

The collage consists of nine photographs arranged in three rows. The top row includes a circular logo for the Arizona Trail National Scenic Trail, a large informational sign with a map, a wooden directional sign for the Arizona Trail, and a small metal marker on a tree. The middle row features a wooden marker in a desert landscape and a wide view of a snow-capped mountain range. The bottom row shows a directional sign for Molino Basin, a large informational sign for the Payson Ranger District, and a wooden directional sign for the Pinal Trailhead.

# Arizona National Scenic Trail Sign Guidelines

## INTRODUCTION

Signs are the most common constructed features on the Arizona National Scenic Trail (Arizona Trail). Properly selected and maintained, signs welcome visitors to the trail, help them find their way, and provide information so people can enjoy the trail, stay safe, and learn about natural and cultural resources.

In 2016, the Arizona Trail Association contracted two thru-hikers to complete an inventory of signs along the 800-mile Arizona Trail. The inventory identified approximately 3,500 signs along the route and included GPS locations, photos, and a brief description of each sign. Although the signs along the trail corridor represent an impressive effort by agencies and partner groups and signs are very helpful to trail users, the inventory showed a number of issues including a lack of consistency, signs that are in poor condition, sign posts that are not installed properly, and missing signs.

Some of the common issues:



About 2500 of the existing signs are fiberglass-type posts with decals. A large percentage of these are not properly installed and/or are in poor condition.



Wood signs are in character with natural landscapes, but do not hold up well in Arizona's climate and require more maintenance than other materials.



The service mark used on signs along the trail varies and the official service mark is rarely used

The guidelines contained in this document are provided to help trail managers as they install and replace signs along the Arizona Trail corridor. Guidelines are recommendations and trail managers should comply whenever possible. However, some agencies have other sign guidelines and/or policy to consider along with these guidelines. Additionally, sometimes local conditions and other issues will necessitate straying from the guidelines and/or installing signs that are not covered in the guidelines. When this is necessary, consider the objectives below and work with the Arizona Trail program manager and Arizona Trail Association.

Objectives for signs:

1. Minimize the number of signs. Signs on the trail should be placed sparingly, where needed for trail users to follow the trail and at critical intersections, but should not dominate the trail corridor.
2. Provide a strong, consistent, and positive image or "brand" for the Arizona Trail corridor.
3. Orient, guide, and inform trail users. Inform northbound and southbound trail users equally. (*Note: Currently there are more complete signs along the south-to-north direction*)
4. Maximize the use of sustainable practices and materials (e.g., wood signs are mandatory in Wilderness, but other materials may be more sustainable in other locations).
5. Complement the nature and purposes of the trail. Ensure signs are consistent with the setting (e.g., signs in urban areas can be different than those in wildland settings).
6. South of the Gila River (passages 1-15), signs should be in both English and Spanish whenever possible.

Many signs should include the official Arizona Trail logo (service mark), in either color or black and white, or as a brand. This service mark is a visual key to trail users on the route and promotes the recognition of a cooperatively managed trail to the public.



There are several general types of signs for the Arizona Trail, including:

- Road signs, which help motorists find trailheads. On high-speed roads, they can also warn drivers of trail crossings. These signs are primarily used on higher speed State highways, county roads, and forest roads.
- Trailhead signs, which provide visitors with things like maps and information about the trail, safety information, and tips on protecting resources.
- Signs on the trail, which reassure trail users that they are on the Arizona Trail and help prevent them from getting lost, give information about destinations and distances, and provide information about administrative boundaries and special places.
- Interpretive signs to help visitors learn about nature, history, and other topics. These may be located at trailheads, along the trail, or at locations just off the trail.

The public agencies and private organizations that manage segments of the Arizona Trail often use a variety of signing methods. However, for the Arizona Trail to be recognized as a National Scenic Trail along its entire 800-mile route, signs and their locations should be consistent. Managing authorities (e.g., U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Counties, etc.) and passage stewards are urged to identify signing needs as part of the annual trail assessment process. An inventory of existing signs should be regularly updated. It is recommended that, as new signs are needed or existing signs need replacement, the uniform sign guidelines suggested in this document be followed.

