



Arizona Trail Association

Warrior Stewardship Class 001 - Tonto NF Pigeon Spring (Passage 20) / 17-20 OCT 22



Photos courtesy of Brian Flynn & Michael "Chappy" Chappell

Quick Stats: 8 veterans / 4 days / ~12 combined miles of impacted trail / 369 total volunteer hours

Concept

Brian Flynn, co-founder and executive director of Two Wolf Foundation, linked up with the AZT VETS during last year's annual Veterans Day event on Passage 4, continuing to build the approximately 1-mile section of the Temporal Gulch Reroute Project allocated to the VETS Program.

Since leaving the Special Forces after 19 years of service, Brian struggled to find a sense of self-worth and purpose, battling depression and alcohol abuse. He needed a new mission. The combination of his struggles and watching fellow members of the military community fall to suicide and depression ultimately put him on a path of seeking change. He has since committed to post-traumatic growth through peer-to-peer support and continued service to our country and its public lands via targeted stewardship efforts.

Brian's vision is to use Two Wolf Foundation's programming by contributing to ongoing land conservation/service projects to support the protection, preservation, and sustainment of wilderness areas while simultaneously providing unforgettable Overlanding experiences for combat veterans and first responders. Through partnerships with veteran-focused nonprofits like the AZT VETS, Two Wolf Foundation has found a unique opportunity for continued veteran engagement that promotes a whole-health approach for both participants and public lands.

Warrior Stewardship

Two Wolf Foundation's flagship program, designated "Warrior Stewardship," provides combat veterans and first responders with the opportunity to serve in new and meaningful ways through land stewardship and wilderness conservation. Warrior Stewardship aims to build a coalition of incredible humans to protect our country's wild and vast landscapes while promoting posttraumatic growth and healing within our community. By fostering a team-focused mentality with this new initiative, participants are encouraged to build strong connections to nature and each other during their time immersed in nature. As such, Warrior Stewardship brings a new sense of purpose found in the service of our public lands by working with other conservation organizations and land managers.

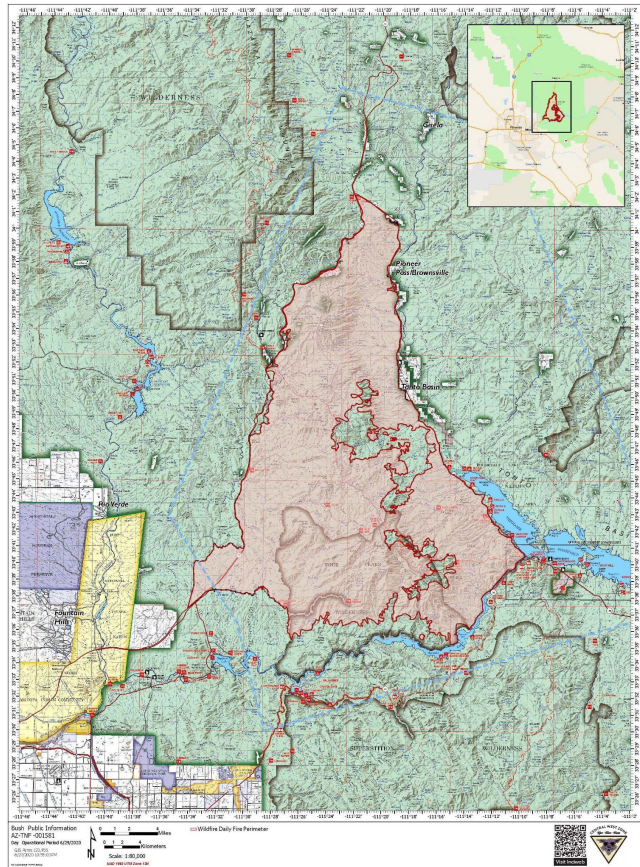


The Project

In partnership with Two Wolf Foundation and ATA's VETS Program, crew members of Wilderness Stewardship Class 001 (WSC.001) focused on continued maintenance within Passage 20 of the AZT near Pigeon Spring from the effects of the 2020 Bush Fire; mostly entailing deadfall removal, major brushwork, and improving/repairing drainages to protect the trail tread.

“This is the Way” – Before the actual stewardship project could begin, months of planning and preparation with involvement across multiple organizations to make Warrior Stewardship Class 001 a reality—including a fundraiser in Phoenix to help pay for future fleet modifications and travel expenses for six combat veterans from around the country to participate in an incredible Overland experience. Although the 1200+ mile journey from Montana to Arizona wasn't without its logistical challenges, the crew of WSC.001 made it to Pigeon Spring, located high up in the Four Peaks Wilderness, energized and eager to get boots on the trail!

Day 1 – The road up to Lone Pine saddle from Roosevelt Lake was rough (and sketchy) at times—navigating deep ruts, tight turns, and oncoming offroad traffic. However, all parties made it to base camp by late afternoon, and we all breathed a sigh of relief, knowing we would be stationary for the next three days. Introductions were made all around, and stories were told of the group's intrepid road trip,



followed by a homecooked spaghetti dinner premade with love back in Tucson. With bellies full, we warmed ourselves by the fire pit, indulged in some s'mores, threw the frisbee for a demanding dog, and offered more profound insights into our shared service and what to expect in the days ahead.

On a side note: other than a few minor issues, the new ATA PinDrop travel trailer proved to be a worthy vessel in design and execution, making the 350-mile round-trip from Tucson easy and providing a comfortable and enjoyable platform for both sleeping and cooking!



