoran Desert National Monument special.”

The BLM land surrounding the monument provides abundant opportunities for recreational target shooting. More than 78 percent of the nearby BLM land is open for recreational shooting. In addition, hunting and many other visitor pastimes like wildlife viewing, hiking, and camping are allowed throughout the national monument.

“It is heartbreaking to see the kind of harm done to saguaros, palo verde trees, and petroglyphs and other cultural sites from so-called recreational shooting,” said Sandy Bahr, director of Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter. “This is no way to treat the land, let alone a national monument. Sierra Club is pleased this new decision will recognize and protect the vast majority of the monument’s resources from harmful shooting.”

“We commend BLM for its willingness to reconsider this issue given the risks to visitors and to cultural and natural resources,” said Elizabeth Merritt, deputy general counsel for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “BLM’s own scientific analysis concluded that recreational shooting is incompatible with the values represented in the monument’s cultural resources, ecology, and public safety.”

The 496,000-acre monument is on the ancestral lands of the O’odham, Yavapai Apache, Cocopah, and Hohokam peoples.

Images for media use:

[Saguaro Damage 1 \(Phil Hanceford\)](#)

[Saguaro Damage 2 \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

[Saguaro Damage 3 \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

[Shooting Trash 1 \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

[Shooting Trash 2 \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

[Shooting Trash 3 \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

[Shooting Trash 4 \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

[Shooting Trash 5 \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

[Sign Bullet Holes \(Phil Hanceford\)](#)



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[Petroglyphs 1 \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

[Petroglyphs 2 \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

[Desert Life \(Kelly Nokes\)](#)

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