



# The Paisano

Big Bend National Park  
Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River  
Visitor Guide

Volume 41 Number 1 2024



With over 150 miles of trails, Big Bend is a hiker's delight!

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## Deputy Superintendent's Welcome

¡Bienvenidos a su parque nacional! Welcome to Big Bend! Whether this is your first trip, or your 20th, our team put this guide together to make your trip as safe and enjoyable as possible.

This is a big year for the park. We'll begin planning construction of a new lodge and replacement of many of the aging waterlines in the Chisos Basin. The amount of precious water we will conserve makes these improvements truly critical. These projects will impact visitor services for approximately 2 years (see page 2 for more information).

As you travel through the park, you will see recycling bins everywhere you go, with information about the park's landfill. Before throwing out your garbage, take a few minutes to read about the park's landfill. It's filling fast! Recycle and please take your trash outside the park.

I know you drove 75 MPH to get here. To protect the park wildlife, the maximum speed limit in the park is 45 MPH. Please slow down, take in the breathtaking vastness of Big Bend, and I hope that you have a wonderful time here!

Deputy Superintendent, Rick Gupman

# What Can I See if I Only Have...

## One Day:

Big Bend is too big to see in a single day, but for a taste of the park and what it has to offer, visit the mountains, desert, and river with the following itinerary:

1) The **Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive** offers fantastic views of the Chihuahuan Desert landscape as you wind your way to the Rio Grande at Santa Elena Canyon.

Scenic overlooks and exhibits along the way are well worth a stop. Short walks through **Sam Nail Ranch**, **Homer Wilson Ranch**, and the **Castolon Historic District** allow a glimpse into Big Bend's past.

At the end of the scenic drive, take the short walk to the river and into **Santa Elena Canyon**—one of Big Bend's most scenic spots and an easy 1.4 mile round-trip hike.

2) Visit the forested **Chisos Mountains** and walk the 0.3-mile **Window View Trail** to get a feel for the mountain scenery. If time allows, hike the **Window Trail** or **Lost Mine Trail** for a look at Big Bend's mountain landscapes.

3) The **Fossil Discovery Exhibit**, located 8 miles north of Panther Junction, is another highlight that could easily fit into a one-day visit.

## Three Days:

With three days to spend in the park, explore the major roads, do some hiking, and **join a park ranger** for a guided walk, talk, or evening program to learn more about Big Bend National Park.

Consider spending a day in each of the three major areas of the park:

1) Visit the **Chisos Basin** and hike the **Window Trail** (5.6 miles round trip) or the **Lost Mine Trail** (4.8 miles round trip). Consult page 7 for trail descriptions of these and other popular trails in the park. Try to experience Big Bend's back country as much as possible.

2) Explore the **Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive** and hike into **Santa Elena Canyon** (see "one-day" suggestions).

3) Drive to **Rio Grande Village**, stopping at **Dugout Wells** to walk the half-mile **Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail**.

The **Rio Grande Village Visitor Center** offers park information and interpretive exhibits.

Walk the **Rio Grande Village Nature Trail**. The bluff overlooking the Rio Grande at the end of the nature trail is a particularly beautiful spot at sunset.

The **Boquillas Canyon Trail** takes you into this spectacular canyon.

## A Week:

With a week or more to spend in Big Bend, endless possibilities are open to you. You have plenty of time to explore the roads and hike or drive some of the "unimproved" dirt roads. For these, you'll need a high-clearance or four-wheel drive vehicle; don't forget to check at a visitor center for current road conditions.

The **River Road**, **Glenn Springs Road**, **Old Ore Road**, and **Old Maverick Road** are some of the more popular backcountry routes. A visit to the pool of water at **Ernst Tinaja** near the south end of the Old Ore Road is a Big Bend highlight.

If you have a high-clearance vehicle, improved dirt roads such as **Dagger Flat** and **Grapevine Hills** will get you "off the beaten path." Hike the **Chimneys**, **Mule Ears**, or **Grapevine Hills** trails for a closer look at the desert environment.

If you'd like to explore the **Chisos Mountains**, trails to **Boot Canyon**, **Emory Peak**, and the **South Rim** offer good views of the park and take you into a world that seems far removed from the desert.

There are plenty of opportunities for overnight backpacking along these trails. A backcountry-use permit is required to backpack and camp overnight.





National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Big Bend National Park  
Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River

The National Park Service was established on August 25, 1916, "... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life... and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Authorized by Congress in 1935 and established in June 1944, Big Bend National Park preserves the most representative example of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem in the United States.

**Park Mailing Address**

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PO Box 129  
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

**Phone**

432-477-2251

**Park Websites**

www.nps.gov/bibe  
www.nps.gov/rigr

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# Protecting Yourself and the Park

Big Bend may be wild and unfamiliar country, but it need not be dangerous. Please review these guidelines for safety and resource protection.

**No Collecting**

The mission of the National Park Service is to preserve all natural and cultural resources unimpaired for future generations. Taking rocks, artifacts, plants, or animals robs everyone of this heritage—once something is stolen, it cannot be replaced.

It is unlawful (and rude) to destroy, deface, injure, collect, or otherwise disturb park resources, including plants or animals (dead or alive), fossils, rocks, and artifacts. It is a violation to possess park resources. Please, take only pictures and leave only footprints.

**Driving**

Drive within the speed limit (45 mph in most areas) and watch for wildlife along the roadsides, especially at night. Park roads have narrow shoulders and some roads are steep and winding. Share the road with bicyclists and pedestrians. Pull off the road to take pictures—do not stop or pause in roadways. Please, slow down...and enjoy!

**Drones/Unmanned Aircraft**

Launching, landing, or operating an unmanned aircraft is prohibited in Big Bend National Park.

**Heat**

The dry desert heat quickly uses up the body's water reserves. Carry and drink water—at least 1 gallon per person per day. As you exercise, you lose salt and water (over a quart and a half per hour during arduous exercise). You need both to survive in this extreme environment. Reduce alcohol and caffeine intake—the diuretic effects accelerate loss of body water.

Protect your body—sensitive skin burns easily. Find shade, wear sunscreen, sunglasses, and a brimmed hat. Wear long-sleeves, long pants, and sturdy shoes.

**Hiking**

Trails vary from easy and well-maintained to strenuous, primitive routes. Plan hikes within your ability. Avoid ridges during thunderstorms and canyons or creek beds when flash flooding is possible. Carry a flashlight and first aid kit, and let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return. If you get hurt or lost, stay in one place to conserve water and energy. Rest in shade if you can.

Please keep your children close; don't let them run ahead on trails.

**Water Conservation**

- Visitors are limited to 5 gallons of water per day when refilling containers; please conserve water while in the park.
- Don't let faucets run unnecessarily.
- Wash only what clothing items you need.
- Fill water jugs and bottles at Rio Grande Village whenever possible.
- Consider topping off RV water tanks outside the park.
- Take brief showers.
- Please report water leaks in park facilities to a ranger.
- Use backcountry water sources sparingly; leave backcountry springs for wildlife.

**Wildlife**

Observe Big Bend's wildlife from a distance. Wildlife is protected in the park; it is illegal to harass or harm wildlife. Never feed wild animals. Feeding wild animals damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Protect wildlife and your food by storing food and trash securely.

Venomous snakes, scorpions, spiders, and centipedes are active during warm months. Pay attention: check shoes and bedding before use and use a flashlight at night.

## Infrastructure Improvements COMING SOON!

### The Great American Outdoors Act

Signed into law in 2020, the landmark Great American Outdoors Act commits energy revenues to address the multi-billion-dollar maintenance backlog in national parks and other public lands. In Big Bend, two much-needed infrastructure projects received funding as part of this effort. By Fall 2024, park visitors will see work beginning on the following major endeavors:

**A New Lodge Building**

Constructed in 1964, the main Chisos Mountains Lodge is an important part of the park's history. Generations of visitors have enjoyed the building's modern aesthetic, large open interior, and expansive windows that frame the surrounding mountains and the classic view of the Window. Unfortunately, the Lodge was built on clay soils and soon suffered as the foundation moved and settled. Over the years, the settling caused significant damage to the foundation, roof, walls, windows, and building systems. Maintaining the building is no longer sustainable. In addition, burgeoning Big Bend visitation has far surpassed the kitchen and dining service capabilities of the facility.

