

# Arizona State Trust Lands Conservation Profile: Picture Canyon



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

## KEEPING THE PAST ALIVE

Tucked away, yet close to Flagstaff and carved by the Rio de Flag, the distinctively discernible limestone striations that form the upper third of Picture Canyon are a beloved point of pride in Northern Arizona. During the 12th and 13th centuries this canyon was used by the Sinagua Indians who built their homes in caves along the steep, well-protected ledges, high above the canyon floor. Hundreds of petroglyphs give Picture Canyon its modern name. The petroglyphs and other archaeological remains attest to at least a thousand years of Picture Canyon occupation by the Northern Sinagua prior to European settlement. Present-day tribes indigenous to the region use the canyon and its plant life for practical as well as spiritual purposes.

While not as well known as Mesa Verde National Park, the support of The Picture Canyon Working Group, the Arizona State Trust Land Department, and others in the region has increased awareness of Picture Canyon and its attendant rock art. Recent archaeological research has identified 127 rock art panels with over 700 separate elements. The proximity to Flagstaff ensures a steady stream of visitors, but imperils its treasures.

*"Come forth into the light of things, let nature be your teacher."*

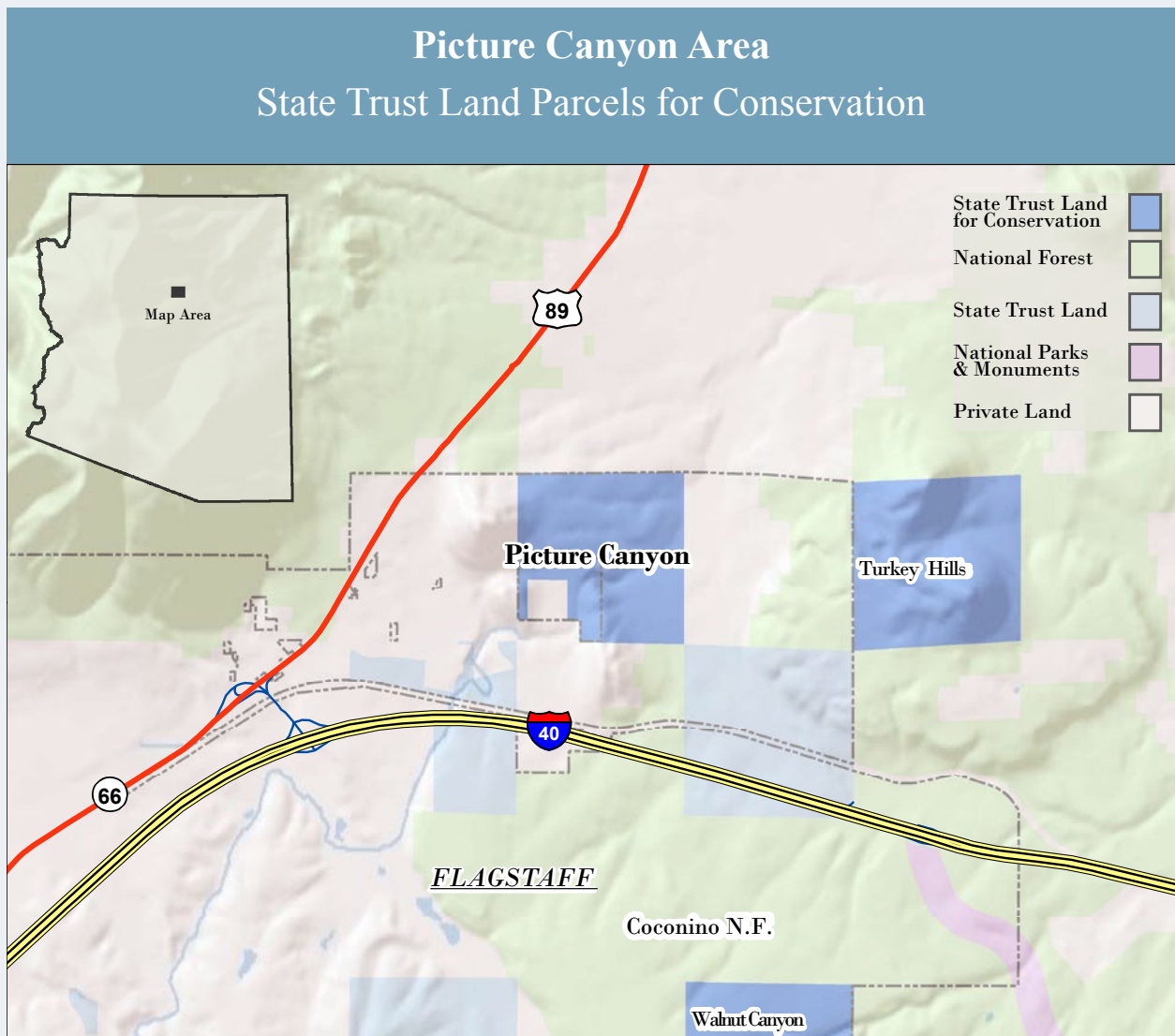
~ William Wordsworth



# LOCATION

## Picture Canyon

Located in a wooded plateau southeast of Flagstaff, a stone's throw from the Flagstaff Auto Mall, is an extraordinary natural feature that has fostered life for millions of years in an otherwise semi-arid, challenging environment. The boundaries of Picture Canyon are within Flagstaff city limits, but most of the site is technically contained in a section of state trust land managed by the Arizona State Land Department. The canyon carries the Rio de Flag, Flagstaff's only natural watercourse. However, the water from the Rio de Flag is captured, and reclaimed wastewater, graded A+, actually feeds Picture Canyon. In the winter months, the flow is steady and high; in the summer, the flow is diverted to supply the city's needs.





## PROPOSED CONSERVATION SOLUTION

### Picture Canyon

For years, the Picture Canyon Working Group (PCWG) has sought to make the case that this particular parcel's maximum value is for conservation, not development. Significant progress was made in early 2011, when Coconino County Supervisor Mandy Metzger and Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) Commissioner Maria Baier agreed that parts of Picture Canyon and nearby areas dense with archaeological sites have conservation value.

In May, 2011 the PCWG and Commissioner Baier suggested that ASLD might look favorably on a proposal by the city of Flagstaff to purchase portions of Picture Canyon containing the most archeological sites. This idea was then presented to the Flagstaff Open Spaces Commission. The Commission voted to have an independent appraisal performed on the property.

The Commission voted unanimously in August of 2011 to recommend to the Flagstaff City Council that it dedicate remaining funds from a 2005 open space bond toward the acquisition of Picture Canyon "as quickly as possible." ASLD will obtain an additional appraisal before determination of the final sale value. Hard work lies ahead for PCWG, as the group continues to champion making the Picture Canyon Preserve and Archaeological Park a reality.



## 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

Since 2005 a group of volunteers representing more than a dozen organizations has been working to protect the past, present, and future of Picture Canyon. Meeting monthly, the Picture Canyon Working Group organized clean-ups and invasive weed pulls, helped to establish easements and build trails, assisted in finding grant money to restore the natural meander of the Rio de Flag, and was instrumental in getting Picture Canyon listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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.

Friends of the Rio de Flag and Coconino County Supervisor Mandy Metzger were instrumental in developing this fact sheet.

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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