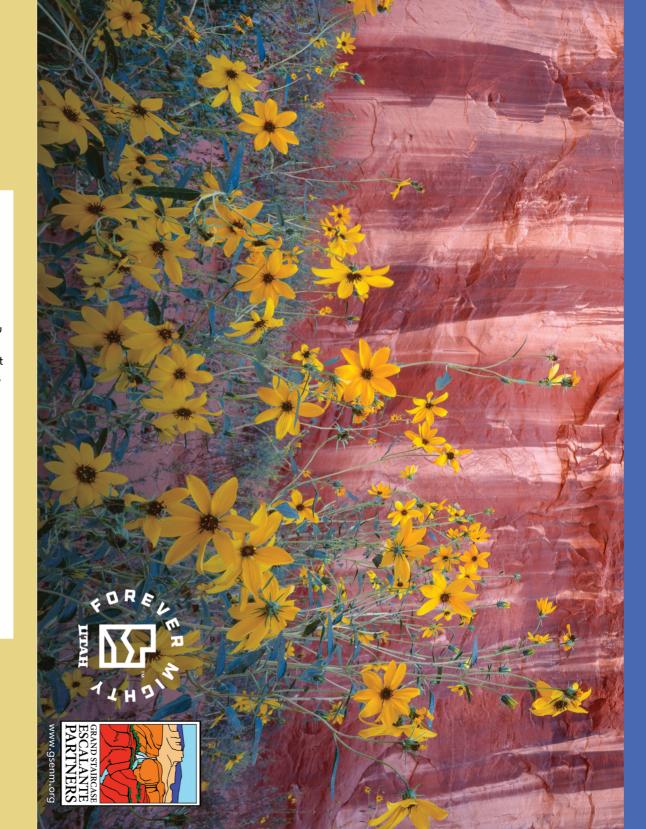
## The Desert is Alive

Why do we want to minimize our impacts when traveling across GSENM? The desert is alive and not well adapted to high volumes of people traveling across it.

While on the Monument in lower-impact areas, you may notice that the ground is covered in a dark "crust." This crust is called cryptobiotic soil crust. It is created by microscopic organisms such as algae, cyanobacteria, and fungi. The bacteria within the soil release a gelatinous material that binds soil particles together in a dense matrix, making a hardened surface layer made up of living organisms and inorganic soil matter.

Cryptobiotic soil crust plays an important role in both preventing erosion and supporting water absorption in a place where water is often scarce. This "crust" of cryptobiotic soil can be damaged easily by people and pets traveling across it. Once crushed, the crust can take anywhere from a few years to decades to grow back. Until recovery, the soils in the impacted area can be damaged by accelerated erosion and nutrient loss.





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