Application of these guidelines needs to be balanced with aesthetic considerations to avoid over-signage. Each passage should contain a limited “set” of signs. Existing “sets” should be evaluated to determine if they contain the essential elements or whether they over-burden the system and contribute to sign pollution. When replacing old or damaged signs, every effort should be made to place new signs back in the same locations and not just add signs to the system.

Implementation of these guidelines will be limited by availability of funds/labor and, therefore, establishing priorities may be helpful.

#### Priorities:

1. Install/repair/replace signs needed to protect health and safety. First evaluate whether a sign is the best way to address safety, then utilize these guidelines as appropriate.
2. Give the entire trail a facelift by performing maintenance on the approximately 2500 existing fiberglass posts or replacing with more durable materials. Install all posts properly (a large number are crooked or falling down), replace posts that are badly deteriorating, and replace decals per these guidelines. Remove those that are not essential for trail users.
3. Install missing signs per guidelines: where necessary for navigation (e.g., trail junctions and major road crossings), boundary signs at private lands and Wildernesses, and Arizona Trail service mark on signs through Grand Canyon National Park.
4. Implement guidelines at high-use trailheads (both road and recreation signs) and replace existing signs that are in poor condition.
5. For signs that are currently in acceptable condition, as funding is available make changes to meet these guidelines, or wait until replacement is needed and then apply these guidelines.

## GUIDELINES

The following types of signs and markers will be discussed in this document. See diagram for their relative locations.

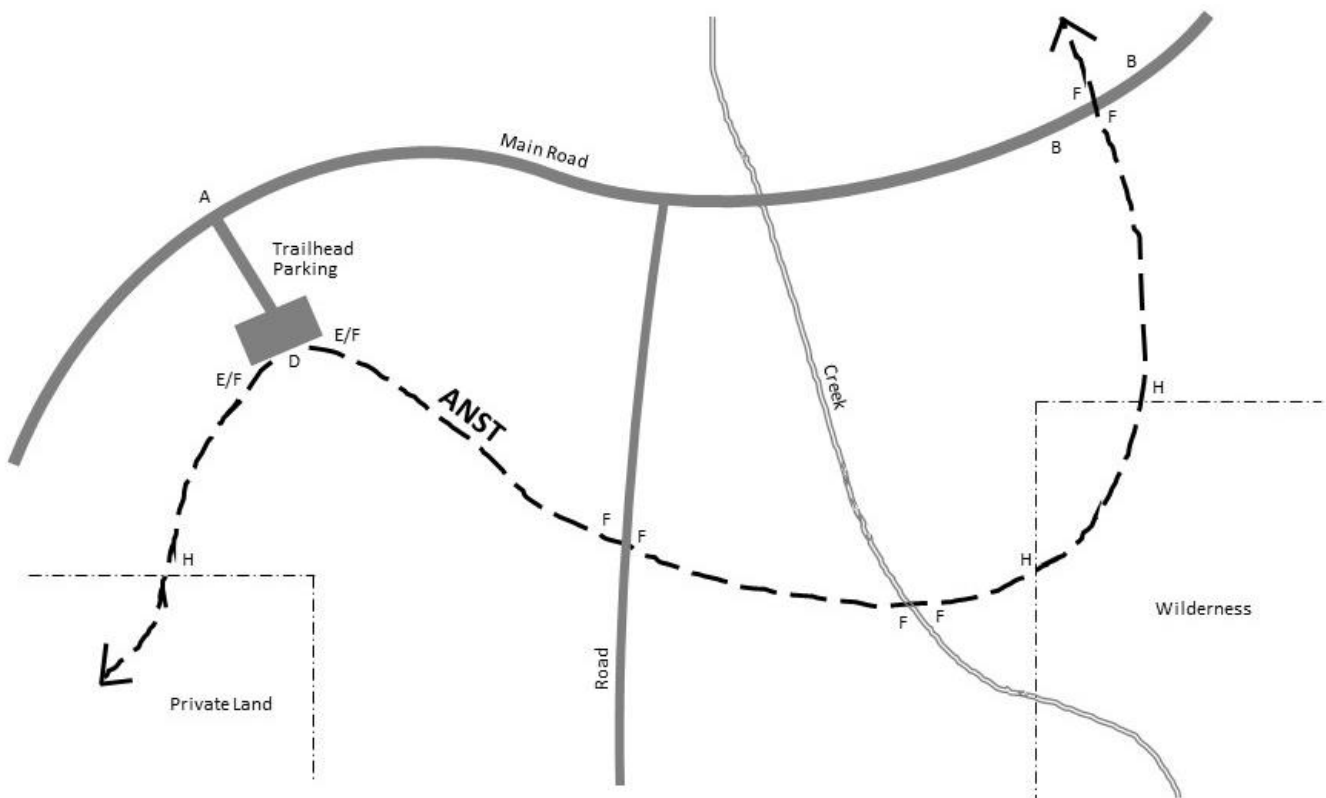
Note that, for many signs, other guidelines exist. For road signs, Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices standards must be followed (see Road Signs section below). For signs on National Forest lands, Sign and Poster Guidelines for the Forest Service (EM7100) apply.