In 2018, park staff began to evaluate solutions for a facility to serve the next generation of Big Bend visitors. Engineering studies established that repairing the failing foundation would require the complete removal of all walls and major features of the Lodge. The best option was to build a new building within the same footprint—a well-

engineered facility that fits the landscape and meets high standards for energy, water, and operational efficiency to better serve the visitors of today and tomorrow.

In 2021, the NPS and Architectural Resources Group developed conceptual designs for a new lodge. The preferred design recognizes the Mission 66 aesthetic but includes improvements. The proposed building is clad in stucco, natural stone, and fire-resistant siding to blend with the environment. An elegant, angled roof, oriented to the south, allows for solar panels to capture energy throughout the day. Future visitors will enjoy the mountain views from the expansive outdoor terrace and reception area. For efficiency, the new retail store consolidates both the gift shop and camper store on the ground floor along with a "grab-and-go" food service.

Behind the scenes, the mechanical equipment, food storage, and commercial kitchen are carefully designed to ensure the utmost in energy and water efficiency.

**Replace Aged Waterlines**

Water is the lifeblood of any desert, and in Big Bend, park managers are committed to using it as efficiently and responsibly as possible. To that end, a concurrent project will address the aging water distribution lines in the park's developed areas, including the 3-mile pipeline from Oak Spring up to the Chisos Basin. Many of those lines date to the 1950s and have far exceeded their useful lives. By repairing or replacing damaged lines,

upgrading storage tanks, and eliminating leaks, this project will ensure that the desert's most critical resource remains available for thirsty plants, wildlife...and people.

**Pardon our Dust!**

Work on these much-needed projects will begin in late 2024. Significant disruptions to

visitor services and access are expected. Stay tuned as construction timelines are finalized or ask a ranger for the latest updates as we work to improve facilities and services at your park.

Park Ranger T. VandenBerg



Conceptual Design



The exterior and interior view above are conceptual designs for the new lodge. The restaurant will offer both indoor and outdoor dining with views of Casa Grande Peak and the best view yet of "The Window."

# Things to Do



## Birding Hot Spots

### Panther Junction to Rio Grande Village

- Dugout Wells—shady cottonwood trees and a windmill at this desert oasis.
- Rio Grande Village Nature Trail—a boardwalk over the pond is an excellent area for waterfowl.
- Daniels Ranch Picnic Area—the cottonwood trees provide excellent habitat to both resident and migrant bird species.

### Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

- Sam Nail Ranch—a windmill and large trees attract birds to this historic ruin.
- Blue Creek Trail—a half mile from the Homer Wilson Ranch are the Red Rocks, an area known for Lucifer Hummingbirds.
- Cottonwood Campground—large trees here provide a haven for birds.

### Chisos Mountains

- Basin area—many mountain birds can be found around the campground and developed areas.
- Boot Canyon—the nesting area of the Colima Warbler and other species.
- South Rim—this 2000' cliff is known for falcons and swifts.

## Birding in Big Bend

The park is recognized as a Globally Significant Bird Area.

Big Bend National Park is famous for its birding, with more documented species of birds visiting the park throughout the year than any other unit in the National Park System (approximately 450 species). The diverse array of habitats, ranging from the riparian corridor of the Rio Grande to the forested canyons of the Chisos Mountains, present an attractive stopping point for birds traveling along major migratory paths that intersect the park.

A good guideline for birding in Big Bend is to seek out areas where water and vegetation are most abundant, such as the Rio Grande, the Chisos Mountains, or desert springs, some of which are accessible by car.

Generally the most active time for birding is in the spring when many species are migrating through the park. However, with patience, birding in Big Bend can be rewarding throughout the year.

The riparian corridor at Rio Grande Village offers some of the best year-round birding in the park. Consider walking the Rio Grande

Village Nature Trail or visiting the Daniels Ranch picnic area west of the campground. A similar habitat is accessible between Cottonwood Campground and Santa Elena Canyon on the park's west side.

The piñon-oak-juniper woodlands of the Chisos Mountains and their foothills also offer accessible, year-round birding and attract many species of birds that would not otherwise be found here. It is well worth the effort to hike into the higher elevations. During early summer you may spot the sought-after Colima Warbler, which is only found outside of Mexico in the Chisos Mountains.

Patience, a good field guide, and knowledge of where to look are the keys to locating birds in Big Bend. A checklist of birds is available for purchase at any visitor center and is a great aid in determining which species are likely to be present and the habitats where they are found.



## The Colima Warbler



One of the most sought-after bird species in Big Bend is the Colima Warbler, a type of New World warbler found primarily in the Sierra Madre of Mexico. A small population nests in the higher elevations of the Chisos Mountains beginning in early summer. Finding one is the tricky part! Visitors hoping to spot a Colima Warbler usually have to make the strenuous, 9-mile round-trip hike to the bird's main habitat in Boot Canyon. Occasionally they are spotted closer to the trailhead on the upper portions of the Pinnacles Trail. Good luck!

## Visiting Mexico

A unique part of the Big Bend experience is crossing into rural Boquillas del Carmen, Mexico.

### Operating Hours

Winter Hours: Wednesday to Sunday, 9am–4pm  
Summer Hours: Friday to Monday, 9am–4pm

*Days and hours of operation are subject to change.*

A visit to Mexico is permitted through the Port of Entry during business hours. There is no other legal access to Mexico within Big Bend National Park. The Port of Entry is a pedestrian crossing only.

### General Information

The Boquillas Port of Entry is operated cooperatively by the National Park Service and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The facility is staffed by park rangers who can assist travelers with information about visiting the area.

### Required Documents

At the time of publication, U.S. and Canadian citizens (of any age) must present a valid passport to enter Mexico and re-enter the United States. Visitors from countries other than the U.S. or Canada must call Customs and Border Protection at Presidio, TX (432-229-3349) for current required travel documents.

### How do I get there?

Park at the Boquillas Crossing parking lot. Pass through the Port of Entry and take a small rowboat across the Rio Grande for a modest fee (\$5 round-trip as of 12/23).

Wading across the Rio Grande is permitted only at Boquillas Crossing, but is not recommended if the river level is high.

Once across the river, walk to the village (1/2 mile) or pay an additional fee to ride on a burro, horse, or in a vehicle. Local guides are available. Visitors are required to check in with Mexican immigration officials upon arrival in Boquillas.

### What is in town?

Boquillas features two restaurants with food that is simple, fresh, and good. A bar features pool and other games. Residents often display wire sculptures, embroidered textiles, walking sticks, and other handicrafts for sale.

U.S. currency is accepted in Boquillas. Visitors are advised to bring smaller bills.

### Border Merchants

Near the border, you may encounter small “souvenir stands” and Mexican nationals wanting to sell you their crafts. **It is illegal to purchase these items in the park.** Items purchased illegally are considered contraband and may be seized by law enforcement officers.

Port of Entry staff can answer questions about items that can be legally purchased in Mexico and imported through the Port. By purchasing souvenirs in Boquillas, you support the citizens of Boquillas, make the river corridor safer for all visitors, and help protect the resources of this ecosystem.



The village of Boquillas del Carmen, Mexico.

## Safety On the Border

Big Bend has a low incidence of crime reported. However, in any remote or seldom-traveled location, it is important to consider personal safety and to secure valuables while away from your vehicle.

- Know where you are at all times and use common sense. Cell phone service is limited or non-existent in many areas of the park.
- Keep valuables, including spare change, out of sight and locked in your vehicle.
- Avoid travel on well-used but unofficial “social trails.”
- Do not pick up hitchhikers.
- People in distress may ask for food, water, or other assistance. Report the location of the individuals to park or Border Patrol staff as soon as possible. Lack of water is a life-threatening emergency in the desert.
- Report suspicious behavior to park staff or Border Patrol. Do not contact suspicious persons.
- Ask at the visitor center about areas where you may have concerns about traveling.



# Things to Do

## Hiking the Lesser-Known Canyons of Big Bend

Santa Elena Canyon with its postcard-perfect views and its towering dark walls is certainly Big Bend's jewel. However, if you're looking to explore off-the-beaten path, Big Bend offers multiple canyons for exploration that appeal to all skill levels.

