



2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Friend of the Arizona Trail Association,

Maintaining 800 miles of trail through some of the wildest landscapes in the West is a daunting task, but thankfully we have the most committed stewards and volunteers who are always up for the challenge. In 2023, we hosted 100 volunteer opportunities – a new record for our organization. This means more miles of trail were improved, and more individuals discovered the rewards of selfless service out on the trail.

We are so proud to have completed construction of the Casa Blanca Canyon Passage. After 12 years of planning and four years of construction, we cut the ribbon on 31 miles of fresh singletrack near the town of Patagonia – providing a safe, scenic and truly enjoyable alternative to paved and dirt roads. This major reroute project is just one of many we've been planning, and with recently-secured funding from the US Forest Service we are excited to further develop sustainable alignments and begin construction on 70 miles of trail on four forests. Our dream of an 800-mile trail will be realized in the near future.

This past year saw further investment in youth and military veterans. By engaging more youth in the exploration and stewardship of the Arizona Trail, we ensure future generations will have lasting connections to this amazing resource and the myriad benefits that happen naturally when spending time in nature. We're also committed to providing healing opportunities on the trail for Arizona's veterans community, and our AZT VETS program saw outstanding success in 2023. Please read some of the stories from these meaningful programs within the Annual Report.

In August, we saw a decade-long dream realized when nearly 1 million acres of public lands in northern Arizona were designated by President Biden as the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument. This includes 40 miles of the Arizona Trail! We were honored to be part of a coalition of organizations and tribes to support this effort, and are confident that visitors from around the world will experience our nation's new national monument on the Arizona Trail.

Every day, someone is having an unforgettable life experience on the AZT. If you're a member, donor, volunteer, business sponsor, trail angel, agency partner, or supporter in any way, please know you're making a positive impact. Especially at a time when it's easy to be dismayed by conflict, the Arizona Trail is a reminder of our common interests, our shared humanity, and offers hope for the future. On behalf of the Arizona Trail Association staff and members of the board of directors, I'd like to sincerely thank you for walking and riding this path with us.

With gratitude,

Matthew J. Nelson
Executive Director

MISSION

To protect, maintain, enhance, promote and sustain the Arizona Trail as a unique encounter with the natural environment.

VISION

A continuous, non-motorized trail traversing 800 miles from Mexico to Utah, linking deserts, mountains, canyons, forests, communities and diverse peoples.

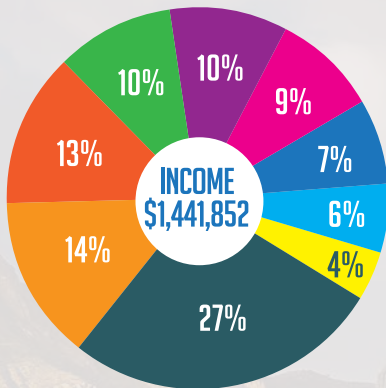
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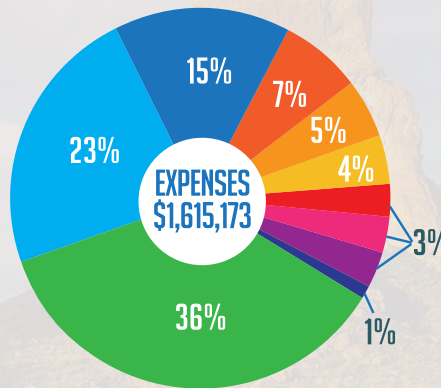
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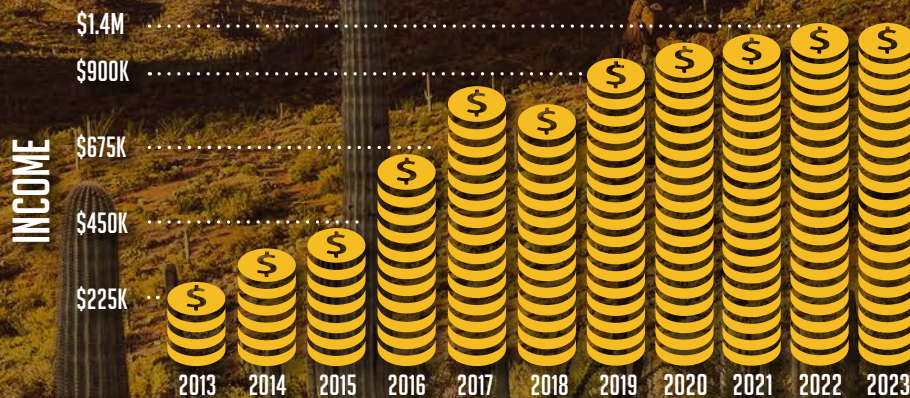
2023 FINANCIALS



US FOREST SERVICE GRANTS
STATE GRANTS
NON-GOVERNMENT GRANTS
MEMBERSHIP
INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS
EVENTS
CORPORATE DONATIONS
& BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS
OTHER
MERCHANDISE



TRAIL OPERATIONS
ADMINISTRATION
YOUTH PROGRAMS
FUNDRAISING
VETS PROGRAM
SPECIAL EVENTS
MERCHANDISE
OTHER
GATEWAY COMMUNITIES
MEMBERSHIP



In 2023, the ATA received a \$100,000 donation which is held in an Endowment Fund. This is not reflected in Income, but will support the organization's long-term financial sustainability.

