

IMPACT



Friends of the
Desert Mountains

Connect to the Land

FRIENDS 2025 At A Glance

502
FREE
PUBLIC
HIKES
&TALKS

6,861
PEOPLE
CONNECTED
TO THE
LAND

1,073
ACRES
RETURNED
TO LOCAL
TRIBE

5,800
VOLUNTEER
HOURS



Friends of the Desert Mountains



**Friends of the
Desert Mountains**

The desert is a place where nothing thrives alone.

Every wash, every wildflower, every mountain range, and every species is part of a living system, each connected to the next. Conservation works the same way. Protecting these extraordinary public lands has never been the work of one organization. It is the work of an entire community.

At Friends of the Desert Mountains, we envision a thriving, inclusive Coachella Valley where people and nature flourish together. Our role is to inspire, educate, and connect people to the land so that today's appreciation becomes tomorrow's stewardship. As the saying goes, *it takes a village.* Around here, we'd argue it takes a Valley.

As visitation to our public lands has grown dramatically in recent years, so has our responsibility to care for them. Beyond the sweeping vistas lies a remarkable web of life; rare plants, resilient wildlife, cultural traditions, scientific discoveries, and landscapes that have sustained communities for generations. These places are not limitless. They need informed advocates, thoughtful visitors, and caring neighbors who understand that when the land thrives, so do we.

What connects you to the desert? Is it the rugged beauty of the mountains, the quiet resilience of its plants and wildlife, or the rich cultural and historical stories written across the landscape? Whatever first brought you here, we hope it inspires you to become a lifelong friend of the desert.

The pages that follow celebrate what we accomplished together this year. Through free community programs, conservation projects, research, and partnerships with Tribes, local communities, public agencies, and fellow nonprofit organizations, we continue to connect people of all ages to the lands we all share—from longtime desert residents to first-time visitors and busloads of wide-eyed third graders discovering the magic of the desert for the very first time.

Thank you for being part of this community. We hope these stories remind you that every act of stewardship, every partnership, and every person who chooses to connect to the land helps ensure these remarkable places will thrive for generations to come.

Tammy Martin
Executive Director

Cheryl McKinley
Board Chair

PALM CANYON LANDS RETURNED *To Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians*

Friends of the Desert Mountains (Friends), with the help of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (CVMC), has returned 1,073 acres of unceded land to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, a federally recognized Tribe. The transfer included two donations consisting of 936 acres, and 137 acres purchased by the Tribe from Friends.

“Preservation of our homelands is essential to maintaining our cultural heritage,” said Tribal Chairman Jeff L. Grubbe of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. “The thousands of years of knowledge and ancient wisdom held within these lands is integral to the identity of our Tribe.”

The first donated 280-acre parcel was conserved originally by the Friends to protect palm oases and fragile cultural resources near Palm Canyon.

The second 656-acre donation is a rugged parcel preserving in perpetuity critical habitat for the Peninsular Ranges Desert Bighorn sheep and other protected species. Additionally, this parcel contains important resource values and water sources that serve wildlife and replenish the aquifer underneath the Coachella Valley. Both of the acquisitions were made possible with CVMC funding.

The 137 acres purchased by the Tribe are scattered across the San Jacinto Mountain range above the Indian Canyons within the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation and were conserved by Friends over a period of years.

Friends' mission is to acquire land with high conservation value from willing sellers to protect in perpetuity. "Who better to care for these lands than the original stewards who have been doing so since time immemorial," said Tammy Martin, Friends Executive Director, referring to the land recently returned to the Tribe.

"The Conservancy is delighted to help bring about the transfer of this culturally and environmentally sensitive land to the Tribe," said Elizabeth King, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy's Executive Director.

"The thousands of years of knowledge and ancient wisdom held within these lands is integral to the identity of our Tribe."

Tribal Chairman Jeff L. Grubbe



Photo of Chairman Grubbe courtesy of ACBCI
Photo spread: Chris Wheeler

PROTECTING *Chuckwalla*

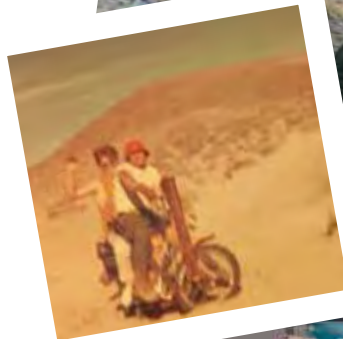
When Friends joined the Protect California Deserts coalition, none of us knew exactly what the road ahead would look like. We simply knew these extraordinary public lands were worth protecting.

That journey took me from telling the monument's story online to organizing bus tours -- and yes, climbing into a chuckwalla lizard suit in 111-degree heat to help people connect with the proposed monument. If me dressing like a giant lizard inspired one person to care about these landscapes, it was worth it.