### Road Signs

- A. Trailhead Information Signs
- B. Trail Crossing Signs
- C. Gateway Community Signs

### Recreation (non-road) Signs

- D. Trailhead Information Kiosks
- E. Destination Signs
- F. Navigation Markers
- G. Interpretive signs
- H. Boundary signs
- I. Signs where Arizona Trail is on existing roads
- J. Miscellaneous other signs



**Note:** This diagram is not to scale and does not include every type of sign included in these guidelines. This diagram represents the potential locations where signs could be installed. Signs are not needed at every crossing or in every locations. Check local trail conditions and install only the signs that are needed.

## ROAD SIGNS

Road signs must comply with the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), including requirements for retro-reflectivity. **When planning these signs, always work with engineers and road managers** (e.g., Arizona Department of Transportation, County Departments of Transportation, or land management agency). Highway departments calculate the size of the sign based on travel speed or posted speed limits. Most road signs are aluminum.

*Note: The Arizona Trail service mark must be approved by Arizona Department of Transportation before it is used on roads within their jurisdiction.*

### A. Trailhead Information Signs

These signs direct motorists to trailheads. They are primarily used on higher speed roads and/or at major trailheads.

Signs generally have white lettering on a brown background. The use of the Arizona Trail service mark is optional, but encouraged (brown and white or color). Signs may also include an arrow, the trailhead or site name, and/or international symbols.

Mounting on standard galvanized U-channel or square posts is the norm.



Road signs help direct motorists to trailheads.



Arizona Trail Service Mark

Where desired, the Arizona Trail service mark may be included in the sign and/or international symbols (hiker, equestrian, bicycle) may be mounted under the main sign.

In some locations, simply adding an Arizona Trail service mark sign (in color or brown and white) is sufficient to direct visitors to trailheads. This may be the best option in locations where existing signs already exist and/or where there are many signs and adding the words “Arizona National Scenic Trail” would be problematic.

### B. Trail Crossing Signs

Road signs can be installed in advance of trail crossings where trail use and road conditions warrant. Approach/warning signs can be installed 500-1000 feet in advance. These signs are important where visibility is limited due to road curvature, vegetation, or hills and trail use is heavy. They can also be used where equestrians must cross a major roadway.

Mounting on standard galvanized U-channel or square posts is the norm.



International symbols can be used where the trail crosses roads.





At potentially dangerous road crossings, pavement markings and/or a signal may be needed. These are rare and mainly on highways.

Where it is important for trail users crossing a road to know the road number (e.g., for navigation), it is acceptable to post a road sign with the road number on the roadway near the trail crossing.



Left: This crossing on Pima County land includes signs, pavement markings, and a signal.

Above: Road number signs may be installed on roadways where the Arizona Trail crosses roads when this information is important for trail users.

### C. Gateway Community Signs

Gateway community signs can be installed at portals to official gateway communities. They are green and white metal signs with the Arizona Trail service mark and usually mounted on U-channel or square posts. They may be mounted alone, or incorporated onto other signs.



## RECREATION SIGNS

Recreation signs are located along trails, walkways, and within recreation sites such as trailheads, and are not meant to be viewed from a vehicle. Fonts on recreation signs should generally be a simple style such as Arial, Calibri, or Helvetica. All caps may be used for headings or destinations, but avoid using all caps for multiple words, as this is difficult to read.

### D. Trailhead Information Kiosks

Trailhead kiosks are used at primary trailheads with higher use and designated parking. At smaller trailheads, a destination sign or navigation marker (see E and F below) where the trail leaves the trailhead is often sufficient.

