

Arizona State Trust Lands Conservation Profile: Walnut Canyon

SACRED HISTORY

Sonoran Institute, in collaboration with conservation groups across Arizona and with funding from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, has assembled state trust lands suitable for conservation into a single database. The resulting profiles focus on conservation values. Political values are left for another day.



Shaping the Future of the West

Practitioners of Hopi medicine regularly provide offerings at Walnut Canyon, a sacred place for many Native Americans. Former Navajo Tribal President, Kelsey Begaye describes Tsé Naat'óódii, the Navajo name for Walnut Canyon, as an important geographical feature; the landscape in and around the San Francisco Peaks is culturally significant and closely tied to their traditional way of life and religion.

President Woodrow Wilson dedicated portions of Walnut Canyon as a National Monument in 1915, however as Northern Arizona has grown, development has caused buffer lands to gradually disappear.

Walnut Canyon itself contains cliff dwellings that are unique and buffer lands are a necessary form of protection as these dwellings are the only known remains of the northern Sinagua culture. Almost 700 years later, petroglyphs and artifacts within the Monument and in the proposed conservation lands are still remarkably well preserved. Current and future generations will look favorably upon the preservation of these dwellings nestled within the boundaries of Walnut Canyon National Monument.

In 2002, a Natural Resource Specialist at the National Parks Service wrote about the impact of nearby development on the Monument:

Impacts from such development would be cumulative and would alter the system forever. Although individual impacts to some species of plants and animals might be mitigated somewhat, the loss of archeological resources and loss of wild character cannot be replaced.



“It is important to protect and preserve irreplaceable resources so that all citizens and future generations can appreciate, respect, and enjoy the richness of our country.”

- Kelsey Begaye, Former Navajo Tribal President, speaking about the dangers of development around Walnut Canyon

LOCATION

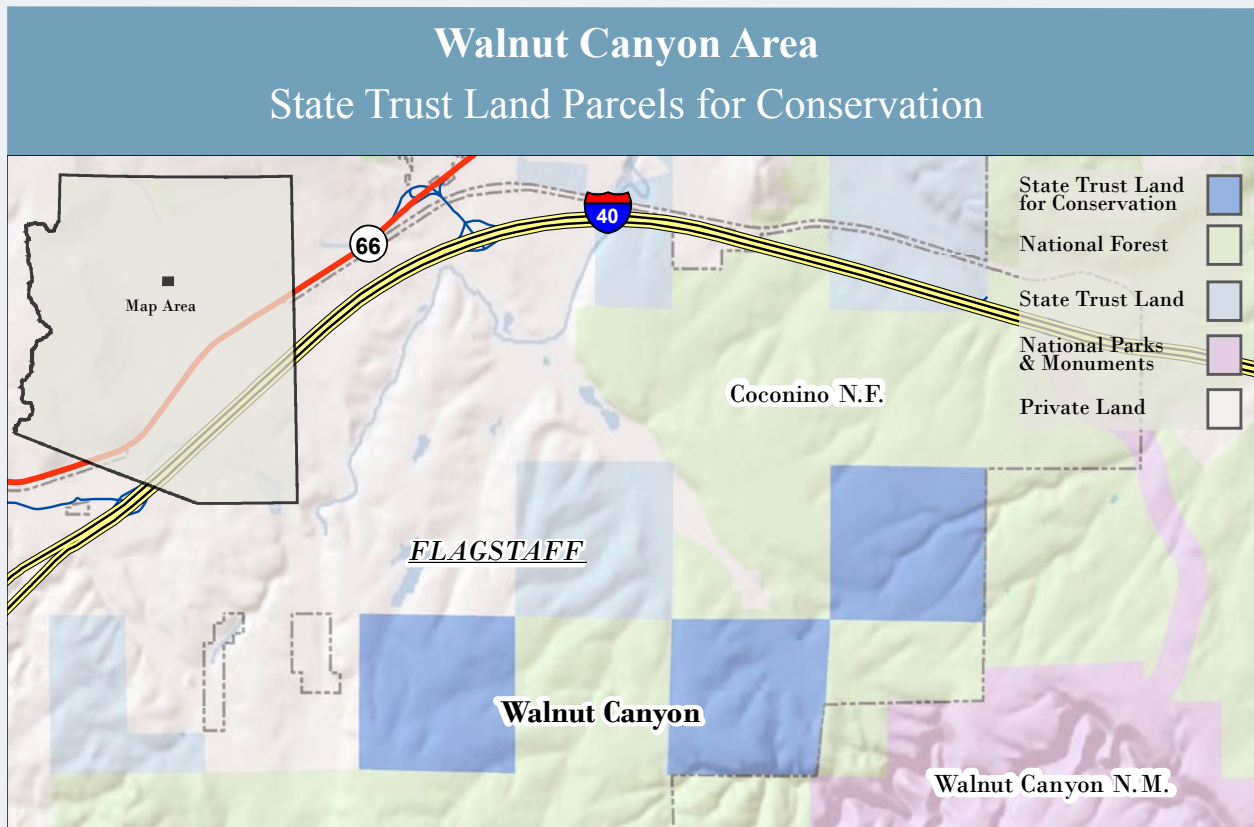
Walnut Canyon

The three Walnut Canyon parcels considered for conservation lie just east of Flagstaff and south of Interstate 40 and are contained within the 1998 Flagstaff Area Open Spaces and Greenways Plan. These lands were divided into four categories of desirability when their open space value was considered. All three of the Walnut Canyon sections received the highest priority for retention as open space.