The campaign united Tribes, conservation organizations, elected officials, volunteers, and thousands of Californians. I was honored to witness the designation ceremony at the White House before returning home to celebrate with our community.

Chuckwalla National Monument is proof that lasting conservation happens when people come together. I never imagined I'd help protect the same desert my parents explored decades ago, but it's a reminder that every person can make a difference for the places they love.

Karin Jaffie
Marketing & Communications Manager



Clockwise from top: Leading a Chuckwalla bus tour in full lizard regalia; celebrating the designation with Friends, coalition partners, and Congressman Raúl Ruiz; witnessing the designation ceremony at the White House with Friends Deputy Director Oscar Ortiz and Board Member Rebecca Driscoll. Inset: The beginning of a lifelong connection to the California desert.

Friends of the Desert Mountains

SHARING BEAUTY

notes from a volunteer hike leader

I was in the Mecca Hills yesterday introducing Chris Sanchez and her mother, Graciela, to the Mecca Aster Canyon, our new hiking trail. They were so blown away by the enormity of the vista and declared that, in their opinion, this absolutely is the best of all the hikes in the Mecca Hills.

- Susan Forgrave, Volunteer Hike Leader



PUBLIC LANDS IN PUBLIC HANDS

Chuckwalla status update

Established January 14, 2025 by Presidential Proclamation through the Antiquities Act, Chuckwalla National Monument preserves a phenomenally diverse array of natural and scientific resources, ensuring that the cultural, prehistoric, historic, and scientific values of this area endure for the benefit of all Americans.

In October of 2025, the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, the Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe, the Cahuilla Band of Indians, the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, and the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) announced the formation of a new Chuckwalla National Monument Intertribal Commission.

Bureau of Land Management's Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office Deputy Field Manager Dan Kasang is serving as Monument Manager.



Top: Chris Sanchez and her mother, Graciela, exploring Mecca Aster Canyon. Bottom: The Protect CA Deserts coalition, along with Southern California Mountains Foundation/Urban Conservation Corps, and members of the public celebrated the Monument's one-year anniversary with a clean up along Painted Canyon Road.

education



Friends of the Desert Mountains

Education */Everyone Has a Way of Connecting*

No two people experience the desert in quite the same way.

Some are drawn to wildlife. Others notice the colors of a wildflower, the stories written across the landscape, or the stillness of a desert morning. Whether we're hiking with third graders, leading an Adaptive Hiking adventure, or guiding adults beneath a sky full of stars, Friends of the Desert Mountains begins with one simple idea: take people into the desert and follow their curiosity.

Our educators create experiences that invite exploration in many forms - through science, art, conversation, observation, and discovery. Every question is worth asking. Every way of learning is welcome. Because the strongest connection to nature is the one people discover for themselves.

Last year, nearly 7,000 people joined Friends programs throughout the Coachella Valley. More than 500 local students explored the California desert with our bilingual, culturally competent educators, while generous supporters helped remove the biggest barrier to outdoor learning by providing transportation to our public lands.

Some participants leave with a sketchbook full of discoveries. Others with a favorite trail, a new appreciation for desert wildlife, or the confidence to return with family and friends. However they connect, they leave knowing they belong here. And that's where stewardship begins.





COMMUNITY SCIENCE /Eyes On The Land

In our desert landscape brimming with biodiversity, natural scientific processes are happening all around us. Community science allows for public participation in scientific research. It enables everyday people - regardless of formal scientific training - to collaborate with professional researchers to collect data, make observations, and solve local or global problems.

Whether joining an official Bureau of Land Management survey of the endangered Coachella Valley Milkvetch plant [*pictured left at Windy Point*], or participating in seasonal bioblitzes on your own utilizing the iNaturalist app, you too can do science!



Friends' birdwatchers also contribute, as our avian specialists submit their count data to eBird. [*Above: Birdwatchers at VC.*]

Thanks to support provided by Edison International, Friends helps the San

Bernardino National Forest band eaglets born near Lake Hemet so their progress can be monitored by the U.S. Geological Survey Bird Banding Laboratory.

[*Left: Friends' Indigenous Community Liaison Alyssa Johnson assists with banding.*]



Friends also relies on our many staff and volunteers who have completed UC Riverside's Center for Conservation Biology/Cactus to Clouds CA Desert Naturalist course. These casual experts have been instrumental in documenting the renewal on our upper Palm Canyon lands after the 2025 Rosa Fire.

[*Top photos on preceding page*]

partners



TOGETHER

In Conservation

Much like creosote, protecting the California desert region takes a network of support, strong roots, and the occasional deep watering.

Friends of the Desert Mountains partners with many entities to make sure the desert we know and love today will be here for future generations. Whether a funder, resource provider, or education partner, Friends is grateful for the ongoing trust and collaboration.



