

TRAIL OPERATIONS REPORT

Passage 1, Southern Terminus and Huachuca Mountains – The southern terminus and southernmost mile of trail are still closed. We will continue working with the National Park Service staff within Coronado National Memorial to assess opening the southernmost mile of trail as soon as it's safe to do so. A steward-led work event to help open up corridor between the Wilderness Boundary and Miller Peak has been snowed out twice by late season snow storms. This work will be rescheduled before summer. Forest Service has a group of Wilderness Volunteers who will be working to clear Bear Canyon Trail as an important connector to the AZT.

Passages 3-4, Temporal Gulch Reroute Project – ATA continues working with Wildlife Corridors (private property owner) to develop a Trailhead near Highway 82 and Big Casa Blanca Canyon Road, and a connector trail to access to the new AZT route. For now, trail users are parking at the road and walking or riding along the highway for a few hundred feet. We have completed another 8.1 miles of trail northwest of Highway 82. This brings the total to 14.5 miles completed of the 32-mile project. Another 4.6 miles has been flagged and brushed between Little Casa Blanca Canyon and Temporal Canyon TH. There are a total of 5 steel gates needed for this segment. A formal easement agreement has been signed with Wildlife Corridors LLC to ensure perpetual access for Arizona Trail users across private property. Eventual goal is to tap into the Land & Water Conservation Fund to purchase the easement and put into the public trust.

Passage 5, Santa Rita Mountains – Plans are set to begin layout and design for the 12.4-mile re-route project to submit to the Coronado National Forest for NEPA review. Development of Oak Tree Canyon Trailhead is planned for later in 2021. USFS has placed boulders blocking a 4x4 spur from where recreational shooters have staged and shot at targets above the trail. We continue to advocate for signs informing recreational shooters of the trail.

Passage 6, Las Colinas – USFS has approved gate upgrades at three locations: two raised cattleguards north of Box Canyon and one at the northern forest boundary.

Passage 7, Las Cienegas – An ATV barrier and gateway sign was installed at the top of the equestrian gate at the Highway 83 culvert.

Pima County is no longer interested in pursuing development at Sahuarita Road Trailhead. ATA will soon default on a \$20,000 grant from the Heritage Fund in support of this project. Executive Director proposes pursuing a State Trust Land parcel purchase and developing the trailhead independently with cash investors and/or 0% loaners with a future Land & Water Conservation funding request to put the property within the public domain (likely Pima County).

Passage 9D, Italian Trap – We completed 7.1 miles of general trail maintenance between Redington Road and Saguaro National Park boundary. Wilderness sign installation is scheduled for this spring.

Passage 10, 11, 11C - Pusch Ridge Wilderness and Bypass, and Passage 12 – USFS with the help of AZCC Conservation Corps crews completed 2.5 miles of general maintenance and deadfall clearing between Hutch's Pool and Romero Pass to open Passage 11 after a 10-month fire closure. The entire AZT route(s) in the SCR D (except a 2.5-mile long segment of Green Mountain Trail along the Wilderness Bypass Route) are now open. We are working with the district to open this last segment once the snow melts.

Passage 14, Black Hills – ATA has permission from Pinal County to upgrade wire gates with raised cattle guards at two remote locations pending State Land Department approval. Pinal County has purchased 20 steel emblem signs to replace worn fiberglass posts. ATA Stewards and volunteers will install.

Passage 15, Tortilla Mountains – Asarco recently announced that construction of the 6+ mile Ripsey Wash Reroute will need to be delayed until 2022 or later. For now, the current AZT remains open and scenic. No new details on the reconstruction of the Florence-Kelvin Trailhead.

Passage 16, Gila River Canyons – Volunteers and BLM staff and contractor installed pedestrian and vehicle gates and ATV barriers, at three locations along the passage to block unauthorized ATV use of the trail. We also installed the AZT “low point” sign, marking the lowest point along the AZT.

Passage 17, Alamo Canyon – ATA and the Sun City Anthem Hiking Club from Florence completed the sign installation at the Picketpost TH and the LOST trail in December, 2020. A recent volunteer event repaired motorized trespass damage and maintained a few miles of trail in this remote location.

Passage 19, Superstition Wilderness Woodbury Fire – ACE crews in conjunction with the Tonto have done significant work to rehab portions of the Reavis Gap and Campaign access trails to the AZT and we hear of plans to do some rehab work on the “Big Dip.” Plans have been set with the passage steward to begin scouting a possible route for the Big Dip Reroute Project.

An AZCC Conservation Crew completed the one-mile Cottonwood Canyon extension, moving the AZT off a mile of FR 83.

USFS staff are initially supportive of plans to rehabilitate Pigeon Spring, and a donor has offered funding. Volunteers are drawing up the plans for circulation through the various FS departments.

Passage 20, Four Peaks – Volunteers, including Bill Vicary and his horses, installed a Wilderness Portal sign 2.5 miles above Mills Ridge TH to replace the one that disappeared.

Volunteers cleared logs for a distance of approximately 3 miles south of Pigeon TH.

New trailhead signs for Mills Ridge and Pigeon Spring Trailheads have been fabricated and will be installed this month. These signs include land acknowledgements – probably a first for the Tonto National Forest.

