



MUSEUM of
NORTHERN
ARIZONA

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New Museum of Northern Arizona Exhibit Explores How Plants Respond to Changing Climate

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. – A new indoor-outdoor exhibition at the Museum of Northern Arizona (MNA) invites visitors to explore how plants on the Colorado Plateau are responding to a warming world. *Shifting Life Zones* is on view in the museum's Jaime Major Golightly Courtyard and the adjacent Courtyard Gallery through April 30, 2026.

Through displays, interactive features, and insights from MNA scientists, the exhibit highlights stories of adaptation, vulnerability, and resilience even as global temperatures continue to rise. It looks at how some species—like pinyon pine—have disappeared from areas that were once suitable for them.

Visitors to the exhibition will encounter the delicate struggle of a tiny, endangered cactus, discover practical steps to support native plants, and engage with artwork inspired by the region's ecosystems and Indigenous growing practices.

Curated by MNA Botany Collections Manager Kirstin Phillips, the exhibit encourages reflection on the shared capacity of all living things to adapt in the face of change.

"Change can be hard," said Phillips. "However, change is constant, and learning how to be resilient is pivotal to health and well-being.

"In *Shifting Life Zones*, we explore how plant life adjusts to change. As you see examples of how some plants adapt, we encourage you to think about ways to be adaptable when you find yourself in a climate that has changed from your ideals."

An accompanying online story map, [Stories of Resilience & Diversity on the Colorado Plateau](#), explores biocultural diversity and community food resilience. Created by students from the School of Earth and Sustainability at Northern Arizona University with guidance from MNA research associate Rosemary Logan, the story map complements the exhibit and provides additional context and insight.



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The Museum of Northern Arizona is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Entrance to *Shifting Life Zones* is included with museum admission. For more information, visit www.musnaz.org.

About the Museum of Northern Arizona

Founded in 1928, the Museum of Northern Arizona is dedicated to preserving and celebrating the natural and cultural heritage of the Colorado Plateau. MNA fosters a deeper understanding of the region's art, science, and people through its exhibitions, educational programs, research, and community events. The museum is located near the foot of the San Francisco Peaks in Flagstaff and is open daily 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Image captions

MNA-ShiftingLifeZonesExhibit_01

"Aspen," a painting by Lone Wolf (Hart Merriam Schultz), reflects the vision of the Blackfoot-Anglo artist named after Clinton Hart Merriam—the American scientist who developed the life zones concept following his survey of the San Francisco Peaks. (Museum of Northern Arizona)

MNA-ShiftingLifeZonesExhibit_02

Museum of Northern Arizona research associate and botanist Barbara Phillips searches for the tiny Peebles Navajo Cactus in northern Arizona in 2024. Museum botanists have been monitoring a population of the tiny, endangered cactus since the 1980s. (Photo by Nancy Wiechec/Museum of Northern Arizona)

MNA-ShiftingLifeZonesExhibit_03

Museum of Northern Arizona botanists have been monitoring a population of Peebles Navajo Cactus in northern Arizona since the 1980s. This tiny, endangered cactus lives in very specific areas that are being impacted by drought, warming temperatures, and other disturbances. (Photo by Nancy Wiechec/Museum of Northern Arizona)

MNA-ShiftingLifeZonesExhibit_04

The last known occurrence of pinyon pine in Wupatki National Monument clings to a rock face. Populations of pinyon pines have declined due to drought and disease. (Photo by Amy Martin for the Museum of Northern Arizona)