Kiosks should be installed at the start of the trail. Kiosks can have 1 or more panels. A 3-panel kiosk at a major trailhead might have a panel with general information about the Arizona Trail and a map of the entire route, a panel with a more detailed map and information about the trail passage, and a third panel for posting temporary information such as safety issues, fire restrictions, etc. A 1-panel kiosk might just have a map and basic information. The Arizona Trail words and/or service mark should be featured prominently on all kiosks. Including the passage name is also recommended. Consider including other important information on kiosks, such as prohibited uses (e.g., bicycles in wilderness), bypass routes, regulatory and safety information, and Leave-No-Trace ethics. An example is shown in the appendix.

Kiosk materials and colors should be selected to blend with the surrounding landscape and minimize long-term maintenance needs. Select brown structures and sign panels with earth tones. Wood structures are discouraged; metal and composite structures are more durable. Existing boilerplate cutouts in the shape of Arizona are also acceptable. Select sign panels that have at least a 10-year warranty. If desired, kiosks are good locations to install trail registers.



Trailhead kiosks may vary in style, but should be comprised of low maintenance materials, have colors that blend into the environment, and include a map and information for trail users.

### E. Destination Signs

Destination signs are a good alternative to kiosks at smaller trailheads, but can also be used at major trail intersections. These signs provide visitors with reassurance that they are on the trail and headed to the correct destination. They should only be used where there are major destinations important to most trail users. Signs should include the Arizona Trail service mark, as well as major destinations, mileage (outside of Wilderness), and arrows if necessary.

Font size is usually 1". In Wilderness, use natural unpainted wood signs installed on natural un-dimensioned posts (such as juniper). Outside of Wilderness, consider the natural and cultural setting, as well as long-term maintenance costs, when selecting materials. Wood can help protect primitive character, but anodized aluminum or routed HDPE composite signs (with brown backgrounds and light-colored text), installed on steel posts may be appropriate in some locations. Do not mount signs on trees, fences, or other signs or their supporting posts. Many destination signs will be mounted so that the bottom edge of the sign is set 60" above the trail tread.



Anodized sign on steel post outside of Wilderness.

Wood signs on un-dimensioned wood post in Wilderness.

## F. Navigation Markers

These are the most common signs along the Arizona Trail. They provide reassurance that trail users are on the Arizona Trail and can also show acceptable and unacceptable uses.

The current signs are usually fiberglass type posts (e.g., Carsonite) with decals, which are inexpensive and simple to install. Although brown fiberglass is acceptable, the material and decals degrade and need regular maintenance and replacement. Fiberglass posts can fade or fail within a few years when located in deserts and/or full sun (note: good quality packing tape placed over the top of decals and posts can help improve longevity). Consider replacing these (Fiberglass posts and stickers) with lower maintenance materials such as anodized aluminum or unpainted Steel signs installed on unpainted 2-4" diameter steel posts set in natural soil and rock where practicable or concrete footings when located near trailheads or urban areas. Consider reflectorized or contrasting colors where visibility at night (or low light) is important. Wood posts are an option in some settings, and a simple installation option is to drive a metal post (U-channel or square, preferably brown in color) into the ground and attach a 4"x4" wood post to the metal post near the ground. This eliminates the need for digging a larger hole and avoids termite/rot issues, but still looks like a wood post set in the ground. Where there are cattle, 4"x4" posts hold up well. Do not use fiberglass posts in Wilderness.

Decals should generally be 3 ½" in size. In locations where this size is not prominent enough, such as at busy trailheads or major road crossings, size may be increased (9" may be more appropriate in these areas). In areas where non-permitted uses are a problem, the international symbol and circle with a slash, can be added to help control the problem. Where possible, install boulders or other physical barriers instead of signs.

For consistency, stickers or symbols should be placed in this order from top to bottom:

- Arizona Trail service mark (use on all navigation markers)
- Directional arrow, if needed
- Other symbols that are necessary for a specific section of trail
- Optional: Agency, trail courtesy symbol, American flag (can help reduce vandalism)

Less is more. Minimize the number of navigation markers and use only the symbols necessary for a section of trail and minimize the number of navigation markers.

