



# Desert Fence Busters

Annual Report: Jan-Dec 2023

## BACKGROUND

In 1916 the first formal organization was created to protect declining wildlife populations in the Tucson area, called the Tucson Game Protective Association. This group primarily worked to regulate hunting and designate wildlife preserves immediately outside the city. In the century since then, new challenges have emerged for wildlife to thrive in these protected areas: construction of the Central Arizona Project canal, expanding urbanization, and increasingly arid conditions. Today, wildlife have numerous obstacles to overcome to continue to persist on this landscape.

In 2021, a group of stakeholders working west of Tucson in the Avra Valley began organizing to remove obsolete fences that unnecessarily impede wildlife movement. The valley has extensive retired agricultural lands that are bisected by fences that are no longer needed. The Desert Fence Busters is a collection of volunteers working with landowners to identify obsolete fences and remove them for the benefit of wildlife movement.

## PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

**NGO:** Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, Friends of Ironwood Forest, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Friends of Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, Tucson Audubon, Friends of Saguaro National Park

**Business:** BKW Farms

**Local Government:** City of Tucson (Tucson Water)

**County:** Pima County (Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation; Flood Control; and Office of Sustainability & Conservation)

**State:** Arizona Game and Fish Department

**Federal:** National Park Service, US Bureau of Reclamation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management

**Tribal:** Tohono O’odham Nation

**University:** University of Arizona, Arizona State University

## 2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In 2023, the Desert Fence Busters continued to refine strategies for prioritizing fence removals. The group continued working with willing landowners in the Tucson area to identify and remove obsolete fences with volunteer labor. The group continued to target “double fences” as the highest priority for removal, along with properties with a high density of obsolete fences. Fencing was removed from two jurisdictions in 2023: City of Tucson (Tucson Water) and the National Park Service.

*Table 1. Summary of Desert Fence Busters’ Accomplishment (2021-2023).*

	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
<b>Events</b>	1	6	12	19
<b>Jurisdictions</b>	2	3	2	3
<b>Number of Volunteers</b>	71	246	176	493
<b>Volunteer Hours</b>	445	1,987	1,582	4,014
<b>Miles of Fence Removed</b>	3.4	21.6	11.5	36.5
<b>Weight of Fence Removed</b>	4,180	18,180	18,940	41,300
<b>Scrap Value of Fence Removed</b>	\$251	\$1,460	\$1,339	\$3,050
<b>Value of Volunteer Hours<sup>1</sup></b>	\$7,062	\$31,534	\$25,106	\$63,702

<sup>1</sup> Median hourly wage from US Bureau of Labor Statistics for “Farmworkers and Laborers” in the Tucson area: \$15.87.



## PHOTOS



*Figure 1. A mule deer entangled in a “double fence”(top left; photo credit: Desert Fence Busters) and fence removal (top right & bottom; photo credits: Marisa Rice) .*