MEMBERSHIP





VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The AZT simply would not exist without its vast and vibrant volunteer community. Volunteers are the visionaries, innovators, builders, and guardians; the heart and soul of the Arizona National Scenic Trail, directly supporting each facet of ATA's mission. On trail, volunteers brush, dig, saw, kick, and haul. They maintain the AZT while protecting the surrounding landscape. Volunteer Trail Stewards are the eyes, ears, and action. They watch over every inch of 800 miles and work diligently to keep their trail segments in tip top shape. Off the trail, outreach volunteers promote the AZT and expand its community. By engaging with trail users, volunteer Trail Angels represent the trail community and enhance individuals' experiences. All in all, AZT volunteers are faithful ambassadors dedicated to sustaining the trail for future generations.

In 2023, over 2,000 volunteers reported more than 22,500 hours of volunteer time to the ATA. That equates to over \$682,000 and nearly 12 full-time staff members. Despite these meritorious metrics, the true value of AZT volunteers exceeds them. Unreported volunteer service is not reflected in the totals and, regardless of the data, no monetary or numeric measurement can adequately summarize the significance of volunteerism.

Many of ATA's most engaged volunteer leaders are represented within the Trail Steward program. Trail Stewardship offers volunteers the opportunity to build a deep connection with a segment of trail and with the greater AZT community. In recent years, we've worked to make segments shorter in an effort to make the opportunity more accessible to a greater range of volunteers. The satisfaction of giving back should be prestigious but never out of reach. In 2023, ATA welcomed 18 new individuals to the Steward family for a grand total of 148 Segment Stewards statewide. Guiding and overseeing Segment Stewards are 14 Regional Stewards who are essential in recruitment and onboarding of new stewards, as well as assisting Trail Operations in managing capital projects in their region.

Throughout the year, Trail Stewards receive exclusive opportunities for training, networking, and special events. In 2023, we hosted two in-person, multi-day conferences during which these volunteers received specialized training and were celebrated for their contributions. Additionally, four virtual in-service sessions were delivered to ensure accessibility of ongoing training opportunities to the entire Steward community.

Volunteer Trail Angels support trail users and offer them direct contact to the greater community. By providing shuttles, laundry, food, water caching, and lodging accommodations free of charge, Trail Angels promote positive trail experiences. In 2023, Trail Angels reported nearly 500 hours of volunteer service to the ATA. To support an engaged and connected Trail Angel community, Trail Angels gathered for two virtual meetings and one in-person social. Additionally, they received specialized information and training through quarterly e-newsletters.

Community outreach and public engagement is a key piece of ATA's mission that is supported by volunteers. Not only does it allow us to expand our reach, it also supports a diverse and inclusive AZT community. In 2023, ATA volunteers attended six outreach events during which they connected with individuals, recruited volunteers, and accumulated nearly 300 hours of reported volunteer time.

Combining all forces of the AZT volunteer program, ATA hosted 75 events in 2023. This includes seven Trail Skills Institute classes that ATA co-hosted with Flagline Trails to offer advanced training to Trail Stewards and others interested in the art and science of trail work. All in all, 2023 offered a variety of opportunities for volunteers of all skill, experience, and ability level. As our volunteer community continues to grow and expand, we are excited to see what 2024 has in store.

2,000+ VOLUNTEERS
22,500+ HOURS
\$682,000+ VALUE



VETS PROGRAM



The mission of the Arizona Trail Association's VETS (Veteran Engagement & Trail Stewardship)

Program is to connect those who have served our country with fellow service members and the Arizona National Scenic Trail. The VETS Program creates meaningful opportunities for military veterans on and off the trail, offering participants a robust platform for continued service to our community and connecting with other members in a naturally therapeutic setting.

It's been an incredible year for the AZT VETS Program! We offered 12 unique veteran opportunities on the trail, attracting over 100 volunteers and new trail professionals through our Veteran Volunteer Work Weekends and Fox Squad events combined – amassing over 1,700 volunteer hours while positively impacting 70 miles of the Arizona National Scenic Trail. On behalf of all the AZT VETS, we'd like to thank our community partners and individual donors who have supported and continue to support this incredible program, allowing us to serve our community through meaningful and purposeful outdoor engagements.

Outreach

- Attended seven important outreach events to connect more veterans to the Arizona Trail, including the annual Navajo Trails Conference in Window Rock, AZ and the 13th Annual Statewide Symposium in Support of Service Members, Veterans, & Their Families in Phoenix. AZT VETS also attended the 1st Annual Veterans' Outdoor Advocacy Group summit in Vail, CO, focusing on how members can effectively collect, convey, and report outdoor programming data to support legislation surrounding the Veterans COMPACT Act and the Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act.

Trail Events

- Fox Squad spent 4 days on the northern border of Saguaro National Park repairing a section of the AZT suffering from severe water erosion due to poor drainage
- AZT VETS partnered with Oracle State Park to help repair an old fire line near Campo Bonito South (Oracle Ridge Tr)
- Over Memorial Day Weekend, veterans helped clear the trail corridor from Gordon Hirabayashi Campground to Sycamore Reservoir
- Fox Squad cleared the trail corridor along Passage 11

- Fox Squad completed their third hitch of the year on Passage 25, building 100+ feet of new rock steps and reinforcing the tread north of Oak Spring

2023 HIGHLIGHTS

- 12 VETERAN EVENTS/OPERATIONS
- 110 VETERAN PARTICIPANTS
- 1,737 VOLUNTEER HOURS
- \$53,000+ VALUE
- 70 MILES OF TRAIL IMPROVED
- 1 MILE NEW TRAIL CONSTRUCTED

- Fox Squad undertook a 16-mile trek from the top of Mt Lemmon to the bottom of Sabino Canyon (Passage 11), focusing their efforts on trail maintenance below Romero Pass

- We celebrated our 3rd Annual Veterans Day Event on Passage 1 in Scotia Canyon, installing two new gates, continuing remediation of old doubletrack to singletrack, and building 1 mile of fresh trail

- Fox Squad hiked into the newly constructed Passage 4, fine-tuning the tread and assessing the trail for the spring '24 thru-hiker season

- The final Veteran Volunteer Work Weekend of the year was held on Passage 2, working to repair wildfire damage near Canelo Pass



"The VETS Program has been one of the best things I've been involved with since retiring from the Air Force in 2000. I suffer from CPTSD, concussions, social anxiety, and a general trauma that has paralyzed me at different times in my life. In the last 10 years there has been something missing in my life – community, purpose, connection. The VETS program has changed my life. I need this program, you need this program, we need this program!"