The following trails and routes are all exposed desert hikes. Big Bend experiences extreme heat throughout much of the year, so hike during cooler days and be sure to drink plenty of water by carrying one gallon per person per day. Trail guides are available for some hikes. Be sure to ask rangers at a visitor center for more information.

### Lower Burro Mesa Pour-off

*Easy. 1.0 miles roundtrip.*

Lower Burro Mesa is a geology-lovers delight. The colorful igneous rock exposed in the canyon is the same rock found on the top of Emory Peak. Burro Mesa is a massive block that slipped 3,000 vertical feet down a fault line millions of years ago. The short trail follows the wash to a steep, narrow pour-off that drains the plateau above. Watch for large conglomerate boulders in the wash.

### Red Rocks Canyon

*Easy to Moderate. 2.5 miles roundtrip.*

Red Rocks Canyon is a series of pinnacle formations accessible from Homer Wilson Ranch. Follow the Blue Creek Trail along the wash. You'll soon see geologic formations unique to this area of the park. The surface of these volcanic rocks has oxidized to a reddish tinge.

### Dog Canyon and Devil's Den

*Moderate to Strenuous. 4 miles roundtrip.*

Dog Canyon is a lesser-traveled yet well-marked trail. The trail is flat, marked by frequent cairns, and bordered by creosote bush. After reaching a wash, the trail leading left will take you to the eastern park boundary through Dog Canyon. If you're up for 3 miles of more strenuous adventure, go right at the wash to continue to Devil's

Den. This narrow canyon is a challenge; it's better suited for experienced boulderers. The easier trail along the rim offers beautiful vistas and views of Devil's Den from above.

### Mariscal Canyon Rim

*Strenuous. 6.5 miles roundtrip to the rim.*

You might wonder where the "big bend" of Big Bend is. Mariscal Canyon Rim trail will lead you to the "point" of the Rio Grande's "big bend." From the paved road, it takes two hours in a high clearance, 4-wheel drive vehicle to access the trailhead. The first two miles of the trail traverses relatively gentle hills. The final mile of the trail becomes significantly steeper and rockier. Keep a close eye on cairns along the route. At the rim is a spectacular view of the Rio Grande framed by 1,400-foot vertical canyon walls.

Park Ranger J. Vanegas



Pour-offs and large boulders make hiking through Devil's Den difficult. For an easier, yet spectacular route, follow the Canyon Rim Trail.

## The Five Best...

We asked park rangers and social media followers about their favorite bike rides, wheelchair-accessible trails, and places their children enjoyed. Here are their suggestions.



### Accessible Trails

**Fossil Discovery Exhibit.** The covered, open-air exhibit is fully accessible by wheelchair. Open during daylight hours.

**Window View Trail.** This 0.3 mile paved loop trail offers excellent views of the mountains surrounding the Chisos Basin. Two benches are perfect for sunset viewing.

**Panther Path.** This paved path near the Panther Junction Visitor Center provides an introduction to native plants of the Chihuahuan Desert.

**RGV Nature Trail.** The first 100 yards of this trail are wheelchair accessible as it follows a boardwalk through a spring-fed wetland. Birds, fish, turtles, and other animals are often seen in the pond and surrounding vegetation.

**Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive.** Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive highlights the geologic splendor of Big Bend and offers many scenic overlooks and exhibits with paved parking. Cottonwood Campground has shaded picnic tables and is a premier location in the park to look for birds.



### River Trips

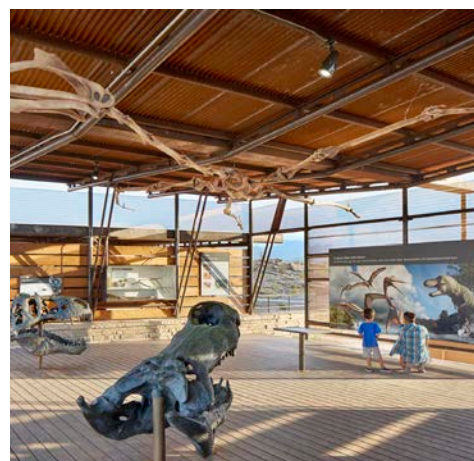
**Santa Elena Boomerang.** Paddle upstream, then float back down to your point of entry. Ideal at flow rates from 200 cfs to 100 cfs.

**Santa Elena.** The most popular overnight or 3-day float trip. Includes a Class IV rapid at certain water levels. 300 to 600 cfs is great for open boats such as kayaks or canoes. Over 600 cfs is appropriate for rafts.

**Mariscal Canyon.** A challenge to get to, but well worth the effort! At only 10-miles long, Mariscal is the shortest canyon in the park. If water is flowing above 300 cfs, the canyon can be floated in a day.

**Boquillas Canyon.** For the less experienced paddler wanting a taste of adventure, Boquillas Canyon is a 33-mile, 3-day float. The rapids only rate up to Class II.

**Lower Canyons.** The Lower Canyons make up the heart of the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River. Experienced boaters can indulge in a true wilderness experience while paddling 83 miles over the course of this 7 to 10 day trip.



### Kid's Play

#### Stargaze.

Stay up late and look for the Milky Way. Safe places to stargaze include the Fossil Discovery Exhibit and Sotol Vista Overlook.

#### Go to Mexico.

Cross the river and explore the Mexican village of Boquillas.

Laura: "My kids love buying tacos in Boquillas."

#### Splash Around.

Play in the Rio Grande at Santa Elena Canyon, Boquillas Canyon, or the Hot Springs. (Warning: it's best to keep river water out of ears, eyes, and mouths.)

#### Boulder Scramble.

Mini-mountaineers love to boulder scramble the Upper Burro Mesa, Ernst Tinaja, and Grapevine Hills trails.

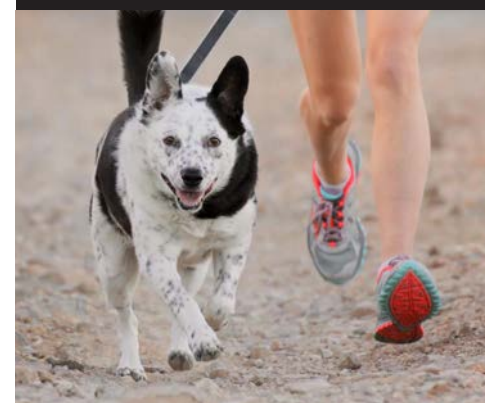
Russell: "The scramble up to Balanced Rock was a highlight when our kids were in elementary school."

#### Time Travel.

Explore the world of dinosaurs at the Fossil Discovery Exhibit.

Sally: "My son loved the fossil exhibit—definitely a must see!"

## Pets in the Park



Having a pet with you may limit some of your explorations in the park. Following these pet regulations will ensure a safer, more enjoyable visit for yourselves, other park visitors, your pet, and the park's wildlife.

- Pets are not allowed on trails, off roads, or on the river. Your pet can only go where your car can go.
- Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet in length (or in a crate) at all times.
- You may not leave your pet unattended in vehicles if it creates a danger to the animal or if the animal becomes a public nuisance.
- If you plan to hike, someone must stay behind with the pet, or you will need to kennel your pet. The Alpine Veterinary Clinic (432-837-3888) and the Alpine Small Animal Clinic (432-837-5416) offer these services.
- Park regulations require that you always clean up after your pet and dispose of waste in trash receptacles.



# Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River

## Two Parks In One

Did you know a trip to Big Bend also gives you access to the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River?

In 1968, Congress passed the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to protect free-flowing rivers with “outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife historic, cultural, or other similar values.”

The Rio Grande, as it flows around the “big bend” on its way to the Gulf of Mexico, ticks all of those boxes. The river provides vital habitat for plants and animals and offers dramatic scenery, spectacular geology, and thrilling recreational opportunities for those that crave adventure.

On November 10, 1978, Congress officially recognized the value of a free-flowing Rio Grande by designating a 200 mile stretch of the river the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River. This National Park System unit is managed with Big Bend National Park.

### Visiting the Wild & Scenic River

Have you stood on the riverbank at Rio Grande Village? Dipped your toe in the river at the Hot Springs or hiked along the Boquillas Canyon Trail? If so, you have enjoyed a portion of the wild Rio Grande.