Section 30 is closest to the popular Fisher Point entrance to the Canyon, and currently not included within Monument boundaries. Presently, no residents live within a mile of the canyon at Fisher Point; however development within this section could put thousands within an easy walk of the sacred and fragile inner canyon.

Section 28, the closest to Walnut Canyon National Monument is considered to be one of Flagstaff’s most critical areas for preservation by the Open Spaces and Greenways Committee and contains an important side canyon which provides a crucial wildlife corridor.

Section 22 and the northeast corner of Section 28 straddle Old Walnut Canyon Road, which runs southeast from the Continental Country Club to the WCNM. This area is a favorite location for day use and is significantly impacted by illegal dumping and campfires which could potentially impact nearby neighborhoods or the Monument itself.





PROPOSED CONSERVATION SOLUTION

Walnut Canyon

The Flagstaff Regional Plan 2001 was adopted to guide future land use decisions in the City of Flagstaff and surrounding area. A core planning team consisting of City and Coconino County staff worked with a 28 member regional task force of city and county residents. The task force provided guidance and advice to the project team by identifying issues and concerns in the community. Protection of land adjacent to Walnut Canyon National Monument boundaries was determined to be a high priority to the community as encroachment on these boundaries has been steady, eroding native habitat and placing more pressure on the actual Monument. Community members have clearly shown their desire to protect state trust lands near the Monument. Voters have approved bond for Open Space acquisition in the past. The areas surrounding the Walnut Canyon should be changed to a conservation designation. State lands could then be purchased for open space purposes and prevent future encroachment on the Monument.

Current proposals to protect natural and cultural resources around WCNM include simultaneously pursuing appropriate expansion of the Monument and undertaking measures to formalize the inter-reliant commitments by the various federal, state and local governmental entities. Future development should not extend into any recent or past proposed Monument expansion boundaries.

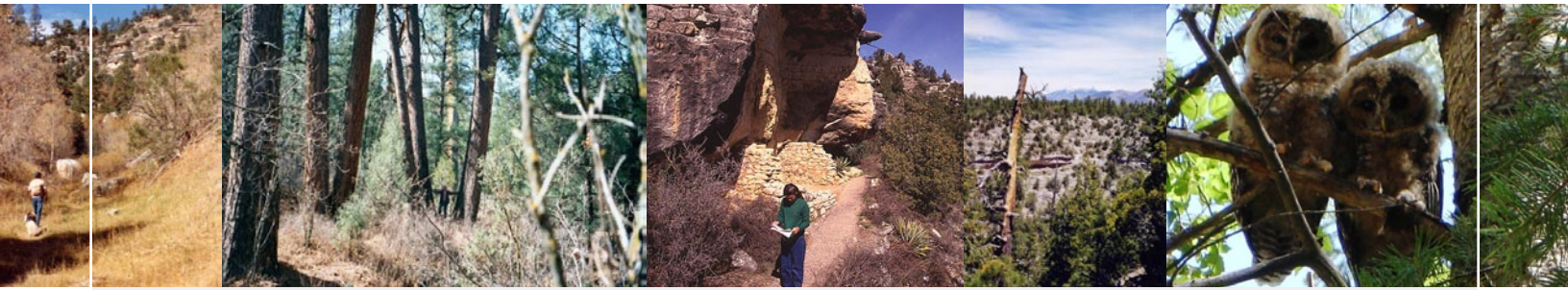


ARIZONA STATE TRUST LAND

In 1912, the federal government gave 10.5 million acres of state trust lands to the new state of Arizona. These lands are not owned by the state, but are held in trust for the benefit of the state's school system and several other beneficiaries.

Proceeds from the sale or lease of these lands generated about \$50 million for the beneficiaries in 2010. The Arizona State Land Department, in its role as trustee for the beneficiaries, is constitutionally obligated to seek maximum financial return for trust lands.

This requirement has complicated efforts to preserve state trust land for recreational use and environmental protection. The state cannot simply turn a parcel of trust land into a park or nature preserve since it is required to receive full market value for the land. All state trust land is subject to sale or lease to the highest bidder. Preservation of trust land requires sustained community input coupled with legislative action.



STATE TRUST LAND CONSERVATION

Collaborating Partners

The Friends of Walnut Canyon were instrumental in assembling information for this fact sheet and they have been protecting Walnut Canyon since 1991. Their constant vigilance has kept logging trucks, off highway vehicles, invasive weeds, and houses out of the area surrounding the Monument. In 1996 Congress doubled the size of the existing Monument, largely due to the efforts of the Friends.

The Grand Canyon Trust has a long history of helping to protect state lands in northern Arizona through collaborative planning efforts and open space initiatives.

The Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust seeks to help people in need, especially women, children and families; to protect animals and nature; and to enrich community life in the metropolitan areas of Indianapolis and Phoenix.

The Sonoran Institute inspires and enables community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of western North America. Facing rapid change, communities in the West value their natural and cultural resources, which support resilient environmental and economic systems. Founded in 1990, the Sonoran Institute helps communities conserve and restore those resources and manage growth and change through collaboration, civil dialogue, sound information, practical solutions and big-picture thinking. The Sonoran Institute is a nonprofit organization with offices in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona; Bozeman, Montana; Glenwood Springs, Colorado; Sheridan, Wyoming; Twentynine Palms, California; and Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico.



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Friends of Walnut Canyon

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