– Dallas Stevens, MSgt, USAF (Ret)

GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

Superior, AZ

While the deserts, mountains, canyons and forests may get all the attention, we recognize that the towns located along and near the Arizona Trail are an unforgettable part of the AZT experience. Whether it's a hot shower after a week in the backcountry, a conversation with a local while shopping at the market, or finding yourself in the middle of a parade during a zero day, Arizona Trail Gateway Communities and their friendly residents are what make the AZT so special.

Shred & Stewardship Camps

Our Gear Girls and GRO girl GRO programs teamed up to provide meaningful experiences for girls from the communities of Payson and Vail. Through weekends full of building friendships and mountain bike skills, combined with learning the art and science of trail construction and maintenance, girls had the time of their lives while camping in the great outdoors – all at no cost to youth or their families!

Our fearless leaders are looking forward to facilitating more of these camps within other AZT Gateway Communities where we don't already have youth programs, including Superior and Summerhaven.

Gateway Community Kiosks

In 2023, we finished the installation of seven kiosks to promote the Arizona Trail to locals and visitors alike, while celebrating local history and culture. With funding from the Arizona Office of Tourism, we are proud to have installed four-sides kiosks in Sierra Vista, Patagonia, Oracle, Kearny, Superior, Payson and Flagstaff. Each kiosk features:

- a map of local trails
- Arizona Trail gateway communities statewide
- local history and culture
- other local attractions and information

After a decade of working with all of the towns located within close proximity to the trail, we have narrowed our official gateway communities down to these 19 wonderful places:

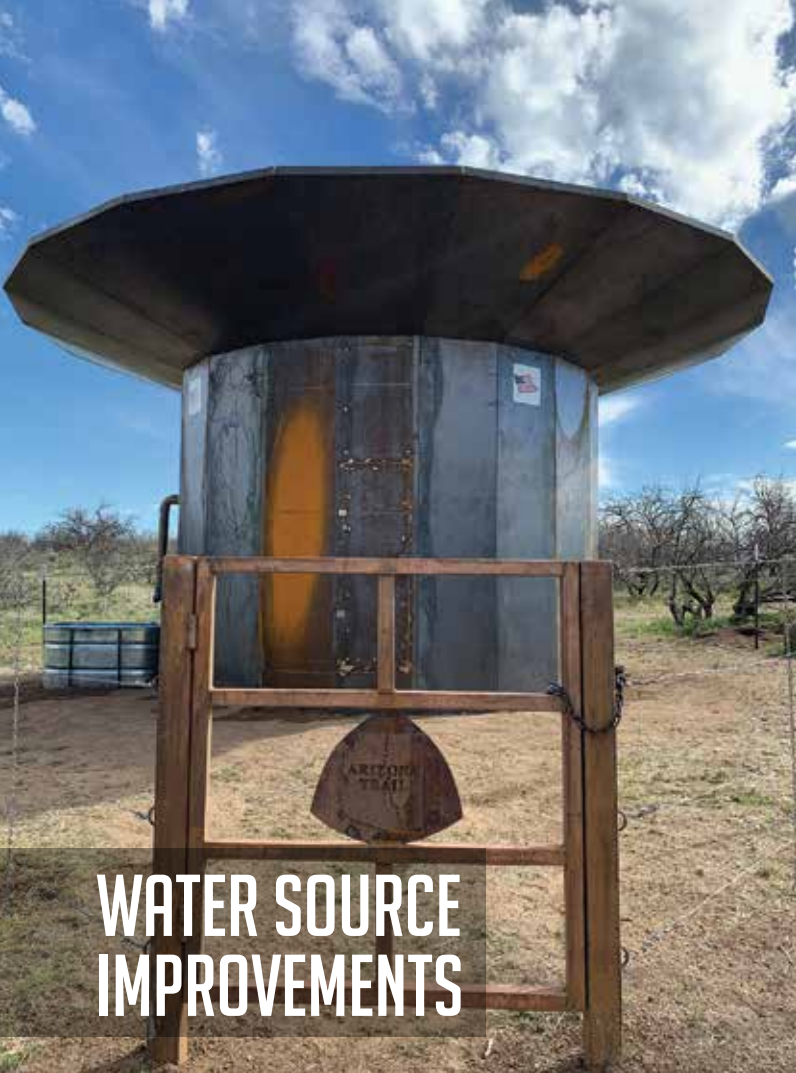
- Sierra Vista • Patagonia • Sonoita • Vail • Tucson • Summerhaven
- Oracle • Kearny • Superior • Roosevelt • Payson • Pine • Mormon Lake Village • Flagstaff • Tusayan • Grand Canyon South Rim
- Grand Canyon North Rim • Jacob Lake • Kanab, Utah



Coaches from the ATA and Tonto National Forest with girls from the first Shred & Stewardship Camp in Pine - a big success!



ATA staff and volunteers celebrate after finishing a kiosk install in Sierra Vista.



