



Branching Out

Sedona Friends of the Forest

June 2026

From the President

Ahh – summer. Even though my kids have been out of school for longer than I’ll admit, there’s still something in my psyche that celebrates summer break. While Sedona summers are less busy for some committees, it’s also peak season for others.

In addition to reading what I have to say (which isn’t much), please spend the time reading about the amazing work being done by your fellow volunteers. As is always the case, our volunteers are incredibly dedicated and make a huge daily impact on the Red Rock Ranger District.

FOF volunteers’ labor provided to the Forest Service in one year, equates to more than 18 full-time employees! That’s more than \$1.1M in salary savings!

Telematics

If you utilize a government vehicle for your volunteer efforts, it is very important for you to know that all FS vehicles have remote monitoring capabilities (telematics) that record speed, safety belt use, harsh turns, and rate of acceleration. Telematics reports are shared with the Forest Supervisor (and District Rangers) on a regular basis. If the Forest Service deems there was reckless driving, that driver will no longer be authorized to drive a government vehicle, nor can they claim volunteer hours for time spent driving their personal vehicle. In other words, reckless driving may result in not being able to volunteer for certain FOF committees.

Seeking Stories for Red Rock News Article



As I’ve mentioned previously, I’m compiling a selection of stories, facts, interactions, etc. that highlight the lighter (and sometimes unbelievable) side of our volunteering efforts. If you have any funny, strange,

unbelievable, or heart-warming stories you’d like to share, please email me. Submissions and stories will remain anonymous and will most likely be edited, so don’t stress about creative writing or grammar.

Final Thoughts

If you want to be more involved or lead a committee in the future, don’t be shy. Talk with the current committee leaders to have a better understanding of the role they play and how you can help.

FOF Merch

If you’re looking for some FOF-branded merchandise, [click here](#) to shop, for ordering information and link to the third-party store.



Thank you to all the volunteer leaders that spent time writing their *Branching Out* articles! The peek into the work you and your volunteers do is greatly appreciated and it’s awesome to share with our full membership.

I’d be remiss if I didn’t thank Diane Greathouse, our *Branching Out* editor, and Sue Meyer, for making all our words and pictures flow!

Wherever you spend your summer, I hope it’s a great time that is filled with laughter and good times.



Melissa Pontikes

Melissa Pontikes

Membership

Hi everyone! My name is **Lex Scanlan** and I am your new Membership Chair. Many thanks to **Karen Yook**, the previous Chair, for all her hard work! Although I've been a Friends member since 2018, work commitments limited my ability to volunteer regularly. I'm excited to now have the opportunity to become more involved.

Because I live in Chicago, I'm especially interested in finding a local co-chair who can assist with occasional in-person membership duties in Sedona. If you'd like to learn more about the role, I'd love to hear from you.

One of the highlights of stepping into this role has been seeing the incredible involvement of our members.

As of April 30, 251 volunteers have been active during this fiscal year.

Thank you for everything you do to support our forests and community!

Name Tag Process

- New members receive one complimentary Friends name tag.
- Replacement or additional name tags are available for \$10.
 - When requesting a name tag, please include:
 - The name you'd like displayed.
 - Whether you prefer a magnetic or a pin backing.

Orders are submitted to our engraving company on the 1st and 15th of each month. Once your name tag is complete and ready to be picked up at the Visitor Center, you will receive an email notification.

Red Rock Pass/ America the Beautiful Volunteer Pass

Volunteers who complete:

- 16 hours during the fiscal year (October 1–September 30) are eligible for a complimentary one-year Red Rock Pass.
- 250 volunteer hours (in addition to the 16 hours required for the Red Rock Pass) are eligible for a one-year America the Beautiful Volunteer Pass.

Pass requests are submitted to the Forest Service on the 15th of each month. Please send your request by the 14th to ensure inclusion in the next submission. Email me at membership@fosedona.org.



Lex Scanlan

Wildlife, Fish, Range & Plants

There are always a variety of projects going on with the **Wildlife, Fish, Range and Plant** (WFRP) program. Here are some WFRP highlights from recent work.

