



Forest Service News Release

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Vandalism to forest infrastructure defers maintenance, decreases public safety

Resources diverted from recreation improvements and law enforcement to address damage from vandalism

(Silver City, N.M., February 3, 2026) —The Gila National Forest has seen an increase in vandalism at developed Forest Service sites including trailheads, campgrounds, and other recreation areas over the past several months. Recreation and Law Enforcement staff on the forest have had to redirect personnel and time away from their primary duties of improving recreational access for the public and ensuring public safety to rectify and investigate defaced areas.

Some acts of vandalism on the Gila National Forest pose a threat to public health and safety. Examples include biohazard contamination of public vault toilets via human excrement, fire-hazard snags (standing dead trees) from unlawfully harvested tree materials, and carelessly discarded food and trash which attract animals such as bears to recreation areas and increase the likelihood for negative human-animal interactions.

While other acts of vandalism such as graffiti and property damage may not pose immediate health and safety threats to the public, they detract from public enjoyment of the forest and diminish the work of countless employees and volunteers. One recent example involves a plaque installed and paid for by community members that was physically pried away from its base and stolen.

Repairing, restoring, and investigating vandalized sites takes Forest Service time and U.S. taxpayer money away from making other improvements on the 3.3 million acres of the Gila National Forest. Graffiti can irreversibly damage federally protected cultural heritage sites such as petroglyphs and pictographs, causing permanent physical destruction to artifacts of the forest's human history. Property damage may force the forest to close affected sites to the public depending on damage severity.

The Gila National Forest asks that the public do their part to responsibly steward public lands by respecting forest infrastructure and reporting vandalism in progress to law enforcement. The Silver City Dispatch Center (575-538-5371) can notify the closest available officer for response. For your own safety, do not confront or approach those committing acts of vandalism.

About the Forest Service: The USDA Forest Service has for more than 100 years brought people and communities together to answer the call of conservation. Grounded in world-class science and technology– and rooted in communities–the Forest Service connects people to nature and to each other. The Forest Service cares for shared natural resources in ways that promote lasting economic, ecological, and social vitality. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, maintains the largest wildland fire and forestry research organizations in the world. The Forest Service also has either a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 900 million forested acres within the U.S., of which over 130 million acres are urban forests where most Americans live.

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