Passages 21, Pine Mountain – The fires removed very dense brush along FR422, which is the trail, presenting the opportunity to scout realignments off the road. A volunteer explored a few miles of potential route north from Pigeon Spring and more will be done as time allows.

Discussions are ongoing with FS regarding a State Parks \$50K maintenance grant to improve the trail where it drops off FR422 into Boulder Canyon, and possibly a 0.4-mile realignment just south of Sycamore Creek near Sunflower.

Passage 22, Saddle Mountain – Volunteers installed signs along the road to the completed Cross F parking lot and installed the kiosk artwork. The project is complete but for signs at Bushnell Tanks TH which are pending a FS decision on the closure. The NEPA work is expected late spring on the 2.5-mile reroute north of Sunflower. Mesa Ranger District staff completed the archaeological field work and the project is joined with the larger NEPA effort for the Highline/Pine area trails.

Passages 23, Mazatzal Divide and 24, Red Hills – The “pucker point” 5 miles north of Mt. Peeley blocked some hikers recently. When funding is available, that spot needs attention. Four conservation corps hitches scheduled for this spring have been rescheduled to this fall **if state funding is approved**.

Volunteers installed a Wilderness sign two miles above City Creek TH on the Mazatzal Divide Trail.

Passage 25, White Rock Mesa – ACE crews resumed the Alder Ridge project earlier this month. They have about one mile to go, although it will be the most difficult mile to cross the Rock Creek drainage. Volunteers installed one AZT gate and 3 signs.

A Volunteer Vacation is scheduled for March 18-21 to install another gate in the Wilderness and complete tread work.

Earlier this month an ACE crew completed the maintenance work between the East Verde River and the Alder Ridge connection. This was funded by a \$50K State Parks maintenance grant.

ACE crews returned for a full hitch (two weeks) to repair damage from a bulldozer that was authorized within wilderness and on the Arizona Trail.

Passage 26, Highline – The cultural resource surveys are complete, and the contractor is finalizing the reports following USFS review. Payson RD is lining up funding for the AZT portion of the project to greatly improve the AZT portion of the Highline. The plans include four bridges for watershed protection, the largest of which is near Geronimo TH. Prospects appear favorable for trail construction to begin in September of this year.

Payson RD has engaged on additional improvements to extend the log rail fence out to the highway at Pine TH. This is envisioned as a summer event when volunteers want to get to the cooler elevations.

Passage 27, Blue Ridge – A volunteer and USFS staff explored a realignment of the steep grade north of East Clear Creek. Additional scouting is needed south East Clear Creek with the intent of moving the trail off approximately 2 miles of FR 123. Mogollon Rim Ranger District has been quite supportive of the AZT and that continues with this potential project.

Passages 30, Anderson Mesa – Plans are set for May to begin layout and design for reroutes at Anderson Mesa to take the trail off roads and to avoid sensitive habitat.

Passage 31, Walnut Canyon Reroute & State Land Sale – In collaboration with Flagstaff Biking Organization, minor reroutes to remove the AZT from old roads are being proposed to the USFS. This will improve sustainability of the Arizona Trail and decrease the possibility of motorized trespass (which is very common in this area).

Since a large parcel of Arizona State Trust Land has been sold to a home developer, the Arizona Trail will need to be relocated. ATA is working with the City of Flagstaff to protect the AZT and its scenic qualities within the region. No surface disturbance or trail relocation is anticipated for many years.

Passage 32, Elden Mountain – The USFS is responding to a recent issue with private property concerns near the I-10 undercrossing. It's possible a minor realignment will need to occur to keep trail users on a public right-of-way.

Passage 34, Maverick Singletrack Project – We are set to complete the last 3.5 miles of layout and design for this 22-mile route to remove the trail from roads from Kelly Tank to connect to the Babbitt Ranch Singletrack project completed last year.

Passage 35, Babbitt Ranch Renewable Energy Project – ATA is communicating with NextEra Energy and Babbitt Ranches about proposed wind and solar development on the CO Bar Ranch. Thus far, proposed facilities are being kept outside the trail corridor (1/2-mile from trail centerline), including wind turbines. If this project moves forward it will have an impact on the scenic resources of the Arizona Trail, but we were made aware of this project as a possibility many years ago. Since it's on private property and supports the current Administration's green energy policies, the ATA is working hard to protect the recently-constructed trail and the nature and purpose of the Arizona Trail, but understand we can affect the outcome less than if it were on public lands.

Passage 37, Kaibab Reroute – ATA met with NPS staff to solidify our working agreement and begin the process of analyzing the singletrack route between Grandview Lookout Tower and Yaki Point at the South Rim. This will be a multi-year endeavor, but the seeds have been planted and leadership is as supportive as they can be. ATA is working with NPS to develop a formal agreement, which will set the stage for increased engagement from the Park. Improved signs along the AZT within Grand Canyon National Park, flexible permit system for thru-hikers, removal of fiberglass posts and upgrading gates and signs, and the new singletrack project are currently the highest priorities.

Passages 40, 41, 42, Kaibab Plateau – Plans for the annual North Rim work event includes highway crossing signs at the Orderville Campground, scouting realignments necessitated by the Mangum Fire, installing a kiosk at the FR 241 road TH, and possibly rescuing a gate from post-fire erosion.