

File Code: 1950 / 2300
Date: January 27, 2022

OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT:

The Forest Service is seeking information and comments from Federal, State, and local agencies as well as individuals and organizations that may be interested in or affected by the proposed **Cultural Site Visitor Management Project**. Comments must be submitted to the Forest Service within 30 days following publication of the Notice of Proposed Action in the *San Juan Record*. Names and addresses of those who comment and/or file objections will become part of the public record.

LOCATION:

The Cultural Site Visitor Use Management Project is comprised of four project locations at separate Cultural Sites; the Doll House; Lewis Lodge; Dry Wash Caves and Twin Kivas. The entirety of the project is within San Juan County, Utah and is located within the Bears Ears National Monument. The overall project area encompasses no more than 10 acres.

PROPOSED ACTION:

The Proposed action would include management actions at four separate Ancestral Puebloan archeological sites: The Doll House; Lewis Lodge; Dry Wash Caves; and Twin Kivas. Management actions would include constructing three parking area modifications (levelling and barriers), designating and constructing three miles of non-motorized trail, installation of signage (directional, regulatory and interpretive), installation of barriers, and the undertaking of stabilization efforts (backfilling, padding cultural deposits, blocking access to some structures, repointing eroded mortar, resetting wall caps, etc.) to mitigate past and ongoing damage to the sites caused by increased visitation. Details for each site can be found below.

The following actions would occur:

- Doll House Site
 - Designate and construct two separate Forest System Trails. One trail two-tenths miles long to access the Doll House alcove and one one-tenths mile-long trail to access a Surface Site above the main Doll House alcove. These trails would be Trail Class 2, with a managed and designed use of hiker/pedestrian and would be open to foot traffic only.
 - Create a small parking area/trailhead (approximately 80x 80 feet) and turnaround at the end of the access road (Forest Road #5133). The parking area would be constructed of native material and a wood barrier would be constructed around it to contain motorized use.
 - A kiosk would be installed at the trailhead with Visit with Respect and Interpretive signage. A visitor sign-in box would also be installed. Interpretive/Directional signage would be designed and installed at the "overlook point" along the trail to the Doll House alcove. Interpretive signs and Visit with Respect signs would be installed at the Doll House and the Surface Site in areas that would not detract from the visual qualities of the sites.



- Lewis Lodge Site
 - Designate the existing one-mile long, user-created trail as a Forest System Trail. The trail would be a Trail Class 2, managed and designed as a hiker/pedestrian trail and open to foot traffic only. The system trail would end at the overlook point above and adjacent to the site proper.
 - Create a small parking area/trailhead (approximately 70 feet x 70 feet) off Forest Road 314. The parking area would consist native materials and a wood barrier would be constructed around it to contain motorized use.
 - A kiosk with Visit with Respect messaging and interpretation would be installed at the trailhead across from the parking area.
 - A sign with interpretative information would be located at the overlook point before a route goes over the edge of the cliff to the site proper. The signage would include wording to encourage visitors to take photos of the site from the overlook and discourage going down and out along the ledge that contains the actual site. A Visit with Respect sign would be placed on the ledge where the site proper begins. Signage would include language on how to visit the site (i.e. staying off roofs, passing through the wall, etc...).

- Dry Wash Caves Site
 - Designate the existing one point seven mile-long trail along the pipeline as a Forest System Trail. The trail would be Class 2, with a managed and designed use of hiker/pedestrian and would be open to foot and stock travel.
 - Create a small parking area/trailhead (100 feet x 30 feet) off Forest Road 009. The parking area would be graveled, and barriers would be constructed around the parking area to manage motorized use. A kiosk would be installed at the trailhead adjacent to parking area and Visit with Respect and Interpretive signage would be installed on the kiosk.
 - Several interpretive signs would be installed along the trail including messaging about the Ancestral Puebloan Dry Wash Site, as well as the history of the Blanding irrigation tunnels and pipelines. The existing benches would be maintained and restored.
 - Signage will also be installed in the Nizhoni Campground with information on the site and Visit with Respect Information.

