



# Branching Out

Sedona Friends of the Forest

March 2025

## From the President

Hello everyone and welcome to the first *Branching Out* in 2025. As you've probably noticed, we are now publishing the newsletter *after* our board meetings instead of before. This allows us to share the most up-to-date information, including updates from the Forest Service.

Unfortunately, the reality is that even the most updated USFS information has the potential of being obsolete hours later, since things are constantly changing and evolving. I can't thank you enough for your flexibility and willingness to adjust to the fluidity of the situation... your dedication to volunteering is unmatched and I am incredibly honored to be a member of this phenomenal community!

### USFS Summary

Even before the new administration came into office, the USFS was facing a budget shortfall. Thus, spending is being held to a minimum and most grants and agreements are on hold. For the Red Rock Ranger District, that translates into the elimination of hiring non-fire seasonal workers. The following chart depicts the number of employees working in key areas last year versus this year, and the 72% reduction in headcount:

Area	2024	2025
Developed Recreation	8	2
Fossil Creek	9	2
Trails	3	1
Special Uses	5	2

### Red Rock News Articles

Did you know that Friends of the Forest (FoF) publishes a monthly article in the Red Rock News? In case you've missed any columns or don't get the paper, you can always find a copy of the articles on our [Friends of the Forest](#) website.

Okay – that's enough of me! Enjoy reading about the amazing work of your fellow FoFers and all that they've accomplished over the past several months. Again, THANK YOU for being incredible humans!



Melissa Pontikes

## Membership

Our membership as of March 4, 2025, is now 666!

Since our last newsletter, 31 new members have joined Friends of the Forest: **Frank Hooper, Gerry Hooper, Chuck Langford, Abby Keller, John Sawyer, Shannon Nolan, Paul Schiminger, Ron Anderson, Kevin Floerke, Shania Molano, Katherine Losh, Cheryl Robertshaw, Rob Robertshaw, Joanne Johnson, Ray Johnson, Grant Levitan, Kate Levitan, Kathy Foster, Mark Foster, David Minor, Alane Eaton, Michael Eaton, Sydney Courville, Janie Maust, Charlie Riou, Sue Rose, Tim Courville, Joy Hilliard, John Hogsett, Ellen Fairchild, and Bill Lusher.** Please give them a warm welcome when you see them out there.

### Name Tags

As a reminder, Committee Chairs whose new members need FoF name tags, should contact me at [membership@fosedona.org](mailto:membership@fosedona.org) and I'll arrange to have the tags created by *Sedona Engraving*. The first name tag is free to members. There is a fee for replacement tags.

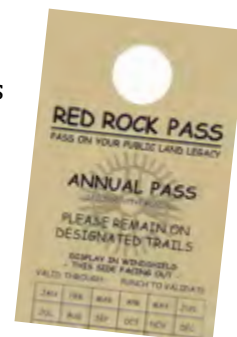
### Red Rock Pass

Also, please note that the ordering of Red Rock passes is now through the Membership Committee as well.

As a reminder, if you have volunteered 16 hours based on the Forest Service fiscal year, which runs from October to October, then you are eligible for a free pass. Better yet, if you volunteered an additional 250 hours, you can get a Volunteer National Park Pass! Check your 2024 volunteer hours.

To request a Red Rock Pass:

1. Only send the request if your current pass has already expired or your pass expires during the current month.
2. Log into the [Friends of the Forest](http://Friends of the Forest) website and verify that your mailing address and phone number are correct.
3. Send an email with your request information to [membership@fosedona.org](mailto:membership@fosedona.org)
4. The Forest Service will mail your pass and an acknowledgment form.
5. Sign the form and return it to the Forest Service.



Karen Yook

## Solstice Talk

Ken Zoll, FoF member and site docent, gave a winter solstice talk at the Crane Petroglyph Heritage Site to well over 100 visitors. Ken recorded the solar calendar there in 2005 and has been active in archeoastronomy since then.





## Trail Ambassadors

In January, Trail Ambassadors **Cheri Breeman, Brian Carlson, Bob Dores, Kelly Gardner, Janet Hillock, Tom Likens, David Terrell, Margie Terrell, Mary Smoak and Mary Zemansky** braved the wet, cold weather for an educational event at the Palatki Heritage site.

**Spence Gustav** discussed archaeology, protecting sites from graffiti and vandalism, geology, and the natural movement of the rocks and plates. He shared tips on how to document and photograph trail damage.

Also in January, we led a new member hike on the Scorpion and Pyramid trails and another hike on Long Canyon-Deadman's Pass-Mescal loop.