Scanners Needed

The Forest Service needs volunteers to scan files. It is an ongoing project so if you have blocks of time to help out, please [contact WFRP](#) to coordinate. Some of these files are older and can be challenging due to the different types of paper, binder styles, and pictures glued or taped to them, so patience is an asset! There's only one scanner and it is located at the Administration building. Big shout out to **Cleo Duardo** and **Gregory Yori** for all their help with this big project.

Thank you Vicki and Rob!

Vicki Hill, our FOF Apps Administrator, recently configured the FOF Reporting apps to automatically forward reports and notify the WFRP Committee Chairs. It is very helpful. Thank you Vicki!

Rob Harrison, FOF Webmaster, created a Google Form for [Exclosure Monitor reporting](#). Thank you Rob!

Kestrel nesting Success!

Dale and **Sharon Evans**, along with **Susan Meyer**, were monitoring a Kestrel nest and spotted five eggs. They monitored the progression from eggs to hatchlings. Then, with the help of the Forest Service and Arizona Game & Fish, the hatchlings were tagged and returned to the nest.



Fireflies



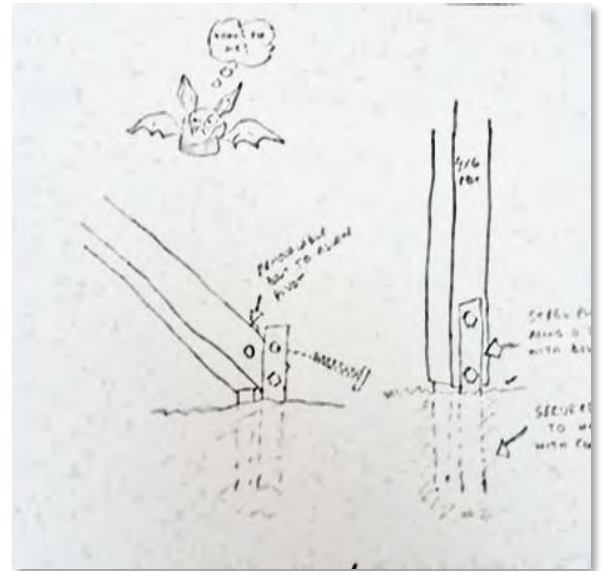
Firefly surveys are being conducted from June 15 to July 15 throughout the Verde Valley in collaboration with the *Friends of the Verde River*. Fireflies are fairly rare in our area, so monitoring is critical to track their numbers and locations. Survey work includes on-site observation, setting up over a dozen outdoor cameras at springs and in riparian areas, and monitoring footage. Results will be published in an upcoming issue.

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Bat Roost

Bats were getting into a building at the Beaver Creek Work Center. After sealing up their entry point, **Mike Boyd, Ernie DiMillo, and Ron Anderson** built a new bat roost.

As with all projects, it never is as simple as it sounds. Archaeology approval was obtained before digging. MacKenzie Atkins, Forest Service, provided info on bats to help with the roost design. Ernie drew up the plans. Angled wood shingles were included as bats like to climb into crevices. The long green cover acts as a roof. The roost base is hinged so it can be lowered when needed. The base of the roost is almost 11 feet, with a total height of 16 feet. Ron will attach temperature recorders and monitor internal roost temperatures.



Ernie's design sketch

It isn't guaranteed bats will take up residence when they return, but their beautiful new home will be waiting for them when they arrive.



Mike and Ernie deliberating



Ernie and Jim setting the post



Green cover on right will go over the shingled pole on the left.

Agave Monitoring

In February, Desert Botanical Garden agave expert Wendy Hodgson led a training session at the Red Rock Ranger District and in the field near Red Tank Draw. Volunteers learned how to identify agaves to distinguish native agaves from rare domesticated agaves cultivated centuries ago by Indigenous peoples of the Verde Valley. Volunteers are helping monitor these unique agaves by locating, counting, photographing, and documenting them in the field. The project supports sensitive species management while also increasing understanding of Indigenous land use, early agriculture, and the preservation of these living cultural resources.