WATER SOURCE IMPROVEMENTS

Along the Arizona Trail, WATER IS LIFE. Everyone who has ever spent more than a few days on the AZT knows that everything is centered around water – where to find it, how much to carry, what means of filtration to use, and distance to the next source. We know that water is the single most important resource along the AZT, and a long-distance trail without drinking water is irrelevant, no matter how lovely the scenery. That's why we have been focused on improving, rehabilitating and supplementing water sources along the entire 800-mile trail. Here are a few of our proudest accomplishments from 2023:

Pigeon Spring Rehabilitation

Located on the Four Peaks Passage, Pigeon Spring is a vitally important natural water source. Thanks to funding from the US Forest Service and a generous individual donor, ATA staff and volunteers worked with Tonto National Forest staff to get approval to restore this spring after it had been negatively impacted by wildfires and flooding, and crumbling infrastructure.

After initial cleaning and restoration of the pipe leading from the source to the concrete trough, ATA contracted a master stone mason from Payson (Carlos Rodriguez from RB Stonework) to rehabilitate the old catchment box. Carlos and his crew completely rebuilt the structure to catch and hold water, and used native stone to reinforce all sides of the structure. It's both aesthetically pleasing and will help ensure this remains a reliable source of water for trail users and wildlife alike.

Remote Rainwater Collector

In April, Arizona Trail Association staff and volunteers completed the installation of a Remote Rainwater Collector along a particularly arid segment of trail within Pinal County. This is the second remote collector the ATA has developed in an effort to provide a reliable source of water in areas that have been particularly challenging for long-distance trail users who often rely on murky water filtered from dirt tanks.

The 420-square-foot steel apron catches rain as it falls from the sky, and is stored within a 1,500-gallon poly tank that is protected on all sides by steel panels. Arizona's rainy seasons are opposite the most popular thru-hiking seasons, so the tank will fill with winter rains to be used in the springtime; and summer storms replenish the tank for use in the autumn months. Because the water never receives direct sunlight, algae will not grow. Water is accessible from a spigot on the side of the unit, and a fence helps keep livestock out. After the tank is filled, the excess flows into a trough that is beneficial for wildlife.

Water Cache Boxes

As increasing numbers of thru-hikers cache gallon jugs of water before their cross-state adventure, and with more Trail Angels wanting to support long-distance trail users by leaving them fresh water, we started seeing piles of water bottles near many road-trail intersections. To support trail user health, protect wildlife, and minimize negative impacts to the environment (and the scenic resources for which the AZT was designated a National Scenic Trail) we have been installing steel bear boxes at a variety of locations statewide. Why is this important?

Water left outside these metal boxes can be harmful to consumers as sun exposure causes chemicals from plastic bottles to leach into the water. Also, wildlife may try to access water left outside. These animals may bite, chew, kick, or smash water bottles in an effort to retrieve its contents. This is harmful to wildlife and also destroys water caches that trail users may be relying on. Additionally, empty bottles left outside cache boxes create litter in the form of microplastics, which damages the ecosystem, threatens wildlife, and detracts from the National Scenic Trail experience.

LAST YEAR WE INSTALLED 3 BOXES AT THESE LOCATIONS:

- CASA BLANCA CANYON TRAILHEAD – PASSAGE 4
- FOREST ROAD 231 – PASSAGE 5
- BOX CANYON ROAD – PASSAGE 6



Pigeon Spring

TRAIL OPERATIONS

Casa Blanca Canyon Passage

Our proudest accomplishment of 2023 includes the completion of a major trail construction project on the Coronado National Forest and private land managed by Wildlife Corridors LLC. Over ten years of planning and four years of trail construction culminated with the completion of this major endeavor in December. A priority for the Arizona Trail Association for decades, the goal of the "Temporal Gulch Reroute Project" was to replace paved and dirt roads near the town of Patagonia with scenic singletrack. The new trail is also just outside the Mt. Wrightson Wilderness boundary, making it accessible to all trail users (the old trail alignment included a short segment of wilderness, forcing mountain bikers to ride on highways and dirt roads popular with OHV enthusiasts). In addition to trail construction, gates, rollovers, trailhead signs, trail junction signs, and roadway signs were installed. Finally, signs designating the old route have been removed or updated. While finishing 31 miles of trail construction through extreme terrain presented numerous challenges, support from many individuals, groups, businesses, conservation corps, contractors, volunteers, staff and agency personnel made it possible. Since the trail no longer passes through Temporal Gulch, the passage has been renamed Casa Blanca Canyon.

Butterfly Metamorphosis

Over the last two years, volunteers have spent the short autumn maintenance season in the high country of the Santa Catalina Mountains seasons working on the Butterfly Trail, a route that has been repeatedly ravaged by fire over the past 20 years. Thanks to the dedication of our Field Coordinator, Tasha Pontifex, volunteers and conservation corps, crews have worked to clear deadfall, beat back thorny vegetation and re-establish tread for almost 3 miles of the Wilderness Bypass route. The Pusch Ridge Wilderness Bypass provides a safe and scenic trail alternative to the AZT's Santa Catalina Mountains Passage for mountain bikers and equestrians alike.

Boulder Canyon Repair

After the Bush Fire of 2020 burned a large portion of Boulder Mountain just west of the trail, the erosion that followed carved deep channels through the decomposed granite slopes. The fire and flooding also stimulated the growth of catclaw acacia throughout the trail corridor. Thanks to ATA volunteers and a hard-working crew from American Conservation Experience, the Pine Mountain Passage received necessary upgrades with funding from Arizona State Parks & Trails. Under the guidance of Regional Trail Steward John Matteson and with support from Trail Tech Olivia Woods, the crew worked for six weeks in the backcountry to widen tread, rebuild drainage crossings, remove vegetation, and improve the overall quality of the AZT. The results are remarkable!