In February, we held a brainstorming session in lieu of a formal education event. Nine Trail Ambassadors gathered to come up with ideas for our committee. We will be working on and implementing many of these ideas over the coming months. Thanks to **David Foster, Lisa Gonzalez, Robert Gonzalez, Bob Haizmann, Sherry MacDonald, Pamela Winningham, and Mary Zemansky** for your time and energy!

The new member hike in February was on the Mystic-Hog Wash-Peccary-Mystic loop.

In March, **Margie Terrell** led an additional hike on the Bandit-Airport trails.



Above: Spence Gustav at Palatki



January member hike on Scorpion and Pyramid trails

Carol and Bob Dores

## Visitor Information Services

Red Rock Country attracts people from around the world, many of them unfamiliar with the desert and our unusual animals. Here are some examples of questions we get at the Visitor Center.

### **“I saw a pig. Are they dangerous?”**

Well, they aren't actually pigs. They are javelinas. They are members of the peccary family. Family groups are called squadrons and youngsters are called “reds.” You do want to give them a wide berth.



### **“I want to do the Subway, the Birthing Cave and the Keyhole. My phone app is enough, right?”**

Those trails are not Forest Service maintained trails nor are they on official maps, so we don't recommend them. We can recommend some alternatives with great views and similar mileage.

### **“We only have two hours. Will that be enough to do Devil's Bridge?”**

Perhaps you might want to drive to some amazing viewpoints instead. We can help you with that.

### **“Are the vortexes real? Where can I find them?”**

A vortex is believed to be a swirling center of energy that can produce a range of physical, emotional, and spiritual effects. The vortexes are often associated with specific sites. But you should know that everyone is going to the same spot to see and feel the same thing. Something you can do to get a great experience is to view Sedona, as a “whole vortex.” Find somewhere special here and stay still and feel the magic in the air.

Those and more are typical questions VIS volunteers answer on a regular basis.



Stationed inside the “bullpen” at the Visitor Center, volunteers stay very busy providing trustworthy advice and information about recreation in the greater Sedona area. It's really climate-controlled Preventive Search & Rescue (PSAR)!



While some FoF volunteers enjoy the challenge of building or patrolling trails, others prefer less vigorous activities. Then again, some of us are here, there and everywhere.

VIS volunteers come in two forms. We have some “shifty” ones who work a regular shift each week; either 9AM-12:45PM or 12:45PM to 4:30PM. One volunteer was clever enough to grab the two-hour (12PM-2PM) shift. The others (who make up the majority) seem to have a fear of commitment and yet they continually fill in all the available slots each month. It is a patchwork of volunteers. Since October 1st (FY25) there has not been one shift that did not have a dedicated volunteer working alongside Forest Service staff! So far so good, however we lose a bunch of volunteers during the summer months.

What does it take to be a VIS volunteer you ask? Well, it takes signing the correct JHAs, going through a two-hour one-on-one training, and shadowing other volunteers until you are comfortable. That's it. What are the benefits of working at the Visitor Center? Good question! It reduces stress, combats depression, keeps you mentally stimulated, and provides a sense of purpose. It also allows you to have a direct impact on helping visitors love the land as much as you do. Please consider joining us!

Annie Glickstein



### New Docents!

Join me in welcoming new docents **MunYee Aldrich, Kate Levitan, Brian Carlson, and Martha Bowman!**

### Docent Refresher Program

The annual *Docent Refresher* event was attended by 30 docents plus site hosts. The program included the following speakers:

- **Nick Massoni**, acting Forest Service Heritage Site Supervisor, shared comments and accolades regarding visitor reviews, provided an overview of site operation procedures and changes, and covered new/revised guidelines for interpretation
- **Dana Brown**, the new RRRD Archaeologist, introduced himself and fielded questions
- **Peter Pilles**, retired Forest Service Coconino Forest Archaeologist, did a presentation on the *Save America's Treasures Grant* projects at Honanki and the importance of volunteers to the success of that project
- **Spence Gustav's** presented an overview of the projects that his photography-related teams (digitization, site photo documentation, 3D site modeling, dust study, and fracture analysis teams) have completed, or that are ongoing.

### Thank you!

Many thanks to the 43 docents who volunteered 5,155 hours at the sites in 2024!

Thanks also to **Wayne Swart** and **Spence Gustav** for the Palatki portion of the new docent training.

### Interested in being a Docent?

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 ([docents@fosedona.org](mailto:docents@fosedona.org)) for more information. Our [FAQ](#) is also available online: (Scroll down and click on *Docent FAQ* for answers to common questions).

