

# *Taking Care of Business*

Through Restoring, Preserving, Maintaining and Promoting Yuma's History



## FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT



[YumaHeritage.com](http://YumaHeritage.com)





## Letter from the Chair

SHELLEY MELLON

2024 culminated in the completion of a number of major projects, which required thoughtful planning, meticulous budget management, and careful construction oversight by Heritage Area staff. I am proud of our efforts to improve Yuma's waterfront, which have elicited state and national recognition. We look forward to continued progress all along our waterfront in 2025.

As an owner of several businesses myself, I am impressed by the way that the Heritage Area runs its operations in a business-like fashion. It has been 15 years since the Heritage Area took over management of Yuma's state parks when they were threatened with closure by the Great Recession of 2008-9. Through innovative strategies to generate more revenue and maintaining strict cost control, we have made the parks sustainable without financial support from the State of Arizona.

The strategic plan update of our Management Plan emphasizes our role in helping revitalize the historic downtown. The Heritage Area provides redevelopment consultant support to the City of Yuma, particularly with regard to leveraging the City's federal grant for the Hotel Del Sol.

On behalf of our Board of Directors, I am so proud to be building upon the work undertaken by past Chairs Brian Golding Sr., Thomas Rushin, the late Patty Ware, Gary Munk, and Steve Bell.

Sincerely,

Shelley Mellon

Chair, Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area



## Letter from the Director

CATHY DOUGLAS

We have completed key projects which are discussed in greater detail within this report. Our focus is to ensure sustainability of our efforts in wetlands restoration, park operations, and historic preservation. Highlights include:

- The **Yuma East Wetlands** received state and national recognition for ground-breaking work in wetlands restoration. We completed the Sunset View Wildlife Area, further expanding public access to the wetlands. Our staff, led by Jesus Melendrez, has also assisted the Cocopah Indian Tribe to enhance their technical restoration capabilities.
- We continue to successfully manage Yuma's State Parks. The **Yuma Territorial Prison** has more than doubled its admission and gift shop revenues since 2010. Looking to diversify revenue sources, Yanna Kruse and her staff are undertaking more special events, and historic programming and tours.
- Tammy Snook and her staff have added a number of educational programs at the **Colorado River State Historic Park**, while hosting highly successful special events.
- We added 8 acres of landscaped parkland at the **Yuma West Wetlands** in coordination with the City of Yuma Parks and Recreation Department.
- With the support of our U.S. Senators, we are seeking major federal funding for the exterior **restoration of historic Yuma City Hall**. The City of Yuma has pledged matching funds for this project.
- Supporting the City of Yuma's **downtown redevelopment** continues to be a priority for the Heritage Area.

My staff and I pledge to carry on the great work of the Heritage Area. Feel free to contact me with any comments or questions at [cathy.douglas@yumaaz.gov](mailto:cathy.douglas@yumaaz.gov).

Sincerely

Cathy Douglas

Executive Director, Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area





Volunteers plant mesquite trees at the new Sunset View Wildlife Area.

**YUMA EAST WETLANDS**  
*Achieving State and National Recognition*

From 2001-2011, the Yuma community transformed the Yuma East Wetlands (YEW) from a trash-filled jungle of non-native vegetation to hundreds of acres of cottonwood, willow and mesquite forests and native marshland.

Since 2013, in partnership with the Quechan Indian Tribe, City of Yuma, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the Heritage Area has successfully operated and maintained the 380-acre YEW, a Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCRMSCP) site. Considered a model for wetlands restoration in the desert Southwest, the Heritage Area continues its commitment to long-term sustainability and improvement of the YEW.



1



2



4

**MARCH 2024**

In March 2024, the YEW emerged from the pool of 11 finalists representing the entire state to take home the Environmental Excellence Award for Natural Environmental Preservation. The award is sponsored by Arizona Forward, a community services organization that advocates for the sustainability of Arizona’s environment.

**APRIL 2024**

In April 2024, the Department of the Interior announced it was awarding \$5 million to protect and maintain Yuma East Wetlands. This funding amount has recently increased to over \$8.7 million. Improvements will include designing and installing a new system to move water around the wetlands, replacing diesel-fueled pumps with electrical pumps, extending concrete canals, and bringing electrical power to the conservation area to allow for technology updates and efficiency improvements.