Casa Blanca Canyon

Eagle Scout Project

The ATA regularly works with Eagle Scout candidates to accomplish improvements to the AZT while engaging youth and their friends and families. In April, Jack Masche and Troop 474 from Tempe wrangled a crew of 52 volunteers to completed a trail maintenance project on the Saddle Mountain Passage. They dug several large drains, armored wash crossings, built rubble dams, and installed a raised platform below a gate to inhibit erosion along the trail.

Highline Restoration Initiative

Throughout 2023, the Highline Passage received significant attention to improve the sustainability of the trail as well as trail user experiences. In addition to being a scenic and popular segment of the Arizona National Scenic Trail, the Highline is also designated as a National Recreation Trail. But poor design, steep grades, and its location at the base of Mogollon Rim has made the trail prone to major erosion events. In collaboration with the Tonto National Forest, National Forest Foundation, and many other local partners, the ATA continued our commitment to the Highline Restoration Initiative. This includes 3.2 miles of new trail construction; 11 miles of maintenance and improvements; and 6 miles of abandoned trail obliterated and naturalized. We also installed a rollover gate and cleared 2 miles of vegetation near Red Rock Spring and Geronimo Trailhead. Only one more mile of trail construction (planned for 2024) and the AZT portion of the Highline project will be complete!

Coconino Deadfall Clearing

Once the snow melted from the wet winter we experienced in northern Arizona, it was clear we had our work cut out for us to clear the downed trees from the trail corridor across the entire Coconino National Forest. Staff, stewards, sawyers and volunteers hit the trail with hand saws, two-person crosscut saws, and chainsaws to remove Ponderosa pines and oaks blocking the trail. We also documented

dozens of trees and shared the information with the US Forest Service so they could deploy their chainsaw certified volunteers on motorcycles to help. Deadfall removal helps keep users on the trail (instead of walking or riding around fallen trees) and limits impacts to the forest.

Walnut Canyon Naturalization

After completing the 3.6-mile Walnut Canyon Reroute in 2022, we were excited to put the finishing touches on this project by naturalizing segments of old road and trail that were no longer part of the Arizona Trail. As the ATA undertakes more reroute projects, we see great value in rehabilitating abandoned segments through a thoughtful process of obliteration and naturalization. Volunteers worked alongside Flagline Trails specialists to help restore the health of the forest near Walnut Canyon.

Schultz Creek Reroute

As part of the Mount Elden Dry Lake Hills Project on the Coconino National Forest, a minor reroute within Schultz Creek was completed to improve safety of trail users as well as sustainability of the trail itself. This is among the most popular segments of the AZT in northern Arizona, and our most sincere thanks goes to National Forest staff, conservation corps, and local volunteers who completed this project swiftly and smoothly.

North Rim Sawyers

In our first year with a new agreement between the ATA and Grand Canyon National Park, volunteer crews turned out to clear deadfall on the Kaibab Plateau. Our sawyers were so dedicated and efficient that they cleared the entire AZT in a day. After that, we assisted the Park in clearing connector trails using only the power of human bodies and antique tools.

Northern Terminus Improvements

The 2023 Volunteer Vacation with American Hiking Society worked on the northernmost portion of the trail, working to repair tread that had been damaged by recent fires and floods. Throughout the week, volunteers from Arizona, California, Minnesota, Missouri, Maryland, and New York fortified the culverts, repaired tread, and reconfigured the trailhead to create an arrival experience worthy of a National Scenic Trail.

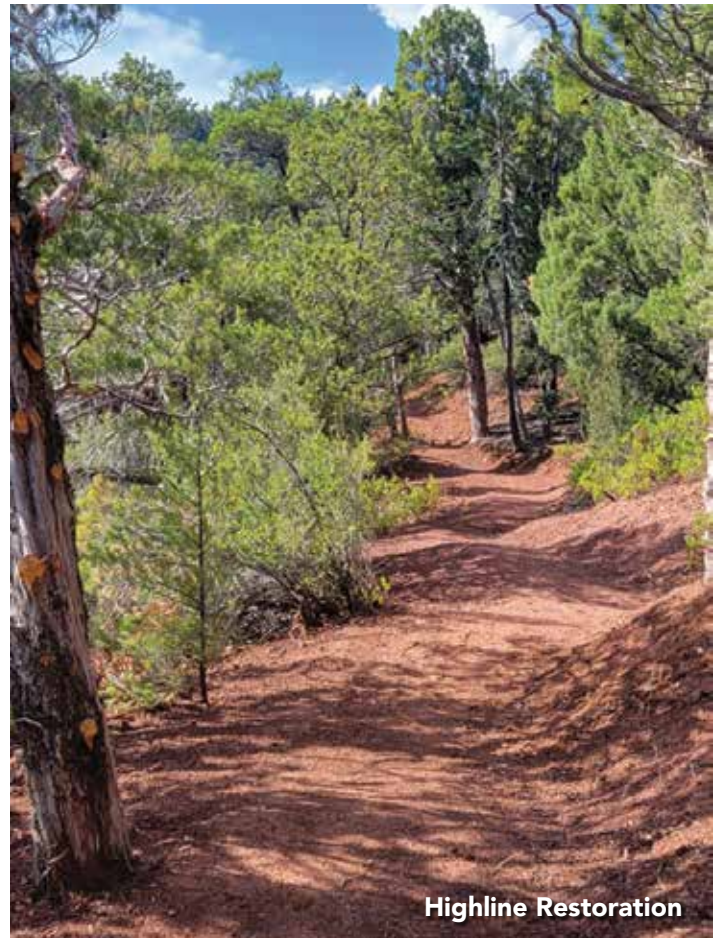
Gate Installations

We continued our mission to replace old wire gates and gates too narrow for equestrians with 8 more steel gates in 2023. We also added 12 rollover gates at fence crossings to allow hikers, runners and mountain bikers to pass through without having to stop to open and close gates. AZT steel gates have become symbolic of the Arizona Trail itself, and are among the most photographed infrastructure out there. Each gate was designed by the ATA in collaboration with land managers, ranchers and recreational specialists, and are hand-built in Arizona.