The Wild and Scenic designation starts just above the big bend of the Rio Grande and

flows north-east beyond the park boundaries to the Terrell-Val Verde county line in Texas.

While dipping your toe in counts as a visit to the Wild & Scenic River, the best way to truly experience the Rio Grande is to float it.

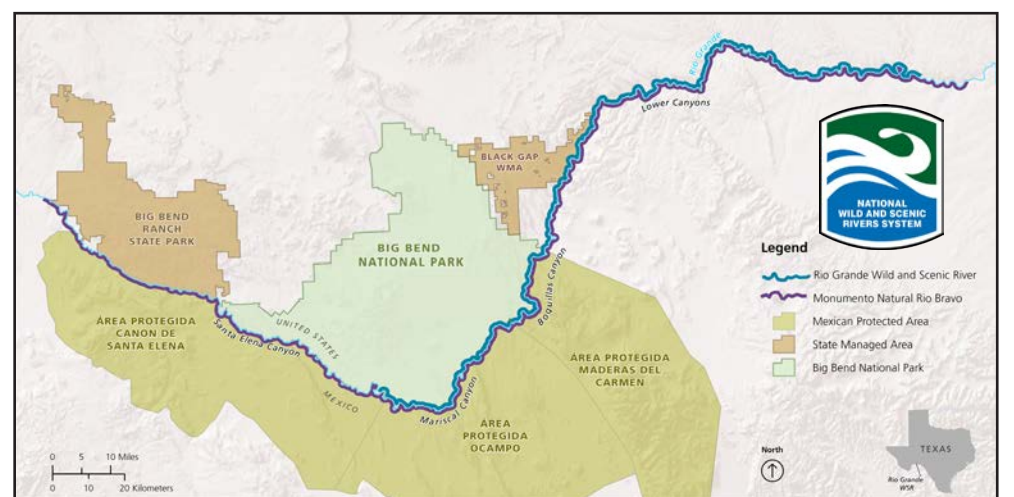
### Floating the Rio

A 1 to 2 day float trip through remote Mariscal Canyon, or a 2 to 3 day trip through Boquillas Canyon offers opportunities to run rapids, or drift at the whim of the river current. You can explore a small portion of the Wild & Scenic River in less than a day by floating through Hot Springs Canyon.

The Lower Canyons between Heath Canyon and Dryden, downstream from Big Bend National Park, make up the heart of the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River.

Wild and isolated, the canyons provide solitude and an outstanding wilderness experience. There are no facilities and access is limited due to rough terrain and the constraints of floating through private land. The arduous 83-mile trip takes 6 to 7 days. Extensive experience and preparation are essential when planning a float through the Lower Canyons.

All river trips require planning, equipment, some experience, and a permit. Consult a river guide book and check with a park ranger for current conditions before embarking on a river trip. Permits are required for all float trips and may be obtained at visitor centers in Big Bend National Park up to seven days in advance.



The Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River extends 200 miles from the Chihuahua-Coahuila (Mexico) state line to the Terrell-Val Verde county (Texas) line.

## River Safety

Our River Rangers share 9 tips on how to make your trip safe and memorable (in a good way).

### Tie Down Your Boat

In summer, flash floods can come at any time even if it is not actively raining here in Big Bend, and winds in the canyons can reach very high speeds. Either of these can result in lost equipment and vessels. Keep an eye on the weather forecast for the surrounding area—not just the park—and keep everything secured on higher ground to avoid it being lost.

### Know Your Limits

If you do get caught in those strong winds, paddling against them can lead to your trip hitting a stand still or with you being blown up stream. Know when to float and when to stay put and hunker down.

### Stick To Your Plan

Once you have your permit, please keep to that itinerary. Don't change your trip's duration, put ins, or take outs. If something were to occur and you need assistance, rangers will use itinerary information from the permit to locate you. Any variations from that plan can cause delays.

### Be Prepared To Portage

When you reach a section of river that looks rough or difficult to pass through, pull off to the side and look at it. Sometimes carrying your vessel a little way along the shore may be the best way to proceed safely.

### Have Extra Supplies In Good Condition

Bring layers, waterproof clothing, a set of camp clothes to change into after a day of paddling, basic first aid supplies, and an extra day's rations of food and water. Make

sure everything is functional and in good condition—a life vest can only take so much damage before it stops being a life vest.

### Don't Rely on Digital

Cell service on the river is spotty at best. Don't rely on digital maps or downloaded material. The Big Bend Natural History Association sells laminated river guides filled with detailed maps just in case something happens to your phone and you can't access your digital material. It's also good to bring other methods of communication such as a satellite phone or inReach device.

### Avoid Littering

Leave No Trace is essential for all outdoor expeditions. Our river volunteers remove gallons of trash on every float trip they take. This waste causes environmental and ecological damage and also poses a risk to other boaters. Objects such as errant fishhooks can get caught up in river cane and cause damage to guests and vessels alike.

### Watch for Critters

The river ecosystem is home to animals like raccoons and rodents that would love to help themselves to your food. Make sure all food is secured where you can see it and get to it easily.

### Time

Don't plan river trips down to the minute or hour, as unexpected events always occur. Give yourself more time than you need, and enough time to enjoy the trip!



Safety and common sense come first. A loaded canoe is carefully lined through a rocky section of the river.



For the prepared, a Big Bend river trip can be a relaxing adventure!

Park Ranger M. Dolan

# Places to Visit

## Chisos Basin

A drive to the Chisos Basin is an excellent way to experience the transition between arid desert and cooler mountain habitats. As this scenic, winding road rises over two thousand feet above the desert floor, it offers vistas of the mountain peaks and the erosion-formed basin area.

Within the Chisos Basin area is a visitor center, campground, lodge, restaurant, gift shop, camp store, and miles of hiking trails.

With limited time, walk the Window View Trail for easy access to mountain vistas and a classic sunset view. If time permits, consider hiking (or backpacking) into the High Chisos to witness the forested slopes of the Pinnacles Trail or the unparalleled vistas of the South Rim.

**Note:** The road into the Basin is not suitable for RVs longer than 24 feet or trailers longer than 20 feet.



## Rio Grande Village

The drive to Rio Grande Village traverses limestone from a Cretaceous sea and has magnificent vistas of the Sierra del Carmens. Along the way is the oasis at Dugout Wells, and a spur road that leads to the popular Hot Springs Historic District.

Continue the drive to Boquillas Canyon where a short hike follows the Rio Grande as it flows into the canyon.

Rio Grande Village has a visitor center, campground, RV hook-ups, camp store, gas station, and picnic area.

Take a stroll (or a short drive) from the store to Daniels Ranch; this is a great area for birding. Picnic tables are near the historic ruins.

The Rio Grande Village Nature Trail follows a wildlife-viewing boardwalk, then gradually climbs the hillside, offering panoramic views of the river, Sierra del Carmens, and Crown Mountain. This is an excellent sunset vista.