**JUNE 2024**

In June 2024, we completed the Sunset View Wildlife Area. This 2-acre project provides an elevated wildlife viewing platform, walking trails, interpretive wildlife signage and native plantings. It was funded through a variety of sources, including a federal ARPA grant through the City of Yuma; Arizona state grants; and a grant from AARP.

**ONGOING**

We continue to expand our tribal collaboration with the Cocopah Indian Tribe. We have assisted the tribe in wetlands restoration and trail development. It is our hope that the expertise we have developed over the decades can be shared with many of our partners to build local capacity for such work.



*“Protecting these wetlands is important to the local communities as well as to the greater health of the lower basin of the Colorado River.”*

Camille Touton  
Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner

- 1 Sunset View Wildlife Area Progress
- 2 YCNHA Director Cathy Douglas and Wetlands and Facilities Operations Manager Jesus Melendrez accept award
- 3 YCNHA assist Cocopah riverfront trail
- 4 Bureau of Reclamation YEW Funding Announcement





## YUMA WEST WETLANDS

# *Yuma's most visited and popular park*

Since 1999, the Heritage Area has worked with the City of Yuma Parks and Recreation Department to develop the 110-acre West Wetlands Park—now Yuma's most visited and popular park. Over the past decade, the Heritage Area worked on improving the riverside section of the park, adding a trail and an outdoor environmental classroom.

In 2022, the Heritage Area secured a \$250,000 grant from the Arizona Office of Tourism to add another 8 acres of landscaped parkland. The Heritage Area collaborated with the City of Yuma Parks and Recreation Department, which was extremely helpful in leveraging these funds by providing staff and by importing the soil to complete the project.

The project, which opened in September 2024, includes picnic ramadas, trails, trees, parking facilities, and a rolling linear landscape that separates the new parkland from the park's facilities maintenance yard. The Heritage Area looks forward to working with the City to complete the construction of the entire park.

1 Aerial view of new 8 acre parkland in progress | 2 Ramada construction | 3 Workers pour concrete for ramada installation | 4 Ribbon cutting ceremony | 5 Volunteers listen to instructions before tree planting



## HISTORIC DOWNTOWN YUMA

# *Revitalizing the Heart of Yuma*

The Heritage Area's Management Plan has focused not only on Yuma's waterfront but also on the revitalization of its historic downtown. In many cities across the country, downtowns had declined in the 1960s and 1970s in the face of suburban-style mall development. With the encouragement of the City of Yuma, the Heritage Area led the effort to upgrade and reopen Main Street. Now vibrant with restaurants and an arts and entertainment scene, Main Street has returned to its role as "the heart of Yuma".

The Heritage Area continues to work with the City of Yuma to further strengthen the downtown. The year 2024 saw both progress and a setback in these efforts.



**The Historic Hotel Del Sol**, which had been Yuma's premiere hotel along the Southern Pacific Rail Line during the 1920's, had been abandoned and deteriorating since the 1970's. Committed to its redevelopment, the City secured a \$10.6 million federal grant for the project with the goal of leveraging these funds to attract private investment. With consulting assistance from the Heritage Area to undertake a Request for Proposals, the City is now in the midst of negotiations with a private developer to determine the best way forward.



Built in 1921 in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, **Yuma's Historic City Hall** served for 80 years as the seat of government. A new Municipal Complex was built in 2002 to accommodate Yuma's rapid growth and need for expanded services. Since then, the Heritage Area stepped forward to manage and maintain Historic City Hall as its headquarters and as a hub for non-profit organizations. The Heritage Area undertook an assessment and design study, which determined the need for major exterior restoration, including window replacement. In coordination with the City of Yuma and with the support of Arizona's U.S. Senators, the Heritage Area is seeking matching federal funds to take on this major restoration project. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places.