- Twin Kivas Site
 - No trails, parking areas or signage would be constructed at the site
 - The existing user created unauthorized route to the site will be obliterated and revegetated.
 - Conservation treatments would occur to mitigate visitor damage to the site.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION:

Purpose:

The purpose of the proposed action will be to protect and restore four cultural sites, manage visitation to them, and provide visitors with important cultural interpretation and Visit with Respect messaging. The overarching objective is to continue to provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy the cultural sites in a responsible manner, to learn how to visit the sites respectfully and in a non-damaging manner, and to learn about the cultures that created them and of their continued importance to those cultures.

Need:

As visitor use increases in the area, the potential to impact sensitive cultural sites also increases. The Doll House, Lewis Lodge and the Dry Wash Caves sites have all seen increased visitation over the last five years. For example, prior to 2016, visitation at the Doll House was generally between 20-50 visitors a year based on voluntary registration. However, in 2020 a total of 464 vehicles accessed the trailhead. Assuming at least 2 people per vehicle, this equates to more than 1,000 visitors to the site that year representing a roughly two-order of magnitude increase in visitation. While the vast majority of visitors to the sites have no intention of causing damage, the sheer amount of use can start to impact sites by increasing erosion, compacting soils, and creating numerous social trails. A primary need for this project is to mitigate these existing and ongoing impacts.

Visitors to the area are often looking for easily accessible cultural sites to visit that provide opportunities to learn about the indigenous and pioneer cultures that created them. Currently, there are no archeological sites on the Monticello Ranger District of the Manti – La Sal National Forest managed to provide interpretive/visit with respect opportunities or to deal with increased visitor use. The proposed action will mitigate extant damage and increase the visitor use resiliency of four sites while also providing interpretation and visit with respect education.

The Dry Wash Caves Site in particular will serve as a location for visitors wanting trail access to Ancestral Puebloan and Pioneer sites. This site is an ideal location for increased visitation because fragile Puebloan structures are highly visible from the trail but are not accessible due to their location in inaccessible caves above the trail.

Additionally, all four sites are located within the Bear Ears National Monument. The primary purpose of the Monument is to protect and enhance objects and values within its boundaries, including the four cultural sites that are the subject of this proposal. Thus, the proposed work advances the purposes of the Monument. The proposed work will result in cultural site protection, interpretation, and education in the context of increasing visitation. Finally, the stakeholder relationships and effort required to move forward with this proposal are the same as those that are necessary to draft and implement effective Monument management. Consequently, in the applied sense this project is important in the context of Bears Ears National Monument management.

PROVIDING COMMENTS

Written comments should be submitted to:

**Michael Engelhart, District Ranger
Moab-Monticello Ranger District
62 East 100 North, P.O. Box 386
Moab, UT 84532.**

For the duration of the Covid-19 situation, hand delivery of comments WILL NOT be accepted. Electronic comments must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf) or Word (.doc or .docx) to comments-intermtn-manti-lasal-moab-monticello@usda.gov. Comments submitted by email should have the subject line of Cultural Site Visitor Management Project; included with your name, address, telephone number, organization represented (if any), and specific facts and supporting reasons for us to consider in the analysis. Anyone who comments in writing will remain on the project mailing list throughout the project.

Upon completion, the Environmental Assessment and a draft decision will be made available to those shareholders who submitted comments and those who previously requested to be included on this project's mailing list. This and other information will be located at:
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/inantilasal>.

The Moab-Monticello Ranger District will publish legal notice of the opportunity to object to this proposed project in the newspaper of record, the *San Juan Record*. Objections will be accepted only from those who have previously submitted written comments specific to the Cultural Site Visitor Management Project (reference 36 CFR 218). This is a non-HFRA project subject to the requirements of 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

If you require more information, you may contact Brian Murdock, Team Lead, at the Moab Ranger District Office, phone: (435) 636-3367 or email: brian.murdock@usda.gov.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL ENGELHART
District Ranger

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

As visitor use increases in the area, the potential to impact sensitive cultural sites also increases. The Doll House, Lewis Lodge and the Dry Wash Caves sites have all seen increased visitation over the last five years. For example, prior to 2016, visitation at the Doll House was generally between 20-50 visitors a year based on voluntary registration. However, in 2020 a total of 464 vehicles accessed the trailhead. Assuming at least 2 people per vehicle, this equates to more than 1,000 visitors to the site that year representing a roughly two-order of magnitude increase in visitation. While the vast majority of visitors to the sites have no intention of causing damage, the sheer amount of use can start to impact sites by increasing erosion, compacting soils, and creating numerous social trails. A primary need for this project is to mitigate these existing and ongoing impacts.