Friends of the Desert Mountains

SOWING SEEDS *Inspiring Others To Steward The Land*



Fabiola Valenzuela
Coachella Valley
Housing Coalition
Community Outings

"Friends of the Desert Mountains have been

great partners to our communities. Our residents really look forward to the trips and always are asking, "When are the Friends coming?!" It has really opened their eyes to what's around them in the Valley."



Matthew Kreps
Desert Mirage
High School
Green Academy

"It's in the name right? Friends of the Desert Mountains. (We

have) a shared passion for our work and the work we do reaching the kids and helping our environment."



Davis Myers
Visit Greater Palm Springs
Valley Hiking Maps

Friends' programs make hiking

and getting out in nature accessible to everyone. A terrific partner in creating materials for our visitors to experience the trails and mountains safely here in Coachella Valley. We've worked with them on hiking trail maps for each area of the CV, as well as 10 Tips for Desert Hiking Safety.



Maricela Rosales
Conservation Lands Foundation
Advocacy Grant

It's been really great to see the work on the ground.

Friends' grassroots efforts meeting the needs of the community and protecting California desert conservation lands network, and trying to be equitable in the work they do throughout the Valley.

A Note from Our Executive Director

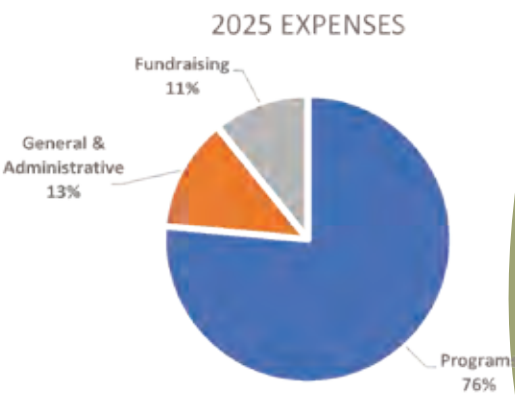
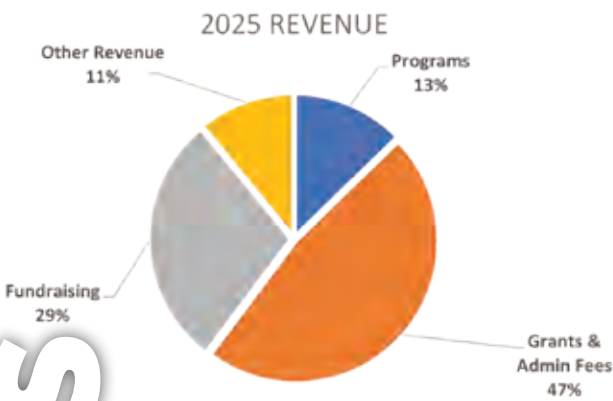
Friends ended 2025 in a strong financial position, with the resources to continue protecting and caring for the lands entrusted to us. Our expenses reflect the people, programs, and stewardship work that make our mission possible, while our assets include land and reserves designated for future stewardship. We are grateful to the donors, members, partners, and volunteers who make this work possible.

2025 Revenue

Programs	\$142,437
Grants & Admin Fees	\$531,876
Fundraising	\$322,172
Other Revenue	\$122,573
TOTAL REVENUE	\$1,119,058