In 2007, in an attempt to save a rapidly deteriorating 1877 **Southern Pacific Freight Depot**, the Heritage Area secured its donation from Union Pacific Railroad, installed a new roof, and attempted to find a way to fund its restoration and reuse with public and private funds. The efforts proved unsuccessful and, sadly, the building was subject to a devastating arson fire in 2024, resulting in its entire destruction. While every historic structure cannot be saved, this serves as a sober reminder that the key to successful historic preservation is getting buildings back into **active use**.



YUMA'S ARIZONA  
HISTORICAL STATE PARKS

Growth through  
Strategic  
Planning

Under the local management of the Heritage Area since 2010, the **Yuma Territorial Prison State Historic Park** (YTPSHP) doubled revenues through aggressive marketing and became operationally self-sufficient in recent years. We continue to expand special events and programming as an additional source of revenue. However, major capital projects, which have not been undertaken by Arizona State Parks since the 1980's, are beyond the financial capabilities of the Heritage Area.

We expected to be included in Arizona State Parks' FY 2025 capital program for long-delayed infrastructure improvements, but state budget constraints have delayed these improvements. Preservation design work of the Prison's Sally Port is currently underway, and we will continue working with the state and seek federal and other sources of funding to advance these projects.

We have expanded upon our educational programming for school children, particularly at the **Colorado River State Historic Park** (CRSHP), which tells the important and timely story of the past, present, and future of the Colorado River. With grant funding provided from the National Park Foundation, we feature free field trips for Yuma County 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders to both state parks and to the Yuma East Wetlands. We are also expanding our reach to a larger, national audience through digital programming.

CRSHP has benefited from additional revenues from increased admissions, gift shop sales and special events, but still relies on funding from the City of Yuma and from the National Heritage Area funding we receive from National Park Service to operate the park.



SPECIAL EVENTS &  
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Varying  
Approach Yields  
Success

Both state parks serve as Yuma's gathering place for special events and group outings. These events serve the dual purpose of improving the community's quality of life while generating additional revenues for the parks, which operate without any State of Arizona financial support. Many involve the active support of area businesses and other non-profit organizations, without which the events would not be possible.

In 2024, the Heritage Area provided 103 education programs and field trips for 4,847 students and 501 adults, as well as hosted 13 special events and programs for 3,378 attendees. Some of the events and programs included Dia de los Muertos, Haru Matsuri (a celebration of Asian and Pacific Islander culture), Christmas on the Colorado, Exploration Station, Movies in the Parks, Yuma Territorial Prison After Dark, and a Sidewalk Chalk Art Contest. Additionally, the parks were rented for 18 private special events attended by 8,081 people.

The Heritage Area was also very busy planning a plethora of events to be hosted in FY 2025 including the annual Dia de los Muertos celebration, as well as several new exciting major events including a 3-night Christmas at the Crossing festival at the Colorado River State Historic Park and Wild West Days at the Yuma Territorial Prison.

- 1 Visitors tour the Yuma Territorial Prison museum
- 2 The iconic Sallyport at the YTP is in need of repairs
- 3 Students learn about 1800s telegraph technology
- 4 New exhibits are in progress at the Colorado River State Historic Park to educate visitors about the Colorado River
- 5 Yuma Territorial Prison After Dark
- 6 Haru Matsuri Special Event
- 7 Dia de los Muertos celebration
- 8 Sidewalk Chalk Art Contest



**Managed \$3.4M budget** with staff of 23 full-time and 14 regular part-time / seasonal part-time employees



**Secured and administered 16 grants** totaling \$1.4M

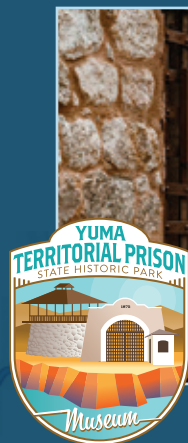
**Leveraged \$6.27 for every \$1 received** in Heritage Partnership Program federal funding



**Developed 10 acres of public park space** and ¾ mile of new trail



**Maintained 380-acre wetland conservation area**



**Successfully managed Yuma's two state parks** since 2010 without any financial assistance from the State of Arizona

**74,129 people** engaged in Heritage Area historic tours, educational programs, special events, and state park visits



## YUMA CROSSING NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

For the Fiscal Period Ending September 30, 2024 (Unaudited)