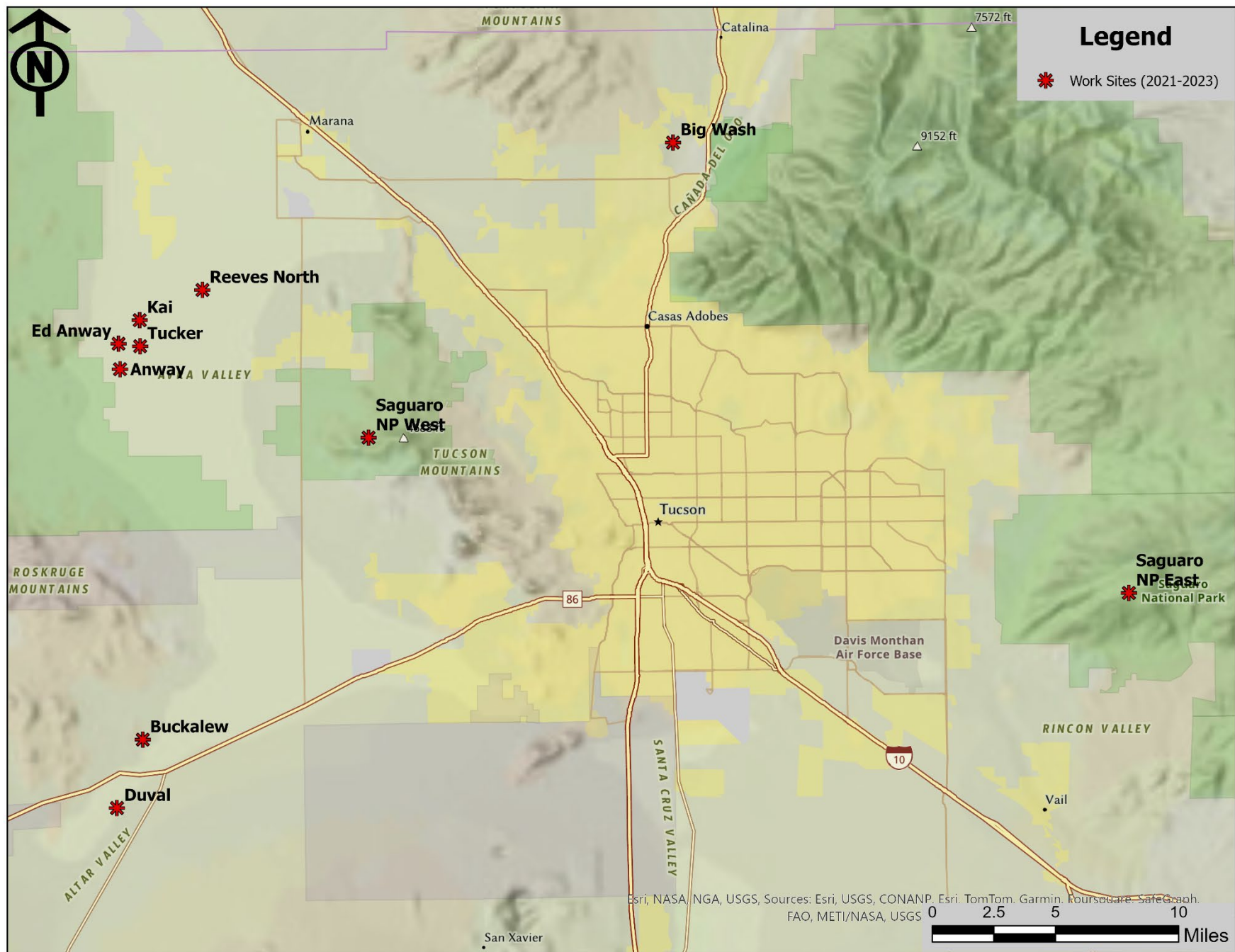


Figure 2. All Desert Fence Buster Work Sites (2021-2023).