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The Dry Wash Caves Site in particular will serve as a location for visitors wanting trail access to Ancestral Puebloan sites and the historic water development site. This site is an ideal location for increased visitation because fragile Puebloan structures are highly visible from the trail but are not accessible due to their location in inaccessible caves above the trail.

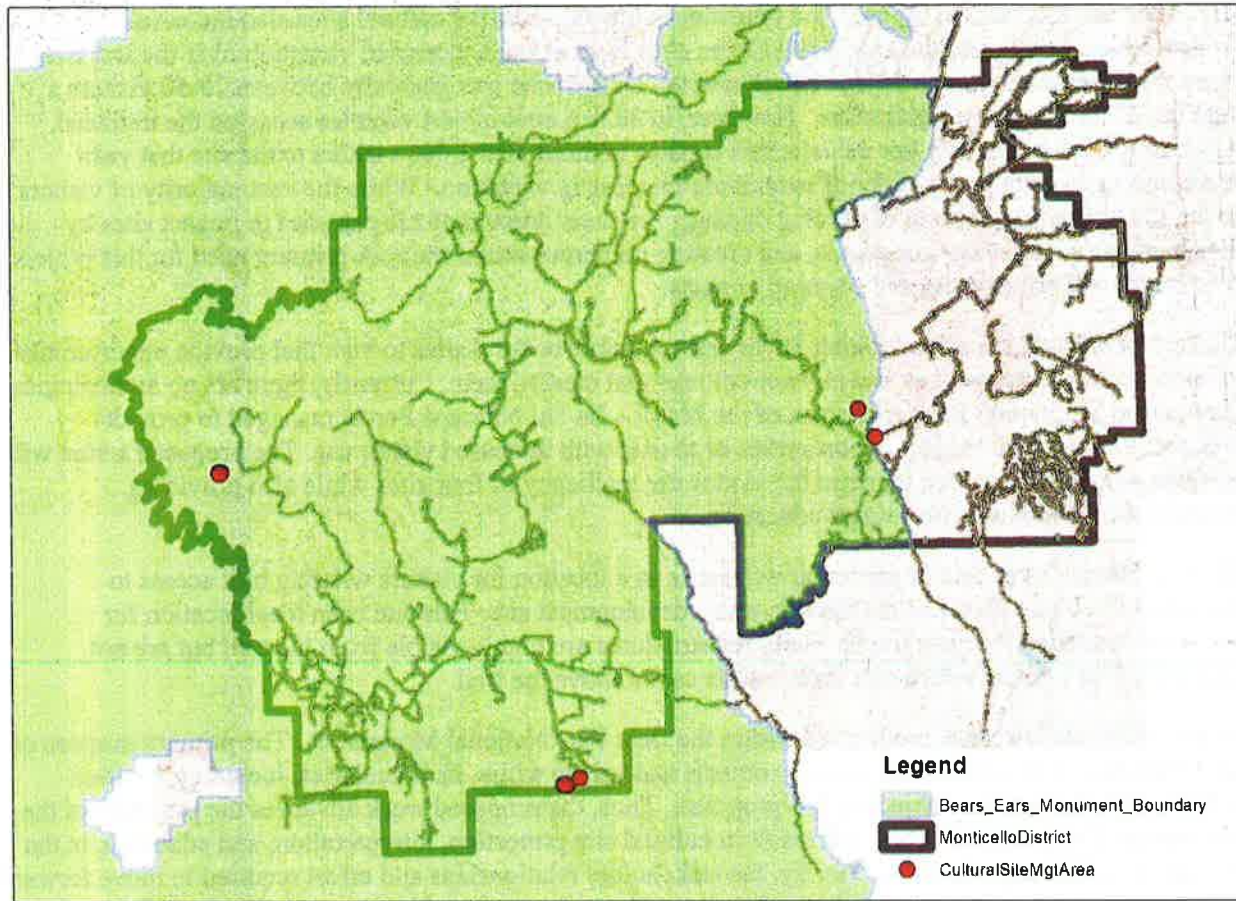
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The purpose of the proposed action will be to protect and restore four cultural sites, manage visitation to them, and provide visitors with important cultural interpretation and Visit with Respect messaging. The overarching objective is to continue to provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy the cultural sites in a responsible manner, to learn how to visit the sites respectfully and in a non-damaging manner, and to learn about the cultures that created them and of their continued importance to those cultures.