Riparian Exclosure Monitoring Training

Riparian Exclosure Monitoring training, held in February at the Visitor Center, had an excellent turnout. **Janie Agyagos** provided a [slide show](#) and thorough overview, as well as conducted an off-site riparian visit in Woods Canyon. The main purpose of exclosure monitoring is to verify allotment fencing is intact before free range cattle arrive. Most importantly, this fencing protects riparian areas. Less than 1% of the Coconino National Forest is considered riparian and yet upwards of 80% of vertebrates depend on these areas.

Monitoring entails:

- visiting an assigned allotment before and after livestock arrive
- Inspecting perimeter fencing
- Documenting conditions



A few more allotments were adopted after the training, but if you're interested, there are more to be assigned! [Contact WFRP](#) for more information.

Rookeries



Volunteers located and reported colonial nesting bird rookeries (groups of nests high in riparian trees where herons roost). **Janie Agyagos** investigated each site. One exciting find was near the Crane Petroglyph site (previously V-V). It is not currently an active rookery but will be monitored.

Mystery Creature Identification

Rob Johnson, an FOF volunteer, sent an email saying *"I'm occasionally outside at night and hear bats, owls and other animals, but this one sound has bewildered me for years. Many people can't hear it, which made me feel crazy, but one night I finally got a recording of the noise."*

The recording was sent around asking for help and bingo, **Rob Gibbs**, an FOF volunteer, came to the rescue with the most probable guess. The potential "whistler in the dark" seems to be a grasshopper mouse. A [Nat Geo Wild video clip](#) shows it howling, as well as its carnivorous eating habits. Viewer be warned, it is a bit graphic.

Ultrasonic Sound

Not all humans can hear the sound of a grasshopper mouse because many of its squeaks, warning calls, and tiny "howl" are ultrasonic; near or above the upper limit of human hearing.



Weed Warriors

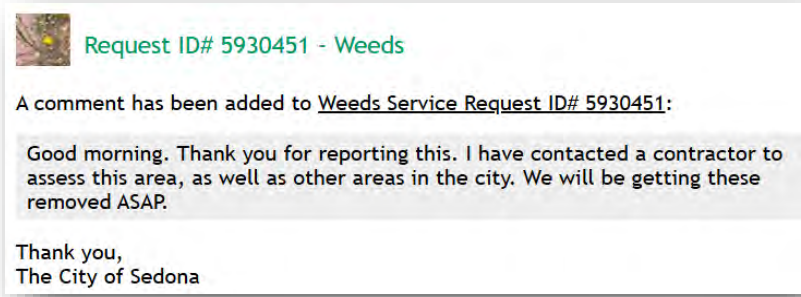
If you spot an invasive weed, there are multiple ways to report it. You can use the *FOF Reporting App* or *Graffiti App*, you can email wildlife@fosedona.org, or use the City of Sedona’s “Citizens Connect” app (available in your App Store). What happens to these reports? Take a look at a few examples of how the community works together to stay on top of these weeds. By reporting you are a critical link in the chain.

Onionweed - **Marjorie** and **David Terrell** reported onionweed on Stirrup Trail in the Western Gateway. The onionweed was GPS'd and a team of FOF weed pullers was deployed. **Janie Agyagos, David Terrell, Bobbi Titter,** and **Steve Galginaitis** successfully eradicated what they found.

Yellow Bluestem - **Don McClimans** reported his findings at Aerie and other places, while Janie Agyagos spotted them around Jim Thompson trailhead. Eradication is in progress.

Yellow Starthistle - **Dale Evans** reported Yellow Starthistle on the Schuerman Mtn Trail on high school grounds by their solar panels. **Sam Blom** and **Annie Glickstein** contacted the high school. The weeds will be eradicated.

Yellow Starthistle - Annie used *Citizens Connect* to report Yellow Starthistle along the Dry Creek Shared Use Path. The first response back wasn't very hopeful, but then this message was received:



Annie Glickstein and Janie Agyagos



Trail Maintenance & Construction

Trail Maintenance & Construction, (TM&C) just wrapped up another busy season. The 2025–2026 season brought a wide range of projects, from infrastructure upgrades to habitat protection to new trail construction. Over the course of the maintenance season, 35 volunteers of the TM&C contributed nearly 1,400 hours across 20 separate work events.