### Cultural Site Photo Documentation Projects

The photogrammetry team has completed several more projects for the Kaibab and Prescott National Forest. When you are good, folks keep calling! These are not official Friends of the Forest projects, but an assist to nearby affiliated agencies.

Rock falls in recent years and months have elevated the need to do more detailed evaluation of new and growing cracks at the Heritage Sites. The photogrammetry work done by this team over the last eight years has set the foundation to work from and highlighted the need for some standard geological measurements. The Fracture Analysis project was begun in early November and has completed work at Crane Petroglyph.

The project to annotate/map the location of each 3D model to reference photos of the various locations in each Heritage Site has completed processing of Crane Petroglyph site and the Grotto, Bear Alcove, and Water Catchment areas of Palatki. The Palatki Roasting Pit and Honanki remain. **Mike Turner** was critical in completing much of this work remotely from his home in Idaho and enroute to his seasonal stay in Sedona. Thank you, Mike!

I would like to thank **Elias Kerzabi, Carol Mankiewicz, MunYee Aldrich, Clay Dunsmore, Melissa Pontikes, and George Goley** for answering the call to create thumbnail JPG images of the 2,400+ 3D models created to date! The project was done much more quickly than we had hoped and has set us up for the ongoing Fracture Analysis project, as well as enhanced usability of the models. We even gained a new docent out of the project!

Please contact **Spence Gustav** at [spencehg@yahoo.com](mailto:spencehg@yahoo.com) if you have any questions or would like to join his team.

**WOW!-Peregrine Project–WOW!**

There were only five known peregrine nest sites (or potential sites) that weren't being monitored and twelve hours after the call for volunteers went out, all five sites were spoken for and three other groups expressed interest. I don't know if that speaks to the allure of the peregrines or the enthusiasm of the Friends of the Forest volunteers!

Peregrines are pretty irresistible with their beautiful coloring, long tails, pointed wings, and majestic bearing.

They are cliff nesters that breed in February and March, incubate eggs in April, feed their young in May and June, and can be seen flying with their fledglings in July and August. A peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) can reach over 200 MPH during its characteristic hunting dive, making it the fastest animal on the planet. The peregrine is a highly successful example of urban wildlife, taking advantage of tall buildings as nest sites and an abundance of prey such as pigeons and ducks.

There are only nine peregrine nest sites in the Red Rock district that we know of, but it would be great to identify more. When you are out hiking, watch the cliffs for (I'm trying to be verbally sensitive here) their dung, droppings, feces, or excrement (take your pick) which is quite distinctive since it appears as long strings of white on the rocks. If you want a picture of what that looks like, let me know. I have one taken through a spotting lens and I am always happy to spread \_\_\_ (poop, that's poop—what were you thinking??) around.



Judy Kennedy



# Graffiti Removal Team



The Graffiti team welcomes **Deneise Piepiora** as the new co-chair of the committee.

We have had a couple of outings in the new year. Cathedral Rock did not disappoint, with lots of scratches to clean up. The team made short work of all the graffiti at the base of the spires.

Thanks to **Scott Newth** for leading our team on an outing to Soldier Pass Arch. Scott supervised our remediation efforts using distilled water and soft bristle brushes. The end result was outstanding.

Thanks to committee members that continue to work independently on reporting and remediating graffiti.

Everyone be careful out there and enjoy our forest.

*Jim White*



Team at Cathedral Rock



Team at Soldier's Pass Arch



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## Water Sampling and Air Monitoring

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In 2024, the **Water Sampling and Air Monitoring Committee:**

- Conducted 112 total sampling events
- Collected 759 total water quality measurements
- Identified the following E.coli exceedance:
  - West Fork Oak Creek - near Oak Creek (June 2024)
- Identified the following pH exceedance:
  - Oak Creek - at Coconino Co. Stage logger (September 2024)
- Collected 1600 air quality measurements, and
- Received ADEQ's Environmental Stewards Award!

Friends of the Forest also met all the benchmarks for credible data in Arizona, including:

- Four quarterly calibrations,
- One annual audit/training, and
- Adherence to all of AZ Community Science Alliance's standard operating procedures.



It goes without saying that the most important metrics are the ones that can't be rounded up so readily - laughter shared in the field, bonding over equipment issues in the lab, and countless moments of shared inspiration. Through this committee's work, we help ensure a sustainable future for our communities and the environment.

As we look ahead, we are excited about new opportunities to collaborate, expand our reach, and continue making a positive impact together.



Jerry Checchia and Jessica Baldischwiler



# Trail Maintenance & Construction

## Trail Maintenance & Construction

We have had a couple busy months out on the trails. In December we held a well-received training session for 30 members of the TM&C. USFS staff, led by Trail Coordinator **Kevin Kuhl** and Trail Foreman **Holly Cliche**, and experienced TM&C volunteers, gave members pointers on the proper way to clear drains, build rock baskets, stabilize trail tread, and clear brush from trails.