Possible locations for navigation markers include:

- At trailheads where trail begins (if the trail itself and other signs are insufficient)
- Both sides of trail crossings, road crossings, and/or major drainages crossings (rivers, arroyos, etc.)
- Where the trail abruptly changes direction
- Places where users may wander off the trail due to cattle trails or other confusing features



Navigation markers may also be the Arizona Trail service mark mounted on fences, gates, or trees (note: Use a metal service mark, not plastic). Rock cairns or rocks in mesh baskets may be appropriate in certain locations, such as on both sides of road crossings, arroyos and creek/river crossings, and in Wilderness (anchor baskets to the ground as needed).



Navigation markers can be branded signs on trees or wood posts (especially in Wilderness), fiberglass or metal posts with the Arizona Trail service mark, or rock cairns. Decals and brands should generally be 3.5". In Wilderness and locations where vegetation and snow will not obscure them, cairns can be smaller than shown here.



## G. Interpretive Signs

Interpretive signs are optional, but can be useful to help trail users learn about natural and cultural resources in an area. Interpretation along the Arizona Trail is currently very limited, and ideally interpretation should occur at trailhead kiosks and in brochures rather than signs along the trail. This is because interpretive signs are a major investment in time and money, expensive to install and maintain, subject to vandalism, and can be a visual intrusion along remote sections of the trail. However, there are some sites where their placement is warranted. Whatever medium is chosen, interpretive signs should be made to quality standards that complement and enhance the prominence and identification of the Arizona Trail. Some potential locations are areas where outstanding educational opportunities exist and in areas where sensitive resources need protection. Trailheads, National Parks, and urban areas are the primary locations where interpretive signs should be considered. Ensure that funds for long-term maintenance will be available.

Recommended materials include anodized aluminum or digital composites mounted in aluminum frames.

## H. Boundary Signs

It is recommended that signs be placed in locations where the Arizona Trail crosses the following boundaries:

- Wilderness (wood signs on juniper posts)
- Private Lands (metal signs on U channel or steel posts)

Signs for locations where the Arizona Trail crosses Federal Public Lands (Forest Service, Park Service, Bureau of Land Management), State lands (including state parks), or county land are optional. Use when helpful to discourage hunting, off-trail use, and illegal activities.

Mounting boundary signs on gates and fences is also acceptable.

Where bicycles frequently enter Wilderness, consider installing signs to inform users of prohibitions (and/or bicycle bypass signs if appropriate).

## I. Signs where Arizona Trail is on existing roads



The long-term goal is to re-route the Arizona Trail off of existing roads. However, in locations where the Arizona Trail is currently on an existing road, fiberglass posts with decals are likely the best option for signs. See Navigation Markers section above. Discuss signs with the jurisdiction responsible for the road. For Forest Roads, posts should be off the road edge 6-12 feet, unless doing so would make them difficult for trail users to see. Install signs sparingly; focus on where the trail starts and stops following a road, and at road intersections.



## J. Miscellaneous other signs

- **Bypass Routes:** Signs for equestrian and mountain bike bypass routes. Ideally trail users will have maps or other guidance to find these routes. Install signs sparingly and only where necessary.
- **Side and Connecting Trails:** See Arizona Trail Comprehensive Plan for direction about side and connecting trails. Signs for these routes may be installed, but they should clearly differentiate between the Arizona Trail and the side or connecting trail. The service mark should not be used on side or connecting trails.
- **Existing Signs:** Some existing anomalies such as monuments at the boundaries with Mexico and Utah, boilerplate cutout signs at the beginning of some passages, overhead portals at some trailheads, and the unique style of signs/posts on the Flagstaff urban trail system. There is no need to change these signs, but additional signs like these elsewhere on the Arizona Trail are discouraged.
- **Passage Names:** Signs with passage names should only be installed at trailheads.
- **Signs on Gates:** Work with land managers and ranchers to determine what a gate is used for. If the gate is only for Arizona Trail users, posting a “Please Close Gate” sign is appropriate. If a gate is used by ranchers to control livestock, a sign reading “Close Gate Unless Wired Open” or “Leave gate as you found it” can be installed.
- **Safety Information:** Temporary or permanent signs for hazards (e.g., wildfire damage, trail maintenance, forest health projects, trail re-routes, etc.) may be installed at the discretion of local trail managers. Information about closures and known safety issues (such as where the Arizona Trail is on a road) is best posted at trailheads. In locations where the Arizona Trail crosses a cattleguard, warning signs for bicycles may be installed.
- **Highest and Lowest Points:** Signs for the highest and lowest elevation points along the trail should be installed. Use appropriate materials.