### Federal, State & Local Grant

\$1,350,100

### State Parks Entrance Fees & Merchandise Sales

\$715,237

### Contractual Revenue

\$589,265

### City of Yuma In-Kind Contribution

\$362,024

### Private Grants & Projects

\$198,975

### Rental Income

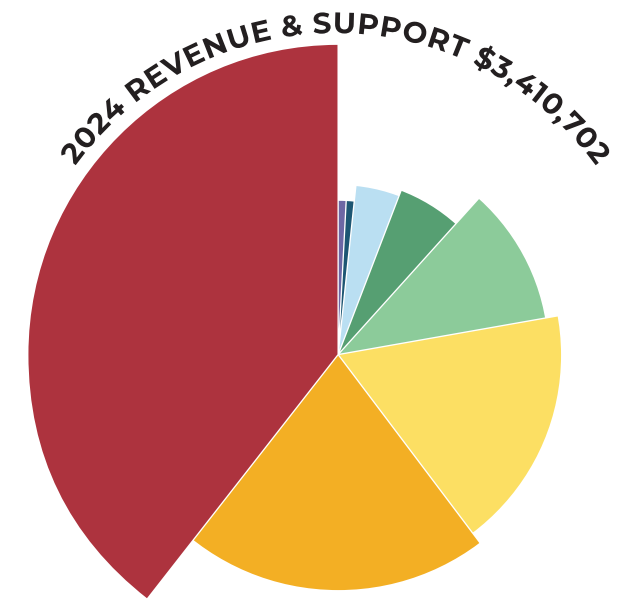
\$144,929

### Charitable Donations

\$25,490

### Special Events

\$24,682



### State Parks - Operations & Maintenance

\$991,827

### Yuma East Wetlands Administration, Operation, Maintenance & Permitting

\$988,501

### General and Administration Expenses

\$527,548

### City of Yuma In-Kind Expenses

\$362,024

### Yuma West Wetlands Restoration Project

\$247,041

### Heritage Programming and Education

\$95,960

### Historic City Hall and Pivot Point Plaza

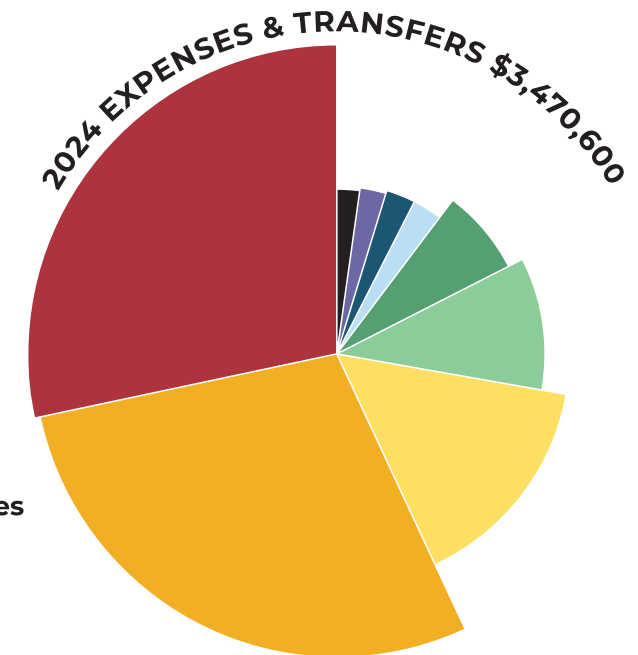
\$95,238

### State Parks - Exhibit Installation & Repairs

\$91,104

### Loss of Value on Donated Property

\$71,357



Deficit from Financial Operations 2024 (\$59,898)

(Deficit due entirely to destruction of donated historic Southern Pacific Freight Depot caused by arson.)