Day 2 – The sunrise overlooking Roosevelt Lake that morning was as breathtaking as the chill in the air, silhouetted by Two Wolf's flagship Tacoma, dubbed "Tango Whiskey One." Some slept well, others did not, but all ate a hearty meal of loaded breakfast burritos before we circled up for a safety brief and promptly hit the trail with tools in hand for the first full day of work. Arizona has seen a very productive monsoon cycle this past summer. Most sections of the AZT have experienced exponential growth of native plant life, so it was unsurprisingly overgrown in some of the narrower sections of the trail as we marched south toward the lake.

After passing the Four Peaks wilderness boundary, we stopped to talk about tool safety, watershed management, and trail construction techniques. The crew made short work of a tree that had fallen into the trail, and we continued on our way. We stopped again nearly 1.3 miles in (just after Bear Spring junction), noting sections that needed work along the way. After a brief rest at a scenic gully overlooking Roosevelt Lake, we double-backed toward Pigeon Spring to tackle the most problematic areas. The work before lunch mainly consisted of grubbing out plants directly from the tread and cutting back scrub oak and Manzanita from the corridor. After lunch, the team collectively engaged in improvements to and created new drainage "cuts" to encourage water off the tread. The most vulnerable areas of the trail were sections of high-angle runouts already severely rutted by heavy rainfall. To combat



future erosion to the path, we built rolling grade dips and new drains at the highest and lowest points of these particular sections to combat this “troughing” effect.

Having put in a solid day's work, the crew hiked back up to base camp and enjoyed another hearty



meal of street tacos with all the trimmings, thanks to Mike and his unique camping “wok.” Brian graciously shared his personally harvested ground venison to top off our plates! Night two proved very windy and cold, but undaunted, we gathered around the fire again to swap tales and share insightful lessons learned from our time on the trail and beyond.

A special thanks to the Overland owners for the in-depth tours of their sweet rigs!

Day 3 – Another glorious sunrise graced our morning as we prepared for another full day of maintenance. With no time to lose, we devoured our breakfast, loaded with food and water, and hit the trail to continue the previous day's unfinished trail work.

We opted to retreat roughly a hundred yards from where we ended the day before repairing a few major drainages along a wide gully. These areas had also seen significant monsoon rain, which allowed us to examine how the water flowed onto the trail and provided a platform to teach the men how to build more sustainable structures to shore up and prevent future erosion on these sections. We chose to dig out these drainages below the tread line and implement riprap and crib wall construction methods. This process took us until we broke for lunch, where we soaked up the sun on some massive boulders and replenished our bodies.





After a much-needed rest, we began working our way back to the Spring, finding smaller projects to tackle, which entailed more drainage work, rehabbing, brushing, and even a short, full-benching exercise to widen a section of trail water damaged. Unfortunately, Marc needed to leave that evening to catch a flight back to NY the next day, so we voted to head back to camp early for our last dinner as a team rather than letting him leave on an empty stomach.

Ending on a high note, we made bbq pork sliders on sweet Hawaiian rolls, topped with spicy dill pickles, three choices of sauces, and served with homemade potato salad! The boys packed it in, but not without a struggle, as there was plenty for seconds (and thirds). After we feasted, we gathered around in a school circle as Marc bid us a fine

farewell and shared his appreciation for his time and experience with WSC.001. Although his comedic presence was missed around the campfire, we did our best to keep warm and not dwell on the fact that our time together was drawing to a close.

The newest tradition during our veteran-specific trail work events is to present each participant with an AZT VETS Program patch for completing a multiday event. These patches represent the hard work and dedication of every member of the US Armed Forces, both on and off the Trail.

Day 4 – The work done, and expressing on multiple occasions how we did not want to bring *any* food home, the crew made one final big country breakfast with the help of some freshly chopped potatoes from WSC’s food stash. We tidied up our campsite and policed the area for any trash we may have accidentally left behind or was left by previous outdoor enthusiasts—following the LNT motto of “leaving it better than you found it.” We gathered one final time as a group to express our gratitude.





Hands were shaken, hugs were given, and the warriors made their way back down the mountain.

Conclusion

This first collaboration with Two Wolf Foundation was truly an inspirational and awe-inspiring example of the triumph and rediscovery of self on the Arizona National Scenic Trail—not only due to the work we were able to accomplish during our four days together in Four Peaks, but also because of the size and scope of all the pieces that had to come together to make this incredible project a reality. I can't imagine how the inaugural Warrior Stewardship class must feel, but I know one thing for sure: Brian Flynn's devotion and dedication to the idea that our veteran community will not only heal one another through our

Nation's sacred outdoor spaces, they are deserving of the chance to preserve and protect this ideal as well.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to all the families for their support, allowing us to participate in this grand adventure, and the vast network of supporters for their generosity in helping to make this vision a reality. And a very special shoutout to Celeste for her 5-star, gourmet meals!

We wish Brian and Two Wolf Foundation all the success in the world and look forward to making Warrior Stewardship an annual tradition for the AZT VETS Program going forward.

Very Respectfully,

Chappy



Wilderness Stewardship Class 001:

- Doug Bauer (USMC)
- Rob Waters (USA), Ret.
- Justin Michael (USA), Ret.
- Charles Neal (USAF), Ret.
- Michael "Chappy" Chappell (USN)
- Mike Meier (USMC)
- Marc Hoover (USA)
- Brian Flynn (USA)
- Bryan White (USN)



"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity."

- John Muir