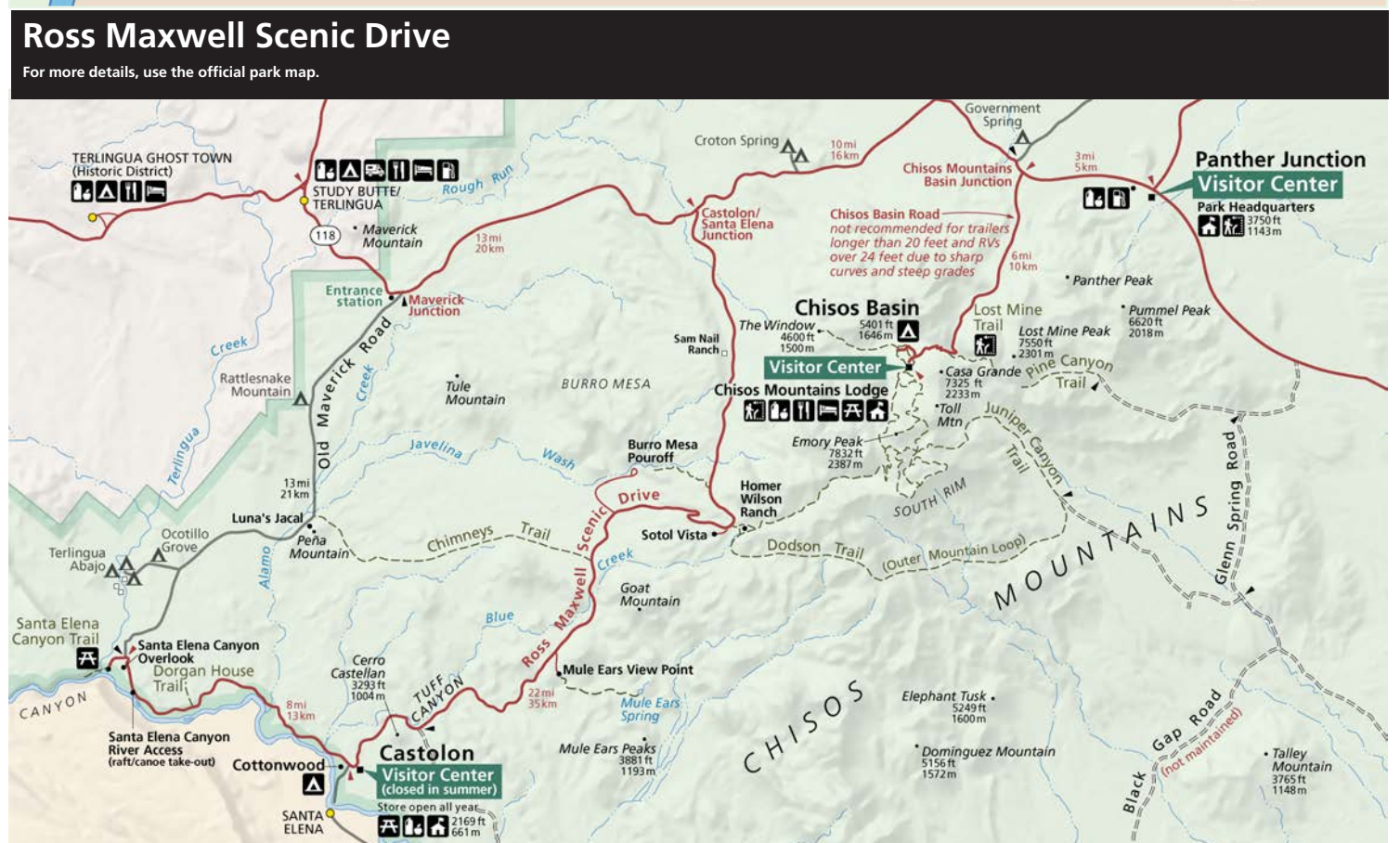
## Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

A trip along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive highlights the geologic splendor Big Bend is famous for and offers many scenic overlooks and exhibits along the way. Sotol Vista and Mule Ears Overlook are worthwhile stops.

History is highlighted at Sam Nail Ranch, Homer Wilson (Blue Creek) Ranch, and the Castolon Historic District. Castolon has a visitor center and camp store. Nearby is the Cottonwood Campground.

Continue the drive to the magnificent Santa Elena Canyon, where limestone cliffs rise 1,500' above the Rio Grande. A short trail leads into the canyon. If the river is high, you may have to wade across Terlingua Creek to access the trail.

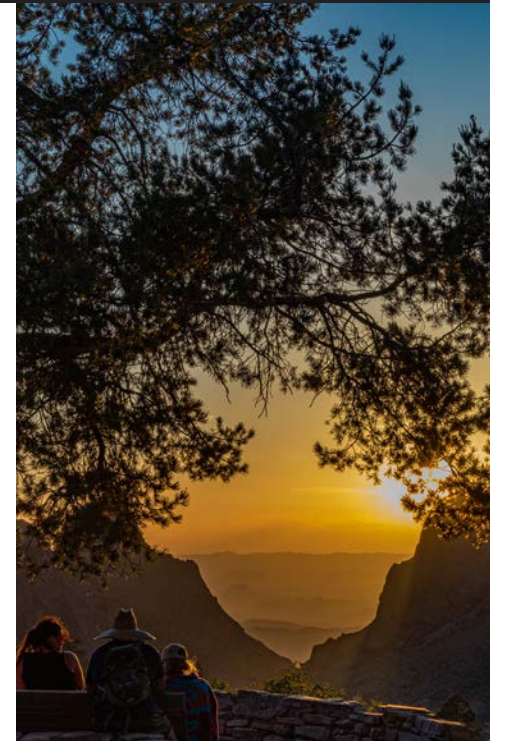
Return by the same route, or drive Old Maverick Road to the western entrance of the park. Old Maverick is most suitable for high-clearance vehicles and may be impassable after heavy rains. Check at a visitor center or entrance station for current conditions.



# Popular Trails

## The Chisos Mountains *Smoking is prohibited on all trails in the Chisos Mountains.*

Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
<b>Basin Loop</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	1.9/3.1	1 hour	280/85	<b>Moderate</b> Connects the Laguna Meadow and Pinnacles Trails. Nice views of the Basin area.
<b>Emory Peak</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	10/16.1	7 hours	2470/753	<b>Strenuous</b> Trail leads to the highest peak in the park, with excellent views. The end of the trail involves some challenging rock scrambling. Use caution on the climb down.
<b>Lost Mine</b>	Basin Road, mile 5 (at the pass)	4.8/7.7	3 hours	1100/335	<b>Moderate</b> Excellent mountain and desert views. For a shorter hike, 1 mile up is a great view to the southeast.
<b>South Rim</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	12/19.3 (14/22.5 with the East Rim Trail included)	8 hours 10 hours	2000/610 2120/646	<b>Strenuous</b> Trail leads to a 2000' cliff with incredible views of the desert below. Hike either the southwest rim, or add the northeast and southeast rim trails when open.
<b>Window</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead or Basin Campground	5.6/9.0 4.7/7.6	4 hours 3 hours	971/296 775/236	<b>Moderate</b> Descends to the top of the Window pour-off. Great scenery and wildlife viewing. For a shorter hike, start from the Basin Campground (near campsite 51).
<b>Window View</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	0.3/0.5	1/4 hour	20/6	<b>Easy</b> Level, paved, accessible. Great mountain views. Best place in the Basin to catch a sunset through the Window.



Sunset on the Window View Trail.

## Eastside — Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village

Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
<b>Grapevine Hills</b> Balanced Rock	6.4 miles down the Grapevine Hills Road	2.2/3.5	1 hour	80/24	<b>Moderate</b> Follows a sandy wash through a boulder field. A steep, rocky climb near the end takes you to a large balanced rock. No shade.
<b>Lone Mountain</b>	Access road 1 mile north of Panther Junction	2.7/4.3	1.5 hours	200/61	<b>Easy</b> A relatively level loop trail with extraordinary views of the mountains.
<b>Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail</b>	Dugout Wells	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	10/3.5	<b>Easy</b> Loop trail with interpretive signs on desert ecology. Look for javelina tracks and resident birds.
<b>Hot Springs</b>	End of Hot Springs Road (unpaved narrow road)	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	10/3.5	<b>Easy</b> Walk past historic buildings to the riverside hot spring. Enjoy a soak in 105°F water. <i>Hot Spring is subject to flooding during rising river levels and may not be accessible.</i>
<b>Boquillas Canyon</b>	End of Boquillas Canyon Road	1.4/2.2	1 hour	102/31	<b>Easy</b> Begins with a short climb, then descends via a sandy path to the river.
<b>Rio Grande Village Nature Trail</b>	Rio Grande Village, across from campsite 18. Park at the RGV Amphitheater parking lot.	0.75/1.2	1 hour	80/24	<b>Easy</b> First 300' leads to a wildlife viewing platform on a pond. Trail then climbs the hillside with views of the river and mountains. Great for birding and sunsets.



View from the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail.