## *With Gratitude*

### OUR DEDICATED STAFF

Cathy Douglas Executive Director  
Priscilla Starr Accounting Manager  
Martha Camacho Senior Accountant  
Sylvia Atondo Staff Accountant  
Arianna Lucero Accounting Specialist  
Sarah Halligan Marketing & Communications Specialist  
Brett Frame Creative Design Manager  
Teri Ingram Events Specialist  
Anna Reagle Grants & Fund Development Manager  
Tracy Jones Administrative & Grants Specialist  
Ken Waller IT Support  
Sharon Maurer Interpretive Education Specialist  
Yanna Kruse Yuma Territorial Prison  
State Historic Park Manager  
Mario Ochoa Yuma Territorial Prison  
State Historic Park Guest Service Supervisor  
Tammy Snook Colorado River  
State Historic Park Manager  
Martin Trujillo Retail Operations Coordinator  
Daniella Hammond State Historic Park  
Guest Service Representative  
Louise Valdez State Historic Park  
Guest Service Representative  
Jaime Valle, Jr. State Historic Park  
Guest Service Representative

Nicole Crawford State Historic Park  
Guest Service Representative  
Angela Snyder State Historic Park  
Guest Service Representative  
Marissa Urias State Historic Park  
Guest Service Representative  
Patrick McFarlane State Historic Park  
Guest Service Representative  
Nick Okada State Historic Park  
Guest Service Representative  
Jesus Melendrez Wetlands and Facilities  
Operations Manager  
Jorge A. Prado, Sr. Wetlands Maintenance Foreman  
Pio Fernandez Wetlands Maintenance Specialist  
Jorge Prado, Jr. Wetlands Maintenance Specialist  
Jesse Lopez Wetlands Field Staff  
Rodrigo Cervantes Wetlands Field Staff  
Chris Ingram Event Support  
Susana Famanias Custodian  
Kayla Comella Education Outreach Specialist  
Shirley Kodama Education Outreach Specialist  
Martha Lewis Education Outreach Specialist  
Loni McCloud Education Outreach Specialist  
Marylou Pilkington Education Outreach Specialist  
Cherilyn Trippett Education Outreach Specialist

### YCNHA BOARD of DIRECTORS

Shelley Mellon Board Chair,  
R.L. Jones Insurance & MVD Services  
Chris Wheeler Vice-Chair,  
Prison Hill Brewing Company  
Thomas Rushin Secretary/Treasurer,  
Retired Yuma School District #1  
Emilia Cortez Allo Fiber  
Amber Shek Greater Yuma Economic Development Council  
Reetika Dhawan Arizona Western College

Linda Elliott-Nelson Arizona Historical Society  
Clint Harrington Pilkington Construction Company  
Brian Golding, Sr. Quechan Indian Tribe  
Douglas Nicholls Mayor, City of Yuma  
Chris Morris Deputy Mayor, City of Yuma  
Jonathan Lines Yuma County Supervisor  
Brian Fernandez Arizona State Senator, District #23

### OUR GENEROUS INVESTORS

Allo Fiber Arizona  
Amber Shek  
Andrew Erwin  
APS  
Avenir Financial  
Big O Tires  
Bose Corporation  
Brett Frame  
Cathy Douglas  
Chapman Dodge,  
Chrysler, Jeep, Ram  
Christina Buco  
Craig Shay  
Culligan Water of Yuma  
D & H Electric

David G Trucking  
Deidre Schuman  
Elliott Family Charitable Fund  
Exceptional Community Hospital  
G & T Alarm Company  
Healing Touch Spa  
KAWC/KOFA Border Radio  
Kevin & Michelle Stoleson  
Lines and Lundgreen  
MGM Design  
National Bank of Arizona  
NexGen  
Olivia Zepeda  
Onvida Health  
Prison Hill Brewing Company

Rancho Melendrez  
Rick Mires  
RL Jones Insurance & MVD Services  
Russ & Janet Jones  
Shelley and Collin Mellon  
State Farm Insurance Agents: Katie  
Figueroa, Martin Armijo, Cindy Topete,  
Lillian Juaregui, and Cathy Nuetzi  
Tracy Jones  
Telemundo  
Visit Yuma  
Yanna Kruse  
Yuma Dentistry 4 Kids  
Yuma International Airport