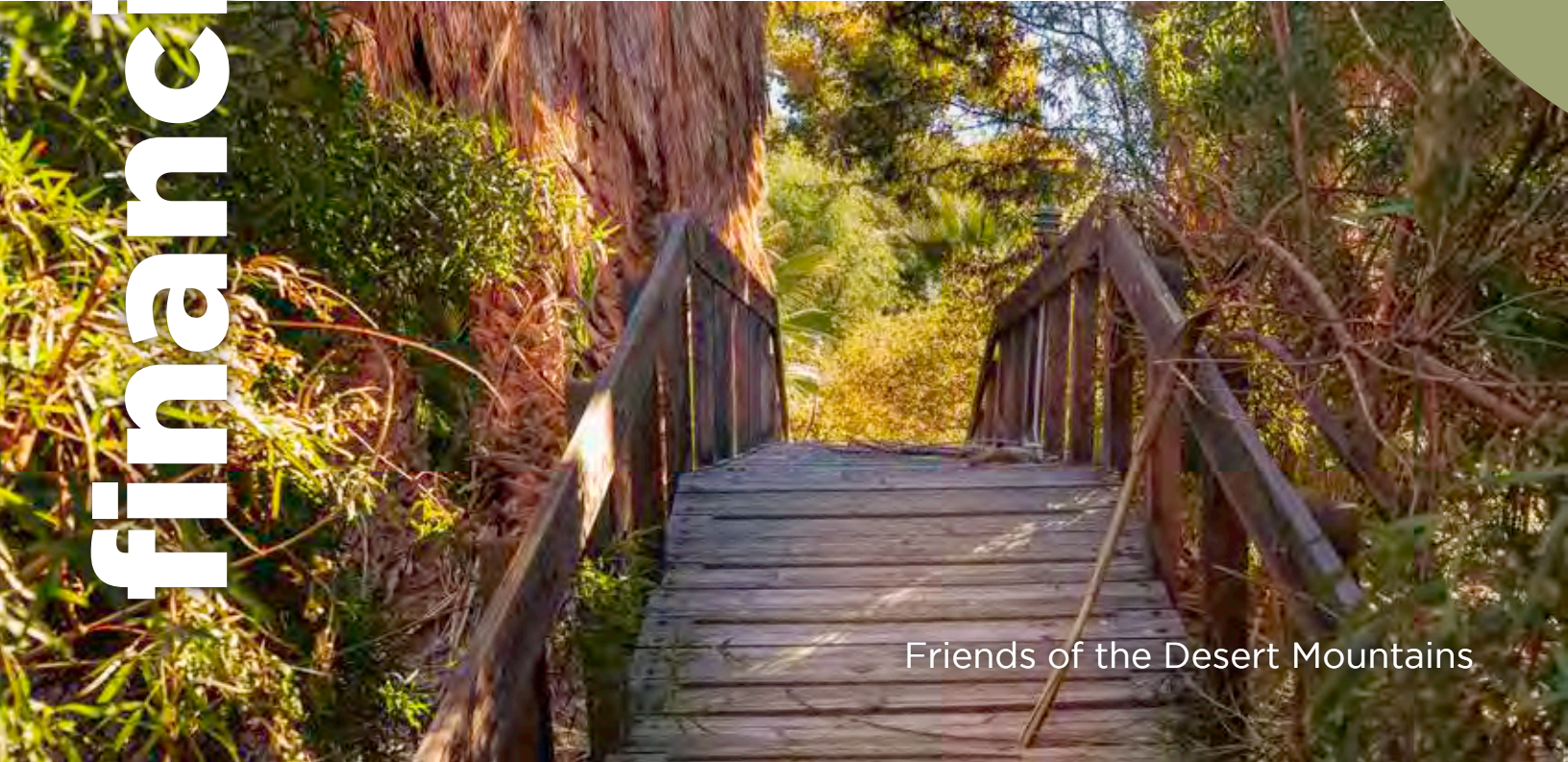
2025 Expenses

Programs	\$919,795
General & Administrative	\$153,203
Fundraising	\$129,857
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,202,855



TOTAL ASSETS	\$24,490,400	TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$35,782
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financials



OUR IMPACT */Working Towards Sustainability*

Youth Education

- Over 500 local students joined us for hikes and classes with our education staff
- Hundreds more reached through our outreach booths at local events

Hiking 101 Lecture

- 300 attendees

Native Planting Lectures

- 7 Lectures
- Over 200 attendees
- 300 native plants given away
- Developed Plant Native – Coachella Valley Planting Guide

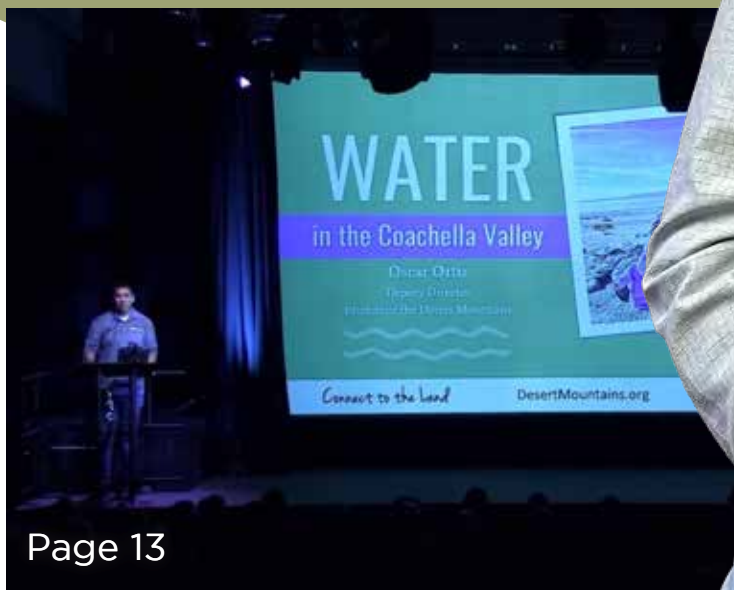


Water Lecture at Rancho Mirage Library

- 300 attendees

Desert Lake Shore

- Initial Design Completed
- Construction Design in Progress



**Every person who connects to the land
becomes part of its future.**

Thank you for walking alongside us.



Friends of the Desert Mountains connects people to the land
through conservation, education and research.

Connect with Friends! Volunteer/Attend/Donate



Contact Us

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**Friends of the
Desert Mountains**