## Westside — Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
<b>Sam Nail Ranch</b>	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 3	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	20/6	<b>Easy</b> Well-maintained trail leads through the old ranch site. The combination of water and shade makes this an excellent birding location.
<b>Lower Burro Mesa Pour-off</b>	Burro Mesa Spur Road	1.0/1.6	1/2 hour	120/37	<b>Easy</b> Trail enters a dry wash and ends at the bottom of the dramatic Burro Mesa pour-off. A great walk for viewing geological features.
<b>Chimneys</b>	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 13	4.8/7.7	2 hours	400/122	<b>Moderate</b> Flat and scenic desert trail to rock formations of an eroded dike. Look for Native American rock art and shelters. No shade.
<b>Mule Ears Spring</b>	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 15	3.8/6.1	3 hours	880/268	<b>Moderate</b> Beautiful desert hike to a small spring. Spectacular geology with mountain and desert views.
<b>Dorgan-Sublett Trail</b>	Castolon to Santa Elena Canyon Road, near mile 5	0.8/1.3	1/2 hour	60/18	<b>Easy</b> This short easy trail leads to the ruins of historic farm houses owned by settlers in the early to mid-1900s.
<b>Santa Elena Canyon</b>	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, 8 miles west of Castolon	1.6/2.6	1 hour	80/24	<b>Easy</b> This trail crosses Terlingua Creek (usually dry) and gradually climbs up to an overlook before dropping to the river bank. Trail has some steep steps and can be very hot midday.



Dorgan House ruins on the Dorgan-Sublett Trail.



# Big Bend News

## Keeping Big Bend Wild

### Is Big Bend truly protected from future development?

Visiting Big Bend National Park provides a powerful and rare opportunity to experience vast, wild lands and almost unlimited vistas. Hikers can venture for days without encountering the sights or sounds of modern civilization. Even though most of us enjoy Big Bend without leaving the roads or trails, the knowledge that these wild lands are protected is one reason we love our park.

The good news is that the National Park Service (NPS) is committed to protecting wild Big Bend forever.

In 1978, the NPS formally recommended that about 2/3 of the park be designated as federal wilderness. In 2023, the NPS found that an additional 63,500 acres was eligible for wilderness designation. But a literal act of Congress is required to make a wilderness designation permanent and a dedicated group of citizens are working to make that happen.

### What are the advantages to a formal wilderness designation?

Formal designation as a wilderness has many advantages. Foremost is assuring that future management will continue to protect the wilderness experience so that our grandchildren can enjoy the park as we do.

A wilderness designation will also provide guidelines for protecting the dark skies, iconic Chihuahuan Desert habitat, and wide-open spaces beloved by current park visitors.

### Yeah, but....

Even when the advantages of a formal wilderness designation are pointed out, many people are nervous, afraid that any change will negatively affect their enjoyment of Big Bend National Park.

At public meetings, supporters of a wilderness designation are frequently asked:

*Would Black Gap or other roads be closed?*  
No. Neither Black Gap Road nor any other public road, paved or unpaved, would be closed.

*How would wilderness designation change the way I access and use the Rio Grande?*

The Rio Grande and the roads that access the river are outside the recommended wilderness area, so river use would not be affected in any way.

*Would current infrastructure be maintained?*

Yes! NPS is maintaining and improving existing facilities. As evidence, we're investing \$50+ million to replace the Lodge and water systems in the Chisos Basin.

*Would wilderness designation affect emergency response or border security?*

NPS and the Border Patrol work very closely together. If necessary security infrastructure cannot be located outside of wilderness, the agencies will ensure that it has minimal impact on wilderness values.

Wilderness does not preclude either agency from using necessary means to ensure life safety and respond to emergencies.

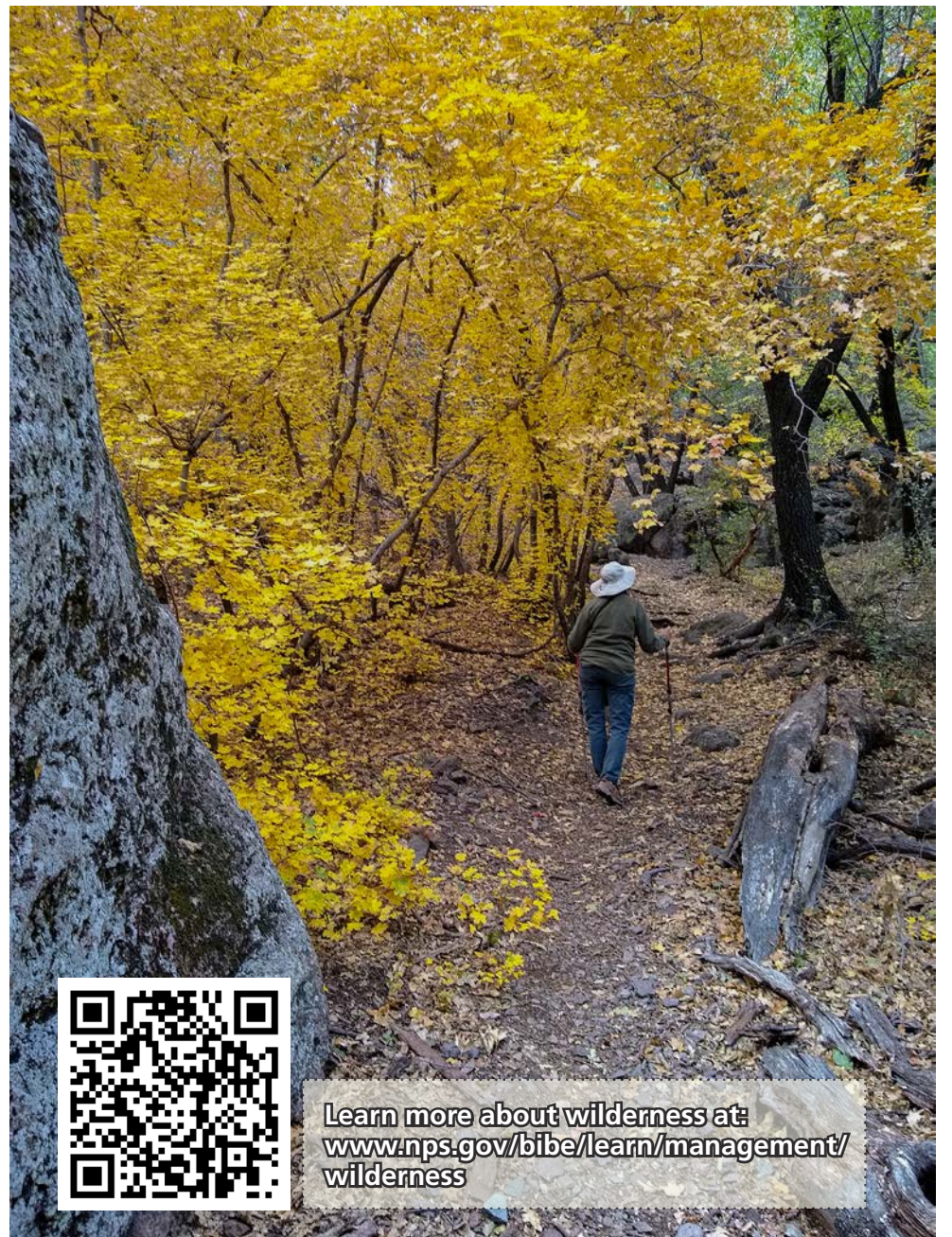
*How will the park's wilderness designation impact how I use my private land?*

Wilderness designation doesn't affect lands or land uses outside the national park.

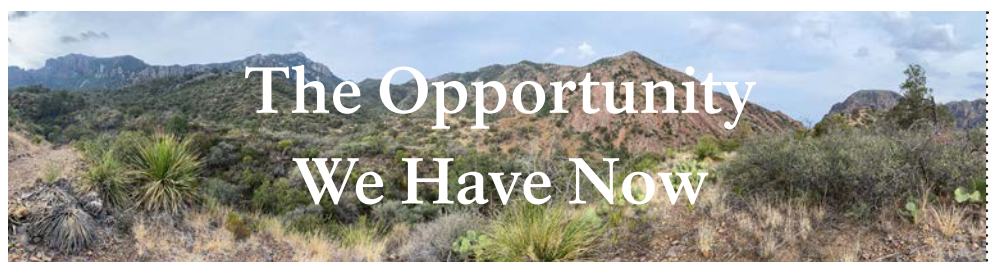
*Would there be room for future development?*

Yes, if needed, additional facilities could be built within non-wilderness areas surrounding the Basin, Panther Junction, Castolon, or RGV. Additional parking would be possible along most of the paved roads.

For the most part, future development would occur outside the park.