We put that knowledge to work on trail days held at Jordan\Cibola, Chuck Wagon, Rabbit Ears\Little Rock, Fay Canyon, Sombart, Sycamore Canyon\Parsons Springs, Margs Draw, Jim Thompson, Old Post, Slickrock, Ridge, Ramshead, AZ Cypress, and Carroll Canyon.

The sign crew has been busy as well installing new signs for the trails being developed and expanded under the Red Rock Trails Access Plan.



TM&C Training for New Members



Sign Guru Rod Cashin going over the finer points of basket construction



Wilderness Crew at Sycamore Canyon



TM&C Member Steve Galginaitis receiving his New Volunteer of the Year Award from Jerry Checchia





Sycamore Canyon Crew



Clearing drains



New steps and retaining wall on Old Post



Carroll Canyon Crew

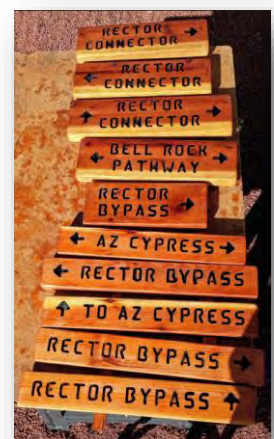
## Pat Quinn and Glenn Kingsbury

### Trail Signage Crew

The TM&C Trail Sign group created and installed signs for the newly completed Hardline, Singletrack Bypass and Rector Connector Equestrian Bypass trails. Signs were also installed on Airport Loop, Old Post, AZ Cypress, Bell Rock Pathway and the Vultee Arch/Sterling Pass junction.



Bell Rock Pathway and Rector Bypass



New signs





Rich Spinelli and Steve Galginaitis at Airport Loop



Ridge and Carroll Canyon Junction



Singletrack Bypass



Rector Connector and Rector Bypass Junction



## Upcoming Events

### Fossil Creek Graffiti Remediation Event

March 19 & 20, Wednesday and Thursday - Full workdays painting the historic Childs Power Plant at Fossil Creek which is covered in graffiti. Meet at the Red Rock Admin Building parking lot at 7:30am. Need volunteers to drive. Sign the [Ladder Use JHA](#) in advance. Bring water, snacks, and lunch. [Click here to register](#) for one or both days. Questions? Email me at [graffiti@fosedona.org](mailto:graffiti@fosedona.org)

### Board Meetings

April 29, Wednesday  
September 4, Thursday  
December 2, Tuesday

### Annual Meeting and Volunteer Picnic

November 1, Saturday-USFS Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

## Committee Contacts

<b>Cultural Resources/Docents</b> .....	<a href="mailto:docents@fosedona.org">docents@fosedona.org</a>
<b>Graffiti Removal</b> .....	<a href="mailto:graffiti@fosedona.org">graffiti@fosedona.org</a>
<b>Membership</b> .....	<a href="mailto:membership@fosedona.org">membership@fosedona.org</a>
<b>Preventative Search &amp; Rescue</b> .....	<a href="mailto:psar@fosedona.org">psar@fosedona.org</a>
<b>River Rangers</b> .....	<a href="mailto:rivrangers@fosedona.org">riverrangers@fosedona.org</a>
<b>Trail Ambassadors</b> .....	<a href="mailto:trailambassador@fosedona.org">trailambassador@fosedona.org</a>
<b>Trail Maintenance &amp; Construction</b> .....	<a href="mailto:tmc@fosedona.org">tmc@fosedona.org</a>
<b>Trailhead Beautification</b> .....	<a href="mailto:thb@fosedona.org">thb@fosedona.org</a>
<b>Visitor Information Services</b> .....	<a href="mailto:vis@fosedona.org">vis@fosedona.org</a>
<b>Water Sampling &amp; Air Monitoring</b> .....	<a href="mailto:water-air-quality@fosedona.org">water-air-quality@fosedona.org</a>
<b>Wildlife/Fish/Rare Plants</b> .....	<a href="mailto:wildlife@fosedona.org">wildlife@fosedona.org</a>

**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 manpower or the funds to accomplish on its own.

**Friends of the Forest** provides the Red Rock Ranger District of the U.S. Forest Service with thousands of hours of volunteer services annually. Our primary goals are:

- Help the Forest Service maintain its trails and cultural resources
- Reduce the environmental damage caused by increasing human impact
- Assist in education and improve communication with the community
- Enhance the forest experience for visitors and residents alike