Trail Signs

In addition to building and maintaining trail, the ATA is skilled at developing informative signs at trailheads, on roadways, and on the trail at important locations. We are grateful for support from land managers who trust us to take the lead on these. In 2023, we developed, printed and installed:

- 7 navigational trailhead signs
- 5 trailhead signs on roadways
- 3 cultural history signs
- 2 bilingual signs
- 1 interpretive sign on the trail



Highline Restoration



Youth Ambassador trail worker

SEEDS OF STEWARDSHIP



The mission of the Seeds of Stewardship program is to provide educational and meaningful outdoor experiences that empower youth to become the next

generation of stewards of Arizona's wild landscapes. We work with youth within Arizona Trail gateway communities using a proven three-tiered approach of experience, education, and service-learning. By engaging, inspiring, and empowering students from 5th grade through high school, we help plant the seeds of stewardship for future generations.

"This is the way youth need to learn. If all students could learn this way the world would be a much better place."

- Tara Dezo, Assistant Principal, Empire High School

In 2023, Seeds of Stewardship provided quality education and nature connection for 41 school groups and nearly 800 students from gateway communities. The power of this work cannot be overstated. Using the Arizona Trail, we facilitated over 36,500 collective hours of outdoor experiential learning. Our programs help students reflect on our shared responsibility to respect and care for one another and the land. The work we do impacts the students as well as their teachers and their school, their friends and families, and the greater community.

This year we are excited to welcome these schools into our Seeds of Stewardship community:

- Puente de Hózhó, a trilingual Title I elementary school where we are teaching 5th grade classes about the importance of trails before designing and building a new trail together on their school campus.
- Coconino High School, where we have launched our first bilingual English/Spanish language outdoor education programs to help recent immigrants and English language learners find a sense of place and belonging in Northern Arizona's beautiful landscapes.
- Tucson Autism School
- Desert Sage High School

"In all my years I have never worked with such talented and quality trail leaders." - Amy Orchard, Teacher, Compass High School

The ATA is committed to the highest standard of trail skills and maintenance. Students from gateway communities are taught these skills effectively, repairing and enhancing the Arizona Trail for the betterment of their community. In 2023, Seeds of Stewardship South students collectively serviced over 100 miles of the Arizona Trail. Our team trains and certifies students with the ATA's Trail Skills

"I could hear the forest breathing and I breathed with it." - Hank, 5th grader, Marshall Elementary School

(above) Students from Killip Elementary School sustainably forage pine needles to make medicinal tea on the Coconino National Forest.



ATA Ambassadors investigate native bee homes in a flowering sotol on the Coronado National Forest.



Compass High School students assist with trail maintenance on Mt. Lemmon.



Fifth graders explore their own relationships to the land through ecosystem and food chain studies at a pond near Flagstaff.

Institute, ensuring the community has youth who are qualified and capable of supporting trails.

"When I come outside I feel alive. Nothing makes me feel as peaceful and connected as when I am outside with Seeds of Stewardship." - Amanda, 11th grader, Sky Island High School

Seeds of Stewardship wants to celebrate our amazing partner STAR School (Service To All Relations), which serves Native American students from Flagstaff and the Navajo Nation. This year we organized a fall Wellness Walk, where 90 Native American students and their teachers walked three miles together on Passage 32 of the Arizona Trail.

"I took all the bad thoughts in my mind and blew them out of my mouth." - Saul, 5th grader, Marshall Elementary School

Bring youth into nature, and they connect for a day. Teach youth how to connect to nature, and they connect for a lifetime. Seeds of Stewardship deals with primordial connections. Our staff provides deep, meaningful, and educational ventures into special landscapes. By helping youth relearn their innate ability to connect to nature, students discover themselves in whole new ways. As our students graduate, many say their vocation is determined because of Seeds of Stewardship. They hope to provide leadership and protection for trails, the land, and people that surround them.

"When I am on these trips I feel like I am the best version of myself. If I could spend the rest of my life out here I would." - Shay, 12th grader, Mica Mountain High School

Seeds of Stewardship fosters the next generation to be nature-conscious members of society. Regardless of the vocation, profession, hobby, politics, or community our students pursue in their lives, a conscientious relationship with nature benefits all of us. Utilizing the Arizona Trail and our local landscapes, youth in our communities grow pride, appreciation, and responsibility for their community. Our students come from all walks of life, and we make sure they know all types of walks belong outside.

Thank you to all the members, donors, sponsors, and volunteers who continue to support Seeds of Stewardship. Your generosity keeps our programs free and accessible to our trail community.



Sky Island High School students explore a hidden canyon near Molino Basin.



A Montessori School House student searches for water in the desert.



Youth from Empire High School enjoy a walk in the woods in one of southern Arizona's sky island mountain ranges.



- Served 78 girls across northern AZ
- 53 total outing days across winter, spring, and fall
- 3 overnight campouts
- 159.5 hours volunteered on public lands/trail work totalling 3.1 improved miles of trail
- 1,258 miles collectively hiked, biked, snowshoed, and XC skied
- 141 hours volunteered from coaches, community partners, and supporters

In 2023, the Gear Girls program experienced significant growth and impact, serving a total of 78 young women across three distinct seasons in Flagstaff. Throughout the year, participants engaged in 53 outings exploring various trails while collectively covering an impressive 1,258 miles through mountain biking, hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing activities.