Learn more about wilderness at:  
[www.nps.gov/bibe/learn/management/wilderness](http://www.nps.gov/bibe/learn/management/wilderness)



## The Opportunity We Have Now

We can fulfill the vision of previous generations at Big Bend National Park. A loosely organized "Keep Big Bend Wild" (KBBW) citizens group that works closely with park leadership, has raised the visibility of this issue.

KBBW is building a coalition by having conversations with people who care about the park, especially local businesses, landowners, and government officials. KBBW is strengthening relationships—and listening when concerns are raised. As NPS has protected these lands from development for decades, this effort is not about changing things in the park. The opportunity lies in reducing uncertainty about their future.

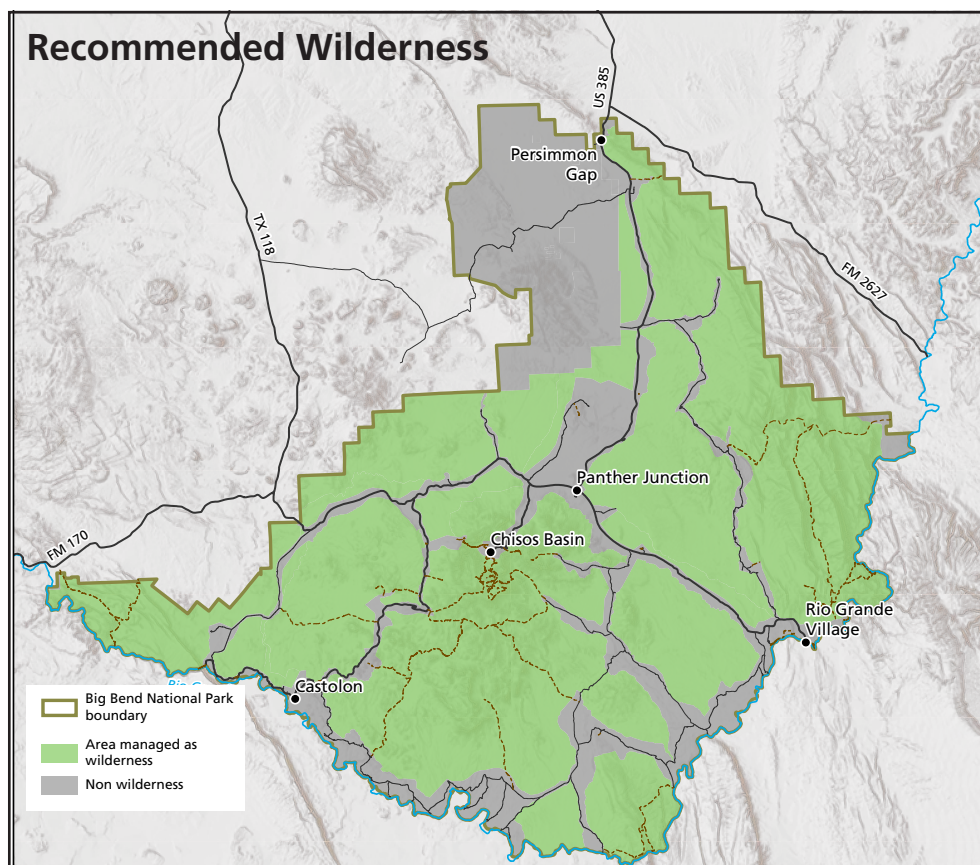
KBBW published a draft map and seeks input on where the boundaries should be drawn to protect existing developments and roads while preserving forever the undeveloped core of the park as federal wilderness.

KBBW has committed that neither the Chisos Basin and other park development, nor the Rio Grande, would be included in any wilderness map they offer to Congress. A Big Bend wilderness bill would assure continuity of management into the future, regardless of who the superintendent is or the policy of the administration in Washington at the time.

### What You Can Do

More detail is at [www.keepbigbendwild.org](http://www.keepbigbendwild.org). Engage the people you know! The goal is to show that a broad spectrum of people and businesses across Texas believes protecting the wild lands of Big Bend forever is in the public interest.

You can comment or ask questions on the KBBW website or contact the park at: [BIBE\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:BIBE_superintendent@nps.gov). We are happy to talk with anyone and meet with groups across the state to discuss wilderness and other park issues.



Map of Big Bend National Park showing recommended wilderness areas (in green) and areas not managed as wilderness in grey.





# Nonprofit Partners

## Big Bend Conservancy

Committed to supporting and preserving Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River.

Since its inception in 1996, Big Bend Conservancy (BBC) has raised over \$5 million for projects and programs at Big Bend National Park. Focused on ensuring conservation while providing support for exceptional visitor experiences, BBC is focused on a variety of projects, from preservation of historic architecture, provision of supplies for the park's Search and Rescue team, supporting Big Bend's efforts in sustainability, and everything in between.

In 2016, BBC funded the \$1.5 million Fossil Discovery Exhibit, showcasing Big Bend's incredible fossil landscape in an award-winning green building designed to complement its natural surroundings.

Recently, BBC has focused on acquiring land west of the park's boundary – a riparian habitat housing yellow-billed cuckoos, gray hawks, and an endangered silvery minnow. This acreage also includes historic ruins and heritage homesteads and is rich with significant fossil resources. BBC is working with the US Congress to pass legislation to

adjust the boundary of Big Bend National Park, ensuring this beautiful landscape is conserved for generations to come.

Thanks to BBC's James A. "Buddy" Davidson Trails endowment, annual support is provided to the Trail Maintenance Crew.

This year, BBC was excited to purchase three new mules for the Trail Crew's Pack String operations. This allowed hardworking animals to retire, while "Hank," "Peggy," and "Tommy" joined the gang. The pack string is a vital part of trail maintenance operations – used to maintain backcountry trails, pack in materials and equipment for the crew, and also assist in emergency service operations and the park's fire mitigation efforts.

### Join Us!

Interested in making a positive impact at your favorite park? Join BBC! To become involved with the Big Bend Conservancy, make a donation, or learn more about events hosted by the Conservancy, visit [www.bigbendconservancy.org](http://www.bigbendconservancy.org), or call 512.529.1149.



With funding from the James A. "Buddy" Davidson Trails endowment, the Big Bend Conservancy purchased new mules for the pack string. Left: Comanche (the horse) shares a hay bale with Peggy. Right: Hank, Peggy, and Comanche share the water trough.



Display your Big Bend pride with a license plate from the Big Bend Conservancy!

## Big Bend Natural History Association

Looking forward to a future of growth and possibilities.

It's been a busy year around Big Bend with growing visitation and multiple upcoming park projects. Big Bend Natural History Association isn't getting left out of the excitement either! While we've continued our focus on supporting the national park through the sales of books and educational materials, we are also exploring new avenues to engage with park visitors to continue our mission.

BBNHA has assisted with the funding of several projects and programs within Big Bend National Park. New trail signage,

publishing of the *Paisano* newspaper, food for the Volunteers-In-Parks events, and special visitor programs are just some of the ways we have supported the National Park this past year.

One of our favorite programs is the Junior Ranger program. There is nothing more rewarding than watching the joy of young visitors as they excitedly share what they've learned about Big Bend with the park's interpretive rangers. It truly is the core of our mission to support education and appreciation of Big Bend National Park; who

better to do that with than future generations of National Park supporters? It has been our pleasure to fund a major revision of the Junior Ranger activity booklet this year as well as the pencils and badges that are handed out to kids of all ages.

As we look forward to the upcoming year, we are excited to continue working hard to aid Big Bend National Park in new ways. Some of our organization's current goals include new bookstore offerings, revamping our website to be more modern and mobile device friendly, and focusing on building relationships with current members as well as reaching a new audience. You can also look for us on our brand-new Facebook and Instagram pages where we will be sharing new bookstore items as well as information about upcoming events such as the return of our Pioneer Reunion, park staff profiles, and more about our growing membership program.

Members are the backbone of our organization, and their support is key to allowing us to continue assisting the park service with important programs. Being a member not only means providing financial support to our beloved park, but it also means benefits for our members. When new members join the Big Bend Natural History Association, they not only receive a 15% discount at our bookstores and webstore, but they receive similar discounts at more than 400 cooperating non-profit organizations at national parks across the United States.

We invite you to become a member of the Big Bend Natural History Association in any of our bookstores or online at [www.bbnha.org](http://www.bbnha.org). With your help, we can continue our mission to educate the public to a better understanding and appreciation of the Big Bend area and what it represents in terms of our historical and natural heritage.



