

State Land Leases

Arizona State Trust Land is managed to generate revenue for public institutions, which often results in more controlled access. Recreational users are typically required to obtain a permit. Access can be more restrictive, and lessees may have greater influence over day-to-day use within their lease area. Gates are common, and users may need permission or a valid permit to pass through. Some areas may be closed to public access depending on the lease type and management objectives.

Federal Land Permits

Federal lands are generally managed under a multiple-use framework that includes recreation. In most cases, public access is allowed without a general access permit. However, access is not unlimited—travel is typically restricted to designated routes, and closures can occur for resource protection, safety, fire restrictions, or land restoration. Gates are often used for livestock control and do not necessarily indicate a closure. Even within active grazing allotments, roads and trails usually remain open unless specifically signed or designated otherwise

Lease Terms and Public Use

A key point to understand is that most grazing leases on land other than State land are **non-exclusive**. That means the land is still considered public in many ways, and multiple uses are allowed at the same time.

One of the biggest sources of conflict is gates which are common on leased lands.

In general, ranchers **cannot legally lock gates on leased land** in a way that blocks public access. Roads and access routes should remain open for lawful uses like recreation and hunting with some exceptions:

- Gates may be **temporarily closed or restricted** during active operations (such as cattle handling or maintenance)
- Other types of leases—such as **mining or industrial uses**—may allow areas to be closed off due to safety hazards
- Some leased lands may have specific agreements or legal arrangements that allow for locked gates, particularly if alternative access points are available

So, if you come across a closed or locked gate, don't immediately assume someone is in the wrong—there may be a legitimate reason. When in doubt, it's always best to check signage or verify with the managing agency.

On state land you should be thinking “Do I have a permit to be here?” On federal lands “Am I allowed to be here, or is there a specific closure?”

Rules, regulations, and land access conditions can change at any time. Always refer to official sources like the Arizona State Land Department or the appropriate federal agency for the most up-to-date information.

Understanding how leased land works helps reduce conflict between recreationists and land users—and ensures we can all continue to enjoy Arizona's public lands responsibly.

The AZ 4 Wheel Drive Association (A4WDA) has been around since 1976; we are a not for profit association that is funded entirely by our members and donations.

This information is for your use, our association, and member clubs are not responsible for any injury or damage. These posts are for information so that we can educate our users on responsible motorized recreation and help keep access open.

Please share this post with other recreation users.

Next – A4WDA #5 – Acronyms

A4WDA #6 – Arizona Permits

Titles are subject to change