Gear Girls dedicated a total of 159.5 hours to volunteering on public lands through trail work, resulting in the improvement of 3.1 miles of trail infrastructure. During the fall session, in partnership with the Coconino National Forest Trails Crew, girls cleared out 57 drainages along Passage 34 of the AZT. This emphasis on giving back showcases the program's holistic approach, fostering not only outdoor skills but also a sense of responsibility towards our public lands and individual trail experiences.

A pivotal moment for Gear Girls came in the form of a generous donation of 47 mountain bikes and helmets that were shared between the Gear Girls and GRO girl GRO programs. This substantial support from Global Bikes enabled the expansion of the Gear Girls initiative, reaching more young women and providing them with access to bicycles, thereby enhancing their outdoor experiences.

The Gear Girls program empowers young women through outdoor exploration while fostering a unique intergenerational connection that sets it apart. With an all-female staff at the helm, the program creates a welcoming and low-pressure setting for participants. Notably, volunteers and community partners generously contributed over 140 hours, giving back to the Gear Girls program and reinforcing our commitment to fostering a supportive community for the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts.

This past year was one of growth, accomplishment, and increased community engagement as we continue to empower young women through outdoor adventures, volunteerism, and valuable partnerships with Arizona Nordic Village, Kaibab and Coconino National Forests, Peace Outfitters, REI (Flagstaff and Goodyear Distribution Center), City of Flagstaff Open Spaces, and The Yoga Experience.



Miriam Ruben
age 11

Miriam (above, right) poses with fellow Gear Girl during our spring trail work day.

"We had just gotten back from riding, and it started to rain. We dropped our stuff in the van and a few of us started playing and having fun in the wildflowers in the rain. Some of the coaches came out to watch us. Gear Girls is a fun thing to do on the weekend."

"Miriam started Gear Girls in the summer when she was 10 years old. It was shortly after COVID and she was super shy and nervous that she didn't know anyone. After the very first day, she had made four new friends. Each week she was excited to go. She became more adventurous and confident in other parts of her life as well - riding her bike by herself to the farmers market downtown on Sundays and attending other events where she didn't know anyone yet. Gear Girls gave Miriam a new independence; this has led to even more adventures and more confidence. What an amazing program. Thank you." - Jen, Miriam's mom



Gathering and
Recreating
Outdoors,
girls learn to
Give back, be
Responsible, and take
Ownership

In 2022, the ATA identified “expanding the Gear Girls Programming to Southern Arizona” as an organizational priority, and in 2023 we launched GRO girl GRO for youth in southern Arizona!

We have so many things to celebrate!

- 42 amazing girls & their families
- 60 adventure days (180 hours) spent outdoors with volunteers and community partners
- 224 miles hiked & ridden
- 18 hours of trail maintenance with Tasha, ATA Field Coordinator
- 15 fantastic Tucson community partners
- 8 dedicated volunteers
- 2 Grants & 1 Business Sponsor

GRO girl GRO “soft” launch in February 2023 allowed us to work through logistics of a new program, including outing locations, communication strategies, adventures, community partners, and volunteer coordination. We had six girls and two volunteer coaches participate over our four weeks of adventures. We ended with some impressive stats! 38 total miles on foot or mountain bike—8 miles on bikes along the AZT near Vail + a 3 mile hike on Passage 8 of the AZT + our Final Cupcake Ride!

GRO girl GRO officially launched in March 2023 with 10 girls over eight weeks of adventures which included 68 total MTB miles (with 10 on the AZT), 6 miles of hiking on the AZT, bike maintenance, visit to community partners, nutrition talk with Skratch Labs, and the final cupcake ride. We secured three volunteers and a favorite adventure was the introduction to trail maintenance with Tasha.

SHINE girl SHINE: An Introduction to Night MTB Riding launched Summer 2023! We held two sessions – one in June and July with four girls each session. None of the girls had ever been riding their mountain bike at night so we spent three weeks riding at Fantasy Island with our final adventure on the AZT. Grand Total of 51.5 miles ridden and 8 of those on the AZT.

MENTOR girl MENTOR: Creating Tucson’s Outdoor Leaders

“Think Tank” We quickly began to see a need (and requests) to support “older” 8th - 11th grade girls who wished to become outdoor leaders. Three girls worked collectively over the Fall 2023 sessions (meeting regularly on Tuesday afternoons) and began crafting curriculum and outdoor leadership project guidelines that will carry over into the Spring 2024 sessions.

GRO girl GRO Fall 2023 meant having the opportunity to continue to reflect on feedback from families and best practice in youth development girl-specific programming. We also worked creatively to allow for growth within the program by offering 3 Sessions—each 6 weeks—1 x per week with two Saturdays in each session. We were thrilled to have 15 total girls! We rode and/or hiked 66.2 total miles (and 10 of those miles on the AZT!) We continued with what has become the girls’ favorite adventure—Trail work with Tasha! + personalized yoga session from Roots Yoga + greatly appreciated a donated outdoor space to meet (from Neuma Wellness Collective), participated in AZT in a Day, and volunteered at the Colossal Vail 50/50 Trail Run.

We are proud to celebrate some funding and additional activities from the past year! In April, we received a very generous donation of bikes and helmets from Global Bikes. This allowed us to eliminate any equipment barriers for girls to participate. We were awarded grants from the Outride Fund and the Mountain Bike Association of Arizona, and secured a donation of 5 lights from Outbound Lights to support future night mountain bike riding adventures. In collaboration with Gear Girls and numerous community partners, hosted Gateway Community Girls’ Camps in Pine and Vail.