Bypass signs (first photo) may be installed at the discretion of trail managers (Note: Bypasses are not a part of the Arizona Trail and the service mark should only be used for the official Arizona Trail route). Existing steel cutout signs (second photo) are acceptable. Temporary signs to alert trail users to hazards (next four photos) may be installed at the discretion of trail managers.

## MAINTENANCE

Signs along the Arizona Trail need regular maintenance and replacement. Managing agencies should pay for signs and maintenance on trails within their jurisdiction. Managing agencies should do the following at least annually:

- Inspect posts to ensure they are plumb and not rotting or failing and replace as needed.
- Replace fiberglass posts and decals as needed.
- Remove graffiti and repair vandalism.
- Repaint where paint is fading, blistering, flaking, or peeling. Federal Standard Color 20059 is a recommended dark brown color.
- Trim vegetation that hides signs or mount signs above vegetation height.
- Remove temporary signs that are no longer needed.
- Update the sign inventory maintained by the Arizona Trail Association. When signs are installed, removed, or altered, send a photo and GPS location to the Arizona Trail Association. Instructions can be found at <https://aztrail.org/get-involved/regional-stewards/sign-and-gate-inventory/>

## SOURCES

Although local sign shops can produce many of the signs included in these guidelines, some sources to consider include:

- Rock Art <https://www.rockartsigns.com/d72/>
- Interpretive Graphics <http://www.interpretivegraphics.com/>
- Carsonite <http://www.carsonite.com/products/parks-recreation>
- Pannier Graphics <http://panniergraphics.com/> and Rock Art <https://www.rockartsigns.com/d72/>
- Unicor <https://www.unicor.gov/Category.aspx?iStore=UNI&idCategory=1422>
- Arizona Trail Association <https://aztrail.org/product/wooden-sign/>
- Wood Product Signs <https://www.woodproductsigns.com/>
- Heather & Fred Studio <https://www.cncservicesarizona.com/>

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## REFERENCES

Many agencies have sign guidelines. The Arizona Trail Sign Guidelines should be used in conjunction with other sign guidance. Some of these include:

Bureau of Land Management National Sign Handbook <https://www.blm.gov/download/file/fid/5938>

Forest Service Sign and Poster Guidelines [https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3810021.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3810021.pdf)

USDOT Federal Highway Administration Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices <https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/>

## APPENDIX

An example of a trailhead sign is shown on the following page.