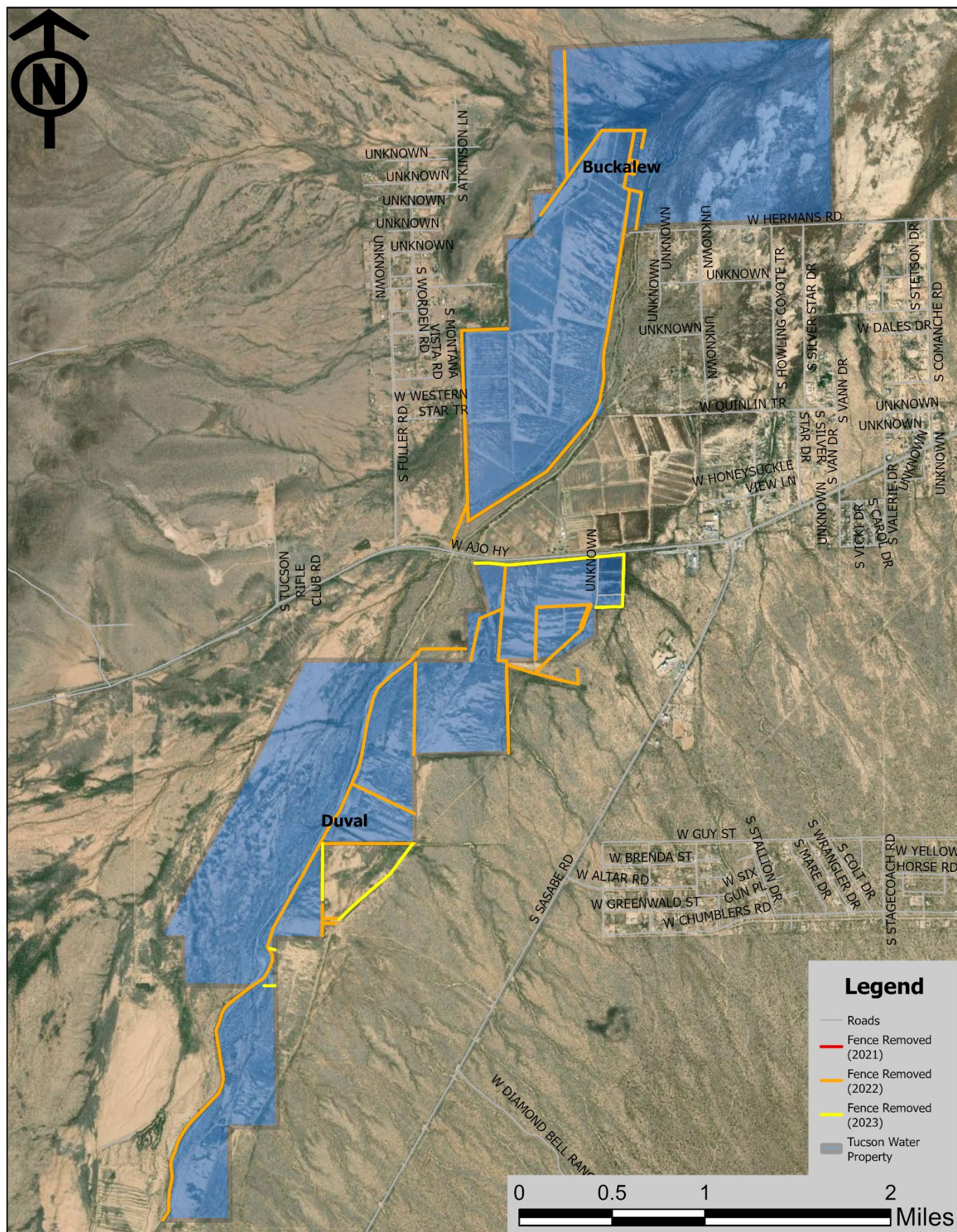


Figure 3. Fences Removed by the Desert Fence Busters (2021-2023).



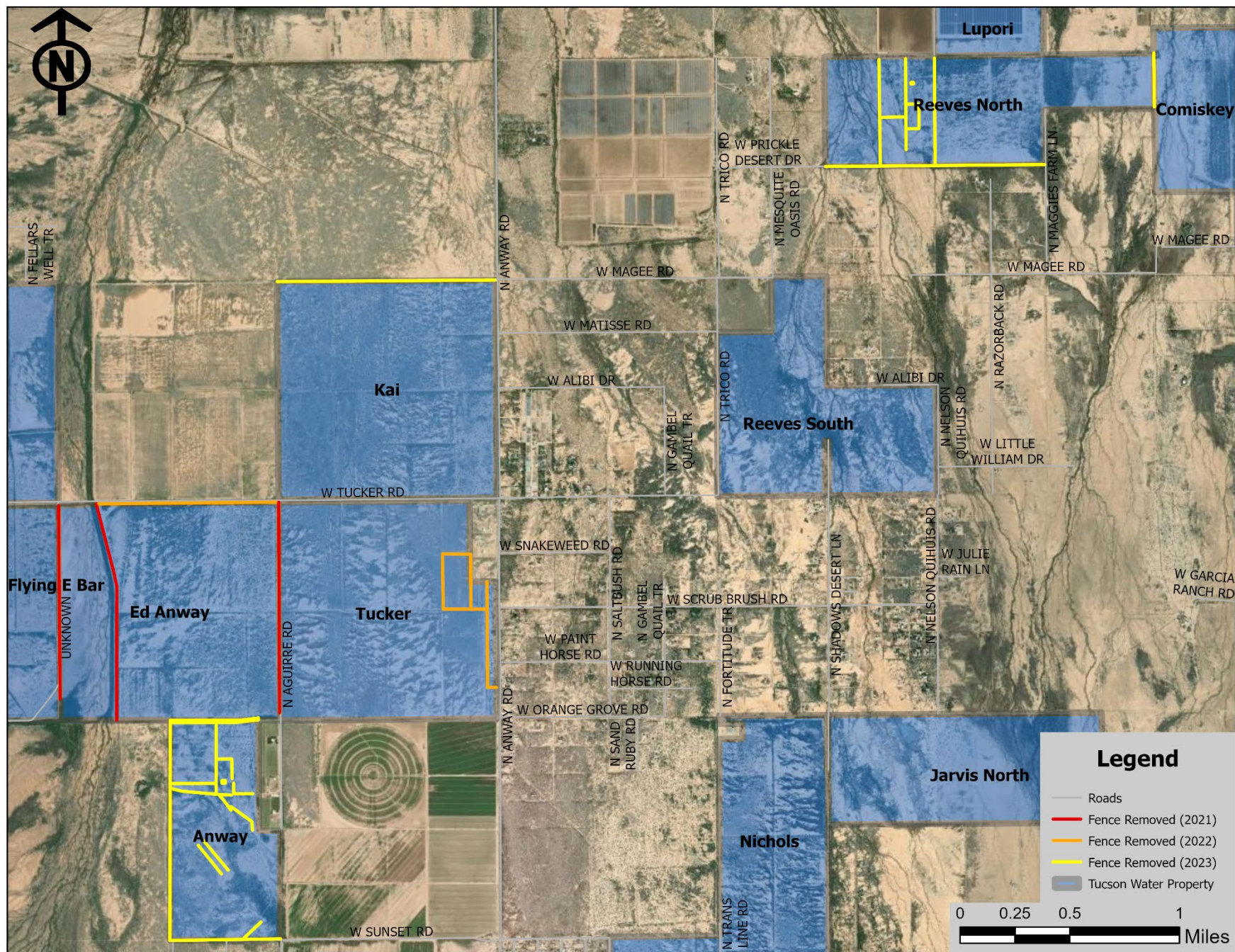


Figure 4. Fences Removed by the Desert Fence Busters (2021-2023).