Kiosk Construction

One of our most visible accomplishments was assisting the Forest Service’s Red Rock Seasonal Trail Crew in the removal of aging wooden kiosks and the installation of new, durable metal kiosks at eight trailheads across the district. These included AZ Cypress, Jim Thompson, Long Canyon, Lower Red Rock, Mystic, North Wilson, Schnebly Hill, and Woods Canyon. At press time we’re due to add a ninth at the new trailhead behind the Oak Creek Elementary School in Cornville. The new kiosks provide clearer information, withstand harsh weather, and reduce long-term maintenance needs.



Preparing the Ground at (the other) Long Canyon



The Big Lift



An old kiosk coming out up at Schnebly Hill Trail



Up it goes!

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Long Canyon finished!

The TM&C crew also helped install hundreds of feet of new protective fencing at two high-use locations: the Bell Rock Vista parking area and the entrance to West Fork. These areas see heavy visitor pressure, and the fencing helps shield sensitive habitat from trampling and off-trail travel.



Dale Smrz ready to do some lopping on North Wilson

Turkey Creek

Another major focus this season was continued work on the new Turkey Creek trail system. With 10 new trails built this year, the TM&C crew contributed to corridor clearing, tread work, and erosion control. The expanded system is designed to provide new loop options, improved connectivity, and add additional recreational opportunities for users. Much of the work entailed rerouting, decommissioning, and naturalizing social trails so that the new trail system avoids sensitive cultural and environmental areas and is more sustainable in the long run.



West Fork fencing!

Signs, Signs and More Signs

The Turkey Creek trail project also kept **Rod Cashin** and the sign crew busy. New signs were created and installed on Longshot, Pony Up, Rodeo, Lion King, Hyena, Giddy Up, Pedal Up, High Noon and Carousel as well as their junctions with Del Sol and Turkey Creek. That was in addition to the routine trail sign maintenance, as new signs were also installed on Apache Maid and Hiline, along with directional signs and trail rerouting on Bell Trail at the river crossing. White blaze markings were freshened up and installed on Rector Connector, Hog Wash and Hiline.



Lion King and Hyena



Steve Galginaitis with new signs at Turkey Creek



Del Sol and Giddy Up



Kiosk installation at the new E. Willow Pt. Rd. trailhead in Cornville



TM&C welcomes **Steve Galginaitis** as new co-Chair, replacing **Glenn Kingsbury** with the start of new season in October. Congratulations!

Glenn Kingsbury, Pat Quinn, and Rod Cashin

Cultural Resources / Docents

The name change from *V-Bar-V Heritage Site* to *Crane Petroglyph Heritage Site* has resulted in a big increase in visitation throughout March, April, and May. In prior years daily visitor counts were in the 80's. This year we saw counts in the mid 100's with a high of just under 200 for the Spring Equinox. Many visitors commented that they had never visited the site because they did not know that it had petroglyphs and they had no interest in visiting a historic ranch. Ironically, this is the main reason why the Hopi wanted the name change, so that Hopi people would know that the site is part of their history and not just some "white man ranch."

**Name
change
increases
visitation
numbers**

Summer heat is now upon us. That means two things: 1) at least half of the docents have left for cooler temps elsewhere and 2) the Heritage Sites switch to half-day operations, with an 8:00 AM start time for Crane PHS and 8:30 AM start time for Palatki & Honanki. All sites will close at noon (or earlier if it hits 100 degrees). Palatki will go from being open 7 days a week to 4 days a week, Wednesday through Saturday.

Docent on the Move



Wendell Waybright

It is with great sadness and fond memories we announce the departure of docent **Wendell Waybright**, who completed his last day at Palatki. Wendell and his wife Carol will be moving back to Rhode Island to be closer to her parents as well as their daughter. Aside from his warm quirky smile and easygoing demeanor, his most appreciated contribution to the program was continually filling in on the days with the greatest needs regardless of the day of week. His trophy for these many years of service is his volunteer vest that is festooned with many patches. I and all who have had the pleasure of working beside him will miss him very much. Thank you Wendell, for your dedication and zeal. Best wishes for many healthy and happy years to come.