In Spring 2024, we will embark on a collaboration with Myers-Ganoung Elementary School in Tucson to (1) revitalize their in-school bike program—eventually leading to field trips to the AZT and (2) create an afterschool program for 4th grade girls who will be mentored by our middle school cohorts of GRO girl GRO athletes!

2024 PRIORITIES



While we will undertake numerous projects to protect, maintain, enhance, promote and sustain the Arizona Trail as a unique encounter with the natural environment, here are some of our big priorities for the year ahead:

PROTECT

- Support the US Forest Service in releasing the draft Comprehensive Plan for the Arizona National Scenic Trail
- Pursue efforts to acquire lands within the trail corridor not currently preserved within the public domain

MAINTAIN

- Maintain at least 250 miles to National Scenic Trail standards
- Document 22,500 or more volunteer hours!
- Advocate for dedicated trail maintenance funding from the State of Arizona

ENHANCE

- Study 8 new reroute projects to replace road segments with singletrack and present to land managers for environmental review
- Install 7 AZT gates on the Kaibab National Forest
- Design a sustainable alternative to Oracle Ridge to remove the trail from roads, away from mining activities, and improve access from Summerhaven

PROMOTE

- Encourage visitation to the recently designated Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument
- Enhance Gateway Community engagement through identification and guidance of Gateway Community ambassadors
- Develop cultural history signs in collaboration with Arizona Tribes
- Provide more diverse volunteer opportunities to engage individuals interested in activities other than trail work

SUSTAIN

- Grow the ATA Endowment Fund by 100%
- Host 2 Gateway Community youth camps
- Expand the diversity and inclusivity of the AZT community through outreach, relationship building, and participation in a minimum of 7 community events
- Expand bilingual programs to increase engagement with Spanish-speaking youth and families

What do you suggest as priorities for 2024 and beyond? As members and supporters of the ATA, we value your input. Please feel free to share your ideas on how we can fulfill our mission and vision by sending your thoughts to ata@aztrail.org.



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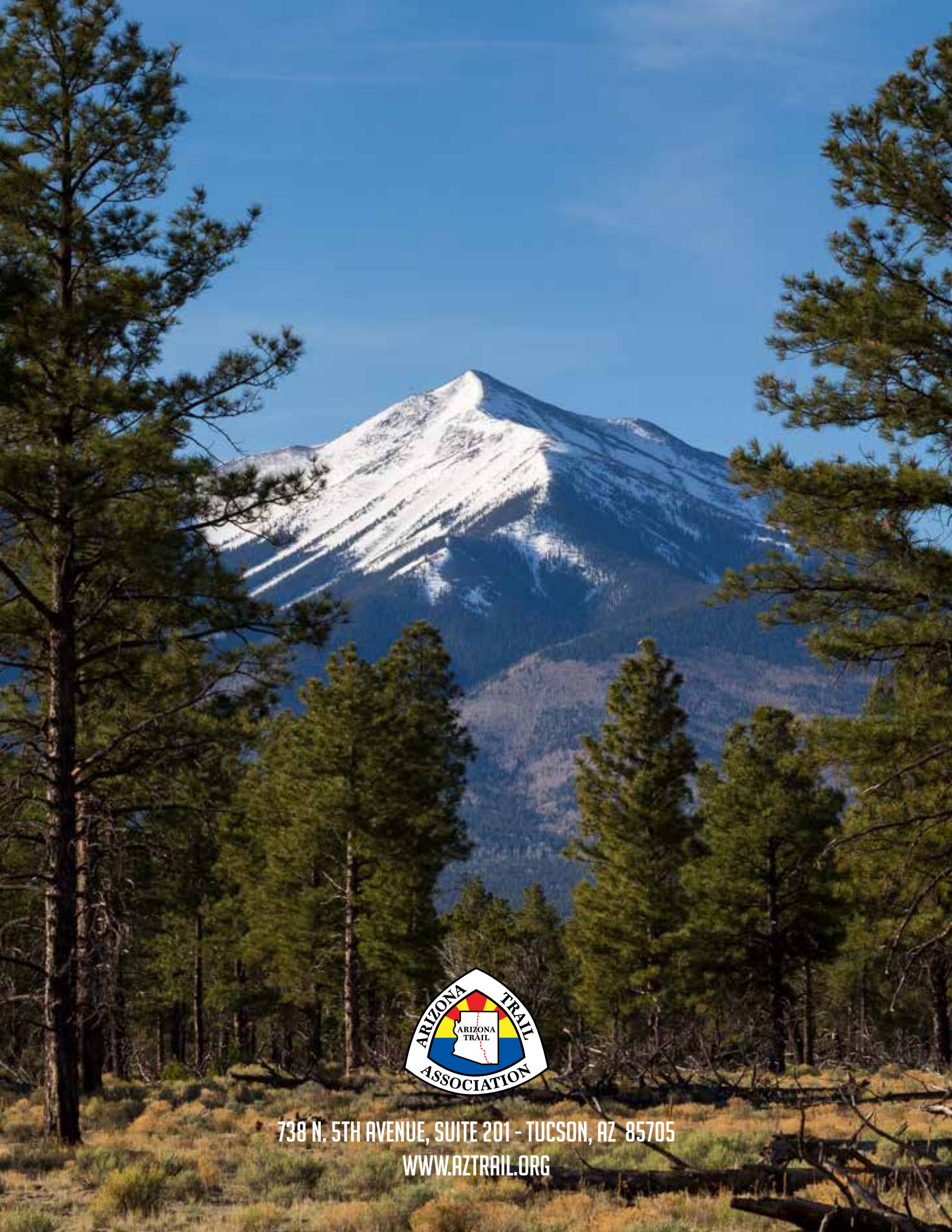
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