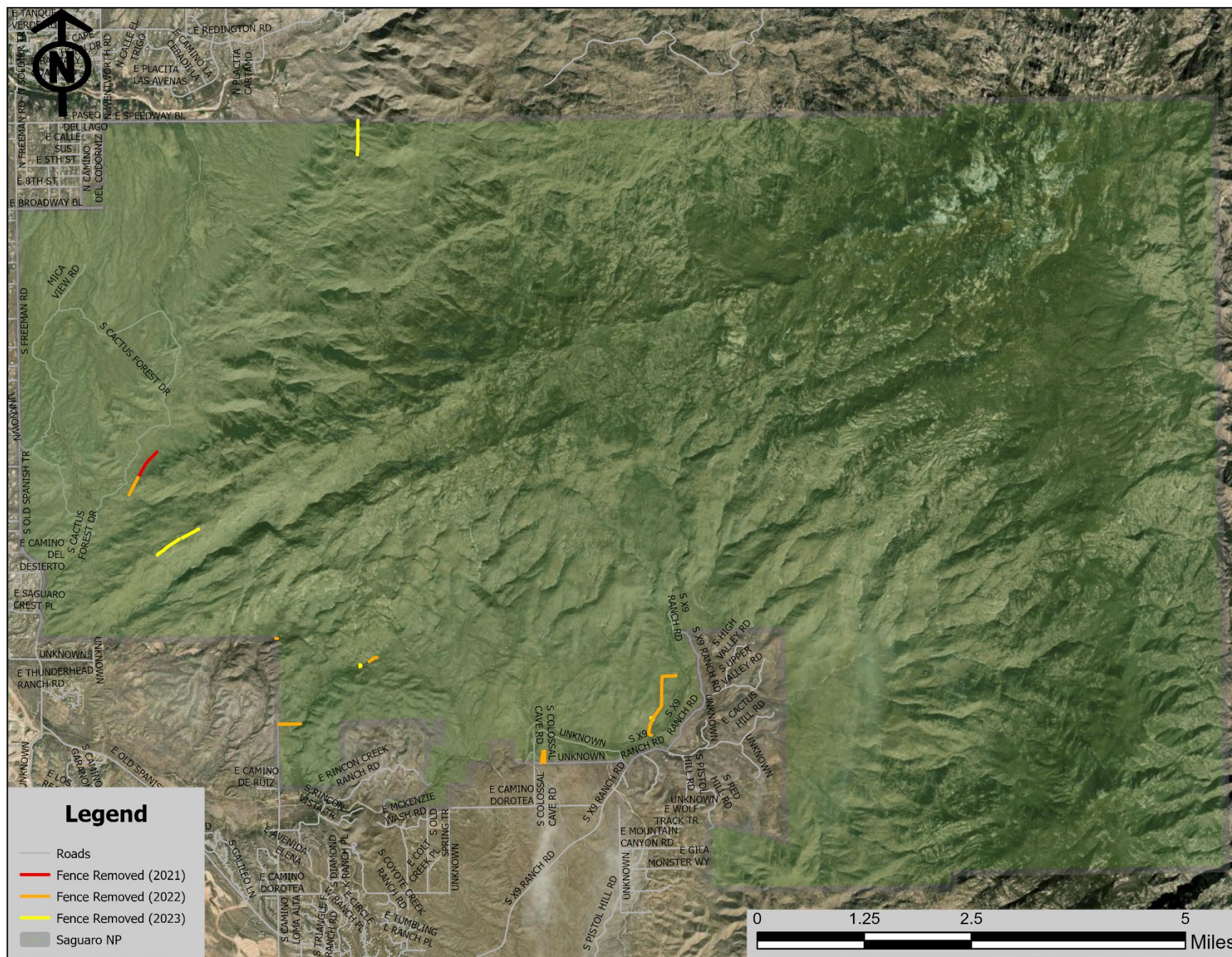


Figure 6. Obsolete fences removed from Saguaro NP, Rincon Mountain District (2021-2023).