PROPOSED ACTION

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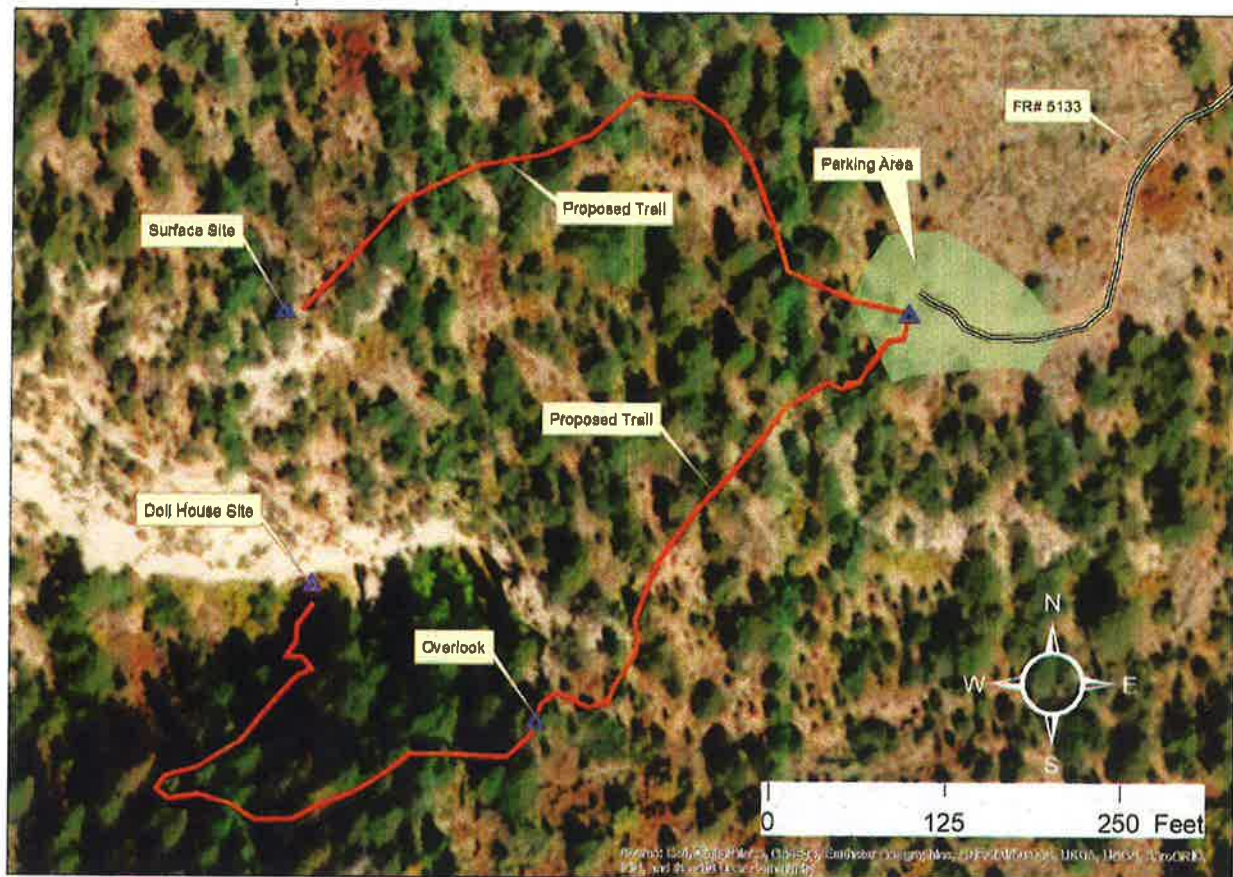
Cultural Site Visitor Use Management Locations