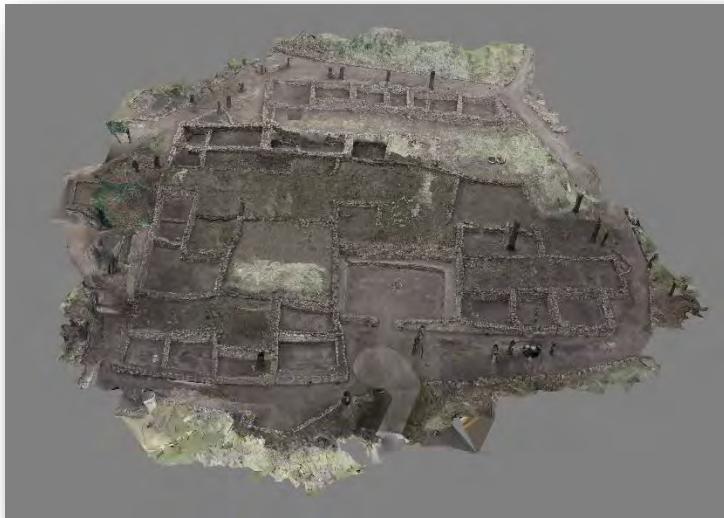
We are always in need of new docents, particularly if you spend all or part of the summer months in the Verde Valley! Seasonal residents are wholly welcomed (and needed) too. Training is scheduled whenever we have members interested in the program.

If you are interested in helping protect our cultural heritage sites and learning more about the Palatki, Honanki and Crane Petroglyph sites, consider joining the Cultural Resource and Protection Committee. Please call 928-284-1339 or [email](#) for more information. Our [Docent FAQ](#) is also available online.

Cultural Site Photo Documentation Project

Photo team efforts continue at Elden Pueblo in Flagstaff on behalf of the Flagstaff District of the Coconino Forest. The "official" 100th anniversary of work at the site occurs sometime during June. At this point, we do have a merged 3D model of the Pueblo 1 (the main area of the site) that incorporated a total of over 28,000 @ 24mp photos. This magnitude of data is seriously pushing the technical envelope of the process and our software and hardware. There remain several areas of Pueblo 1 that do not have the 3D quality we would prefer, but continual geometry issues, complicated by ongoing substantial grass and weed growth, limits

what we can do. For now, update photo acquisition is on hold. Pueblo 2, the smaller 5 room area, is complete. The 3D models are the basis of updated sketch maps of the site and architectural "elevation" style diagrams of every room wall and feature. We need a lot of computer-based help creating the elevation diagrams if anyone is interested. Training will be provided via Zoom or locally if possible. A reasonable internet connection, computer screen and mouse will be needed.

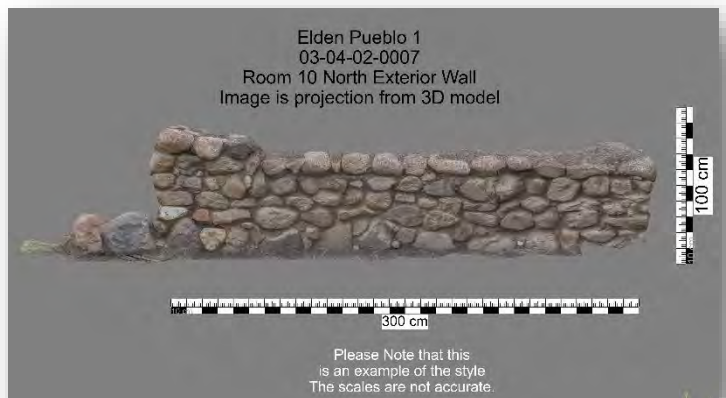


The angled capture image of the Pueblo 1 model



The original model is close to 40,000,000 faces. Back during our use of *Sketchfab*, our largest models were 4,000,000 faces, with most less than 1,000,000. The image to the right of the model capture is a view of a vertically aligned orthographic projection of the model which is an early draft of the new site map. Spatial accuracy is for the most part, well below 5 cm. This model is also the basis for most of the elevation diagrams to be created. The image (below right) is an example of the style of architectural elevations to be created for all room walls at Elden, Honanki and Palatki and ultimately also of rock art panels at all of the sites.