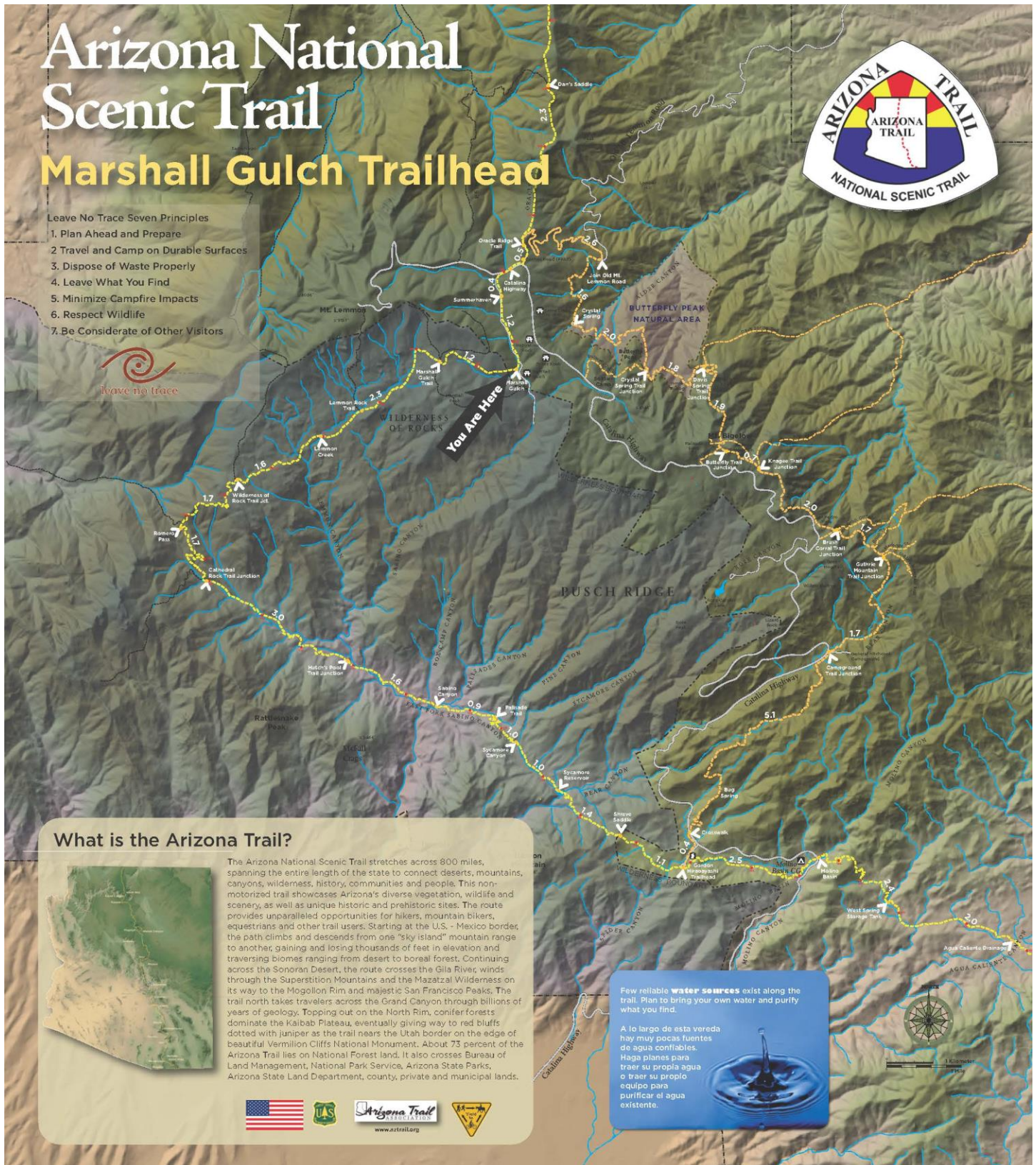


# Arizona National Scenic Trail

## Marshall Gulch Trailhead

### Leave No Trace Seven Principles

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors



### What is the Arizona Trail?



The Arizona National Scenic Trail stretches across 800 miles, spanning the entire length of the state to connect deserts, mountains, canyons, wilderness, history, communities and people. This non-motorized trail showcases Arizona's diverse vegetation, wildlife and scenery, as well as unique historic and prehistoric sites. The route provides unparalleled opportunities for hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians and other trail users. Starting at the U.S. - Mexico border, the path climbs and descends from one "sky island" mountain range to another, gaining and losing thousands of feet in elevation and traversing biomes ranging from desert to boreal forest. Continuing across the Sonoran Desert, the route crosses the Gila River, winds through the Superstition Mountains and the Mazatzal Wilderness on its way to the Mogollon Rim and majestic San Francisco Peaks. The trail north takes travelers across the Grand Canyon through billions of years of geology. Topping out on the North Rim, conifer forests dominate the Kaibab Plateau, eventually giving way to red bluffs dotted with juniper as the trail nears the Utah border on the edge of beautiful Vermilion Cliffs National Monument. About 73 percent of the Arizona Trail lies on National Forest land. It also crosses Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Arizona State Parks, Arizona State Land Department, county, private and municipal lands.



Few reliable **water sources** exist along the trail. Plan to bring your own water and purify what you find.

A lo largo de esta vereda hay muy pocas fuentes de agua confiables. Haga planes para traer su propia agua o traer su propio equipo para purificar el agua existente.



1 Kilometer

An example of a well-designed trailhead sign. Trailhead signs should include a title that prominently features the words Arizona National Scenic Trail, the service mark, and a detailed map of the trail. The map should highlight the Arizona Trail, but also show other trails and bypass routes. Additional items that may be included: The passage and/or trailhead name, an overview of the Arizona Trail, leave-no-trace guidance, regulatory and safety information, and/or interpretation of natural and cultural resources.