The following actions would occur:

- Doll House Site
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Doll House Site Proposed Management Actions

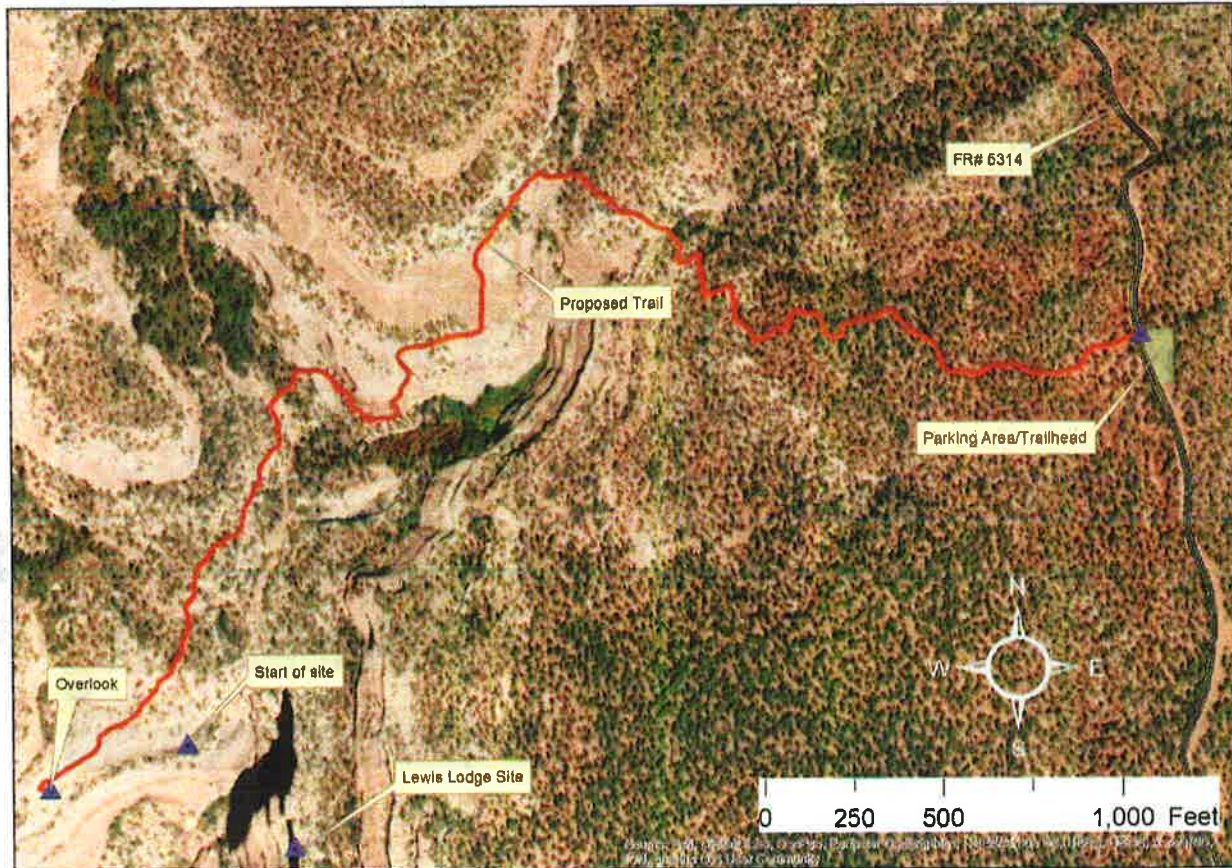


- **Lewis Lodge Site**

- Designate the existing one-mile long, user-created trail as a Forest System Trail. The trail would be a Trail Class 2, managed and designed as a hiker/pedestrian trail and open to foot traffic only. The system trail would end at the overlook point above and adjacent to the site proper.
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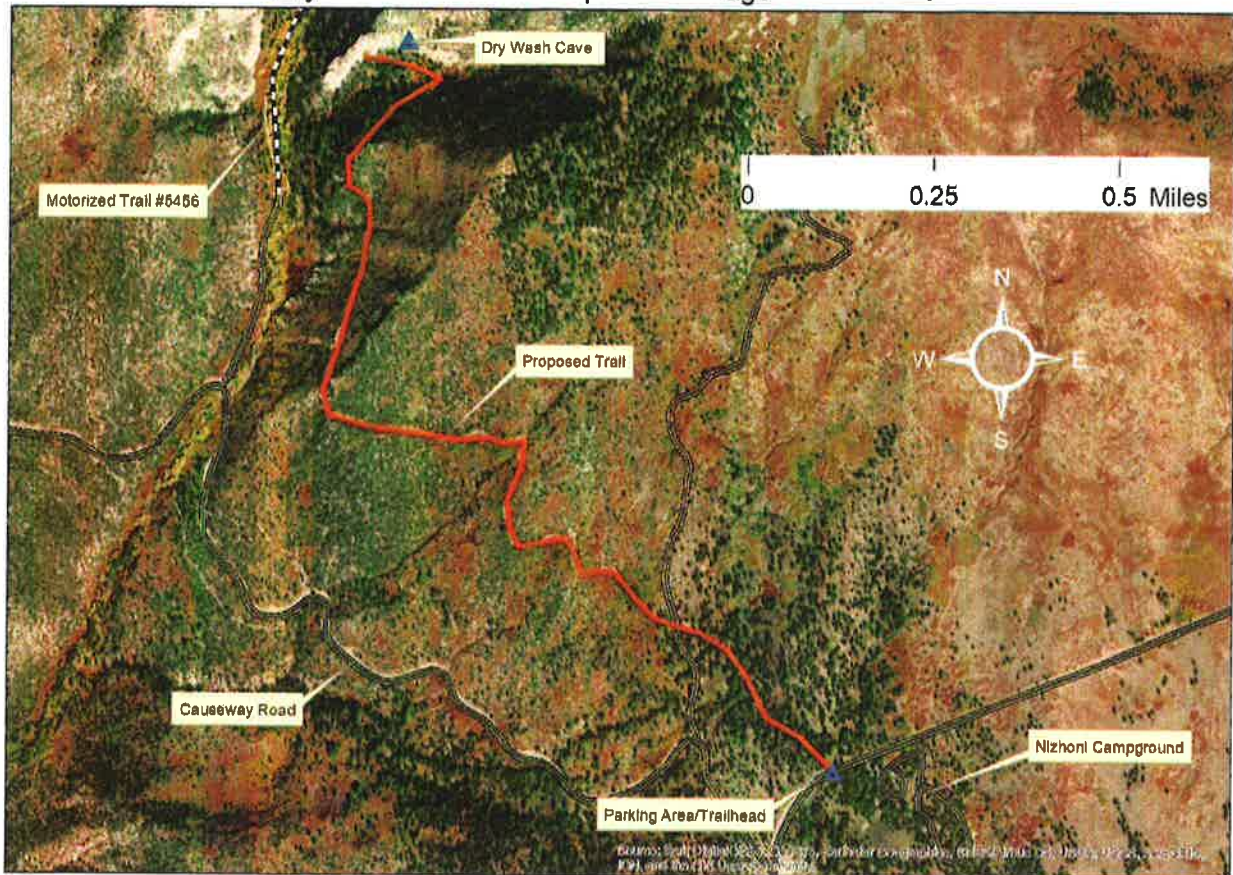
Lewis Lodge Site Proposed Management Actions



- **Dry Wash Cave Site**
 - Designate the existing one point seven mile-long trail along the pipeline as a Forest System Trail. The trail would be Class 2, with a managed and designed use of hiker/pedestrian and would be open to foot and stock travel.
 - Create a small parking area/trailhead (100 feet x 30 feet) off Forest Road 009. The parking area would be graveled, and barriers would be constructed around the parking area to manage motorized use. A kiosk would be installed at the trailhead adjacent to parking area and Visit with Respect and Interpretive signage would be installed on the kiosk.
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- Signage will also be installed in the Nizhoni Campground with information on the site and Visit with Respect Information.

Dry Wash Cave Site Proposed Management Actions



- Twin Kivas Site
 - No trails, parking areas or signage would be constructed at the site
 - The existing user created and unauthorized route to the site will be obliterated and revegetated.
 - Conservation treatments would occur.