Updated current condition photo acquisition at Honanki continues, as does room wall assessment. Progress has been slow for the past few weeks but will start up again shortly. The team is currently at approximately 40-50% complete for both image and data acquisition. We will be starting to prepare available imagery for the architectural elevation style diagrams in the very near future. When data acquisition is complete at Honanki, the plan is to move on to Palatki.



Please contact **Spence Gustav** at spencehg@yahoo.com if you have questions or would like to join his team.

Site Recording Project (SRP)

Due to early seasonal heat, and team members being unavailable in April and May, the SRP activities ended seasonally early this year. The team hopes to resume in the fall. If you are interested in learning more about the SRP, please contact **Scott Newth** at Sedonaexplorer3@gmail.com.

Jerry Walters

Graffiti Removal

Graffiti vandalism is making local headline news. Visitors to Cathedral Rock were recorded scratching graffiti into the sandstone. The video was posted on Facebook and received over 371,000 views. A [Red Rock News article](#) and [NRI News story](#) mentioned law enforcement involvement (see links). Getting this topic into the news can help bring attention to this issue and hopefully act as a deterrent. Many of our visitors don't believe that scratching into the sandstone is harmful. These articles point out it *is* vandalism and against federal law.

Childs Powerhouse

Thanks to team members **Jerry Checchia** and **Steve Galginaitis** for joining me on a trip to the Child's Powerplant down on Fossil Creek. Since our outing last year, more graffiti has appeared. We were able to paint over six various graffiti incidents. We were also able to repair fencing and gates to prevent access to the plant. A quick response to the forest service request on this project assured completion before the return of the bats in mid-April.



Before.....



...and After



Repaired access gate

Vandalized Forest Service Property

Thanks also to the group participating in another painting project. A local pumphouse and storage tank on forest service property was covered in graffiti. A group of volunteers made quick work of painting over the graffiti.



Painting pumphouse & storage tank

On-the-Job Training

A group outing to Bell Rock included both graffiti remediation and "on the job" training for team members interested in learning our technique for camouflaging graffiti over patinaed rock. The technique involves the use of egg yolk as a medium and metal oxides as pigment to create a paint to cover the graffiti. This does not hurt the patina on the rock surface.



Cleaning West Fork

West Fork Group

Another nice outing was held at West Fork in May. The group cleaned the entire length of the trail.

Everyone be careful out there and enjoy our forest.

Trail Ambassadors

Since January, Trail Ambassadors have logged 4,817 hours, hiked 3,719 trails, and submitted 122 maintenance reports. Thanks to all of the Ambassadors for their presence on the trails, interactions with visitors, and trail damage reporting.

Thanks to **Carol Dores** for three years of serving as co-chair of Trail Ambassadors. **Peter Cross** will join Bob Dores as co-chair. We will resume Trail Ambassador programming in October.



Trail Ambassador group hike on the Brins Mesa/ Soldiers Pass Loop



Janie Agyagos leads a Flora and Fauna talk on the Girdner trail



Al Cornell gave a presentation on Tracks, Signs, and Scat at the Ranger Station

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Trail Ambassador group hike on Transept



Jim and Cheryl McCann led a Trail Ambassador group hike on Del Sol and Third Rock

Carol and Bob Dores

Visitor Information Services

Many volunteers have said “I don’t know enough to give good advice,” and that’s why they avoid working at the Visitor Center. However, VIS volunteers are never alone. Forest Service staff are always on site and handle all the phone calls, as well as issue the Recreation Passes, wood permits, etc. Volunteers answer general questions, help plan trips, and direct visitors to appropriate resources.

Steve and Judi Schulte recently became VIS volunteers. Here’s what Steve had to say:

“As recent “graduates” of the new Visitor Center training program, my wife Judi and I are two of the newly qualified volunteers. I thought I would share our experience of getting trained and completing our first shift. We first did an orientation with Grant Cloud, FS Visitor Services Information Assistant (I actually got two orientations by tagging along during Judi’s orientation). Grant did a fantastic job laying out all the “do’s and don’ts,” explaining the different fee requirements, and giving us a great tour of the Visitor Center. Then we did two “shadow shifts” with Kelly. Kelly Harper, Visitor Information Services Resource Assistant, is so helpful, knowledgeable, and patient. It really helped seeing how she interacted with the public.



Steve and Judi Schulte

Finally, we signed up for our first shift and felt ready to help out. Judi jumped right in with a family with kids and started them in Junior Rangers. I got my first visitor and was ready to help with anything... favorite hike, things to see? Instead, the man said, “I’ve got a question,” and pointed out the window at Sedona and said, “How did this all happen?” Really? No softball question to start? Fortunately, we have the Geology display that I could point him to while I checked to see if I was being set up on my first day (Annie claims it was legit).”

Volunteers also help direct visitors to other trails besides the favorites, Cathedral and Devils Bridge. The new Turkey Creek Trail system is a great alternative, as well as the improved Doe Mountain Trail.

Just as Judi Schulte experienced in her first shift, it’s fun to introduce kids to the Junior Ranger Program. Kids get a booklet, complete activities with their families, say a cute pledge, and receive their Junior Ranger Badge.

To complement the Junior Ranger Program, there’s now a B.A.R.K. Ranger Program!

Bag your pet’s waste

Always leash your pet

Respect wildlife

Know where you can go (and what temperature the ground is)

If you haven’t gone into the Visitor Center lately, stop by, observe the process, and take a look around. The interpretive displays are always impressive, and more improvements are on the way. **Mike Boyd** and **Ernie DiMillo** demolished an old counter that showcased a very outdated map. It will be interesting to see what new items are installed.



BARK approved by
Jack A. Glickstein

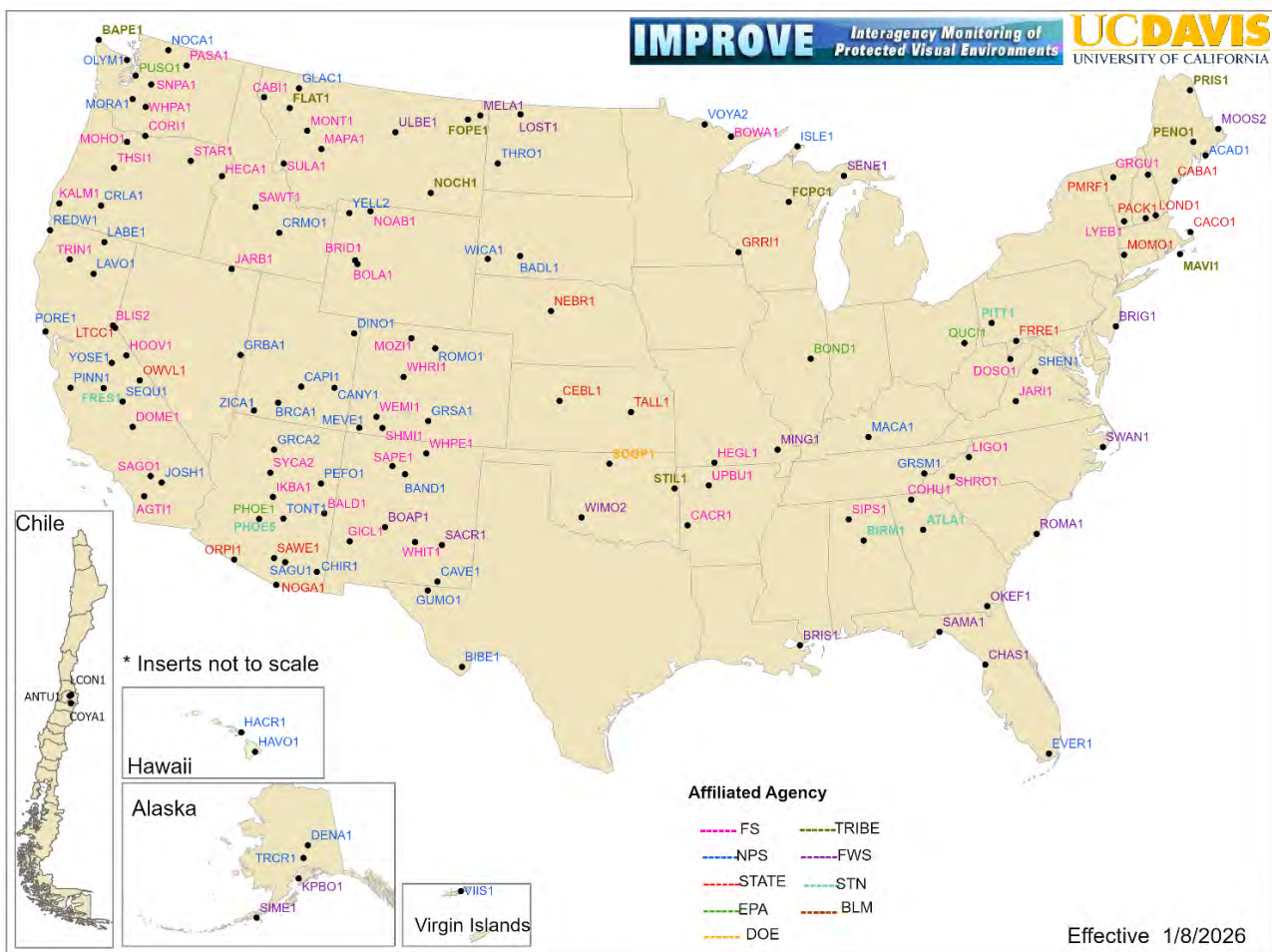
Annie Glickstein and Nick Kollios

Water Sampling & Air Monitoring

In April, UC Davis needed to do some scheduled maintenance at their air quality site at Ike's Backbone. I would like to give a huge shout out to **Ron Anderson** for escorting them. It is approximately 100 miles round trip, with 40 miles on a bumpy washboard road. It takes about five hours from the Red Rock Ranger Station.

In 1985, the EPA created the IMPROVE network. As the network grew, it evolved from 20 sites to approximately 160 sites across the United States, Canada, and South Korea. Find the Ike's Backbone site, IKBA1, on the map. Here is a [link to the IMPROVE](#) website (Interagency Monitoring of Protected Visual Environments). Scroll down to *Current IMPROVE Site Report* to see the site report.

Thank you to everyone on the committee for all you do for the Friends, the Forest Service and our environment.



Enjoy the summer and be safe,
Jerry & Chase 🐾

Jerry Checchia and Jessica Baldischwiler

Upcoming Events

Board Meetings

September 17, Thursday

December 3, Thursday

Basics of Bird ID

Saturday, June 20th at 9:30 AM – Red Rock Ranger District Visitor Center

Dr. Courtney Duchardt will share the basics of identifying birds.

Friends of the Forest Committee Chair Roster

Cultural Resources/Docents	Jerry Walters	docents@fosedona.org
Graffiti Removal	Jim White	graffiti@fosedona.org
Membership	Lex Scanlan	membership@fosedona.org
Motorized Environmental Restoration	Mike Boyd	mer@fosedona.org
Preventative Search & Rescue	Glenn Kingsbury	psar@fosedona.org
River Ranger Support	Warren Holm	riverrangers@fosedona.org
Signs	Rod Cashin	rodcashin@gmail.com
Special Projects	Spence Gustav	spencehg@yahoo.com
Trail Ambassadors	Bob Dores and Peter Cross	trailambassador@fosedona.org
Trail Maintenance & Construction	Glenn Kingsbury Pat Quinn	tmc@fosedona.org
Trailhead Beautification	Dale Smrz	thb@fosedona.org
Visitor Information Services	Annie Glickstein Nick Kollios	vis@fosedona.org nick.kollios@fosedona.org
Water Sampling & Air Monitoring	Jessica Baldischwiler Jerry Checchia	water-air-quality@fosedona.org
Wildlife/Fish/Range/Plants	Annie Glickstein Janie Agyagos	wildlife@fosedona.org

Our Mission

[Friends of the Forest, Inc.](#) is dedicated to assisting the U.S. Forest Service in maintaining, protecting and restoring the scenic beauty and natural and cultural resources of forest lands for the enjoyment and use of present and future generations. The objective of the nonprofit, volunteer group is to work in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service in tasks it does not have the workforce or the funds to accomplish on its own.