Ranger Christy helps a Junior Ranger work on her activity book. Free Junior Ranger activity books can be picked up in any visitor center thanks to the support of the Big Bend Natural History Association.



**BBNHA members receive a 15% discount on bookstore and online purchases.**

*Your membership also qualifies you for discounts at over 400 nonprofit stores on public lands throughout the nation.*

For a complete listing of participating organizations, visit: [www.publiclandsalliance.org](http://www.publiclandsalliance.org)





## Developed Campgrounds

Campgrounds include amenities such as flush or vault toilets, running water, grills, picnic tables, animal-proof storage boxes, and hosts on duty.

### Chisos Basin

The Chisos Basin Campground is surrounded by tall, rocky cliffs and is conveniently located near some of the park's most spectacular and popular trails.

Due to the terrain, campsite size, and road access, this campground is not suitable for trailers over 20 feet and RVs over 24 feet. No hook-ups available.

**Open:** Year-round

**Getting a Site:** Campsites are available by reservation only. Two-thirds of the sites are reservable 6 months in advance; 1/3 are reservable 14 days in advance.

**Group Camping:** Seven tent-only group campsites are available for groups of at least 9 and up to 20 people. Group sites are by reservation only and cost \$40 to \$60 nightly.

**Make a Reservation:** [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or 877-444-6777

### Cottonwood

Cottonwood Campground is a quiet, shady desert oasis located between Castolon Historic District and Santa Elena Canyon. A picnic area under the shade of mesquite trees is available for day use.

There are no hookups, no dump station, and generator use is not permitted.

**Open:** November 1 through April 30.

**Getting a Site:** Campsites are available by reservation only. Reservations can be made up to 14 days in advance.

**Group Camping:** One group campsite is available for 9 to 25 people. The site is a tent-only, walk-in campsite. The group site is available by reservation only and costs \$60 nightly.

**Make a Reservation:** [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or 877-444-6777

### Rio Grande Village

The largest campground in Big Bend; it can accommodate large RVs or trailers. There are no hookups, but generators can be used in some sites during designated hours.

A dump station is nearby. Coin-operated showers and laundry are located at the RGV store.

**Open:** Year-round although limited in the summer (May through October).

**Getting a Site:** Sites are by reservation only. Two-thirds of the sites are reservable 6 months in advance; 1/3 are reservable 14 days in advance.

**Group Camping:** Four tent-only group campsites are available for groups of 9 to 40 people. The group sites are available by reservation only and cost \$60 to \$100 nightly.

**Make a Reservation:** [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or 877-444-6777.

### Rio Grande Village RV

A privately-run campground operated by Aramark. This campground has the only full hook-ups in the park. The campground is an open, paved lot with grassy, tree-lined edges. Located adjacent to the camp store.

Twenty-five sites with full hook-ups including water, electrical, and sewage.

Nearby amenities include coin-operated showers and laundry (call for availability). Free, public WIFI at the RGV campstore. WIFI does not reach any campsites.

**Open:** Year-round

**Make a Reservation:** Call 432-477-2293 to make reservations before coming to the park.

Developed Campgrounds at a Glance						
	Elevation (ft/meters)	Sites	Nightly Fee	Facilities	Reservations	Comments
Chisos Basin	5,401/1,646	60	\$16.00*	Flush toilets, dump station	<a href="http://www.recreation.gov">www.recreation.gov</a>	Sites are not level; only some have shade.
Cottonwood	2,169/661	30	\$16.00*	Vault toilets, no generator use allowed	<a href="http://www.recreation.gov">www.recreation.gov</a>	In a cottonwood grove along the river. Partial shade.
Rio Grande Village	1,850/564	100	\$16.00*	Flush toilets, dump station	<a href="http://www.recreation.gov">www.recreation.gov</a>	Great birding area, near RGV Nature Trail.
Rio Grande Village RV	1,850/564	25	\$37.00 and up	Privately operated, full hook-ups	432-477-2293	Only place in park with full hook-ups, check-in at the RGV store.
			* \$8.00 with an Interagency Senior or Access Pass	Observe posted campground quiet hours.		



Camper enjoying a backcountry campsite.

### How to Obtain a Permit:

Permits are required for any overnight backcountry camping, river use, or stock use, and can be obtained from the Panther Junction and Chisos Basin visitor centers.

Some sites are available for reservations six months in advance on [Recreation.gov](http://Recreation.gov) or by phone at 877-444-6777. Check our website at [www.nps.gov/bibe](http://www.nps.gov/bibe) for more information.

- Permits can be written for up to fourteen consecutive nights from the first day of backcountry use.
- Backcountry use is subject to rules and regulations regarding sanitation and minimal impact practices that must be agreed to in order to obtain a permit.

## Backcountry Camping and River Use

If you're after solitude, dark skies, or a river trip, consider backcountry camping.

### Primitive Roadside Sites

All roadside campsites are along unpaved roads, and as a general rule are not designed for large RVs or trailers. Some centrally located sites are accessible to most vehicles; however, a high-clearance and/or 4-wheel-drive vehicle is necessary to reach those along the primitive dirt roads.

Sites are \$10/night. Reserve most sites online at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) up to six months in advance. Permits for all other sites are written on a first-come, first-served basis at Panther Junction Visitor Center.

Sites offer a cleared gravel pad to park your vehicle and set up a tent. The only amenity at a backcountry campsite is a large animal-proof box to store food and other items. Please plan to bring everything you need, including water, shade, chairs, and a trowel to bury human waste. Pack toilet paper out as trash—do not burn or bury it. Better yet, bring a self-contained, portable camp toilet.

Please remember, campfires (all wood fires or ground fires) are strictly prohibited. Use cook stoves with caution. Generators are not allowed in backcountry areas, and pets must be kept on a leash within the boundaries of the campsite.

### Backpacking

Do you dream of carrying everything with you as you hike to a beautiful campsite? Big Bend National Park has over 200 miles of trails in the Chisos Mountains and the lower desert with numerous options for multi-day backpacking trips.

**Chisos Mountains:** Forty-one campsites—ranging from 1 to 8 miles from the trailhead—dot the high Chisos Mountains. These sites help reduce impact and damage to this delicate environment.

Sites include a cleared area for a tent as well as a bear-proof storage box. It's important to use this box to store all scented items when camping. There are several composting toilets in the Chisos backcountry.

Most sites are reservable up to six months in advance on [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). A few sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis at Panther Junction Visitor Center.

**Desert Backpacking:** Experienced hikers wanting to camp in the park's open desert areas can obtain a camping permit (\$10/night) from the Panther Junction Visitor Center the day before, or the day of, your first night in the backcountry.

### River Use & Stock Permits

**River Use Permits:** Permits are required for anyone using canoes, kayaks, rafts, or other watercraft on the Rio Grande. Day-use permits are free. Permits for overnight use are \$10/night and can be written up to 7 days in advance.

To obtain a permit, you must have a Coast Guard-approved lifejacket for each person, an extra lifejacket, and an extra paddle. If going on an overnight trip, you will also need a fire pan and a system for removing human waste. Check the park's website or talk to a ranger for additional gear requirements.

**Horse/Stock Permits:** You must have a stock permit if you wish to ride your horse in the park. All gravel roads are open to riders. Horses are not permitted on paved roads or the shoulders of paved roads. Horse use in the Chisos Mountains is limited to Laguna Meadow, South Rim to the Boot Canyon Trail junction, and Blue Creek trails.

Grazing is not allowed in the park. Hannold Draw is the only campsite with a corral. Stock must not roam free; hobble or tie them. Check the park website for more information about stock use in the park.

# Keep Wildlife Wild



## Black Bears

The return of black bears to Big Bend is a success story for both bears and the park. Originally native to the Chisos Mountains, bears disappeared from this area by the 1940s, in part, due to predator control agents.

Nearly fifty years later, in the 1980s, bears returned from Mexico—crossing the river and the harsh desert to start breeding in the Chisos Mountains. Today, wildlife biologists estimate that there are around 20 to 30 black bears in the park.

A black bear's normal diet consists largely of nuts, fruits, sotol, and yucca hearts. They will also eat small mammals, reptiles, and carrion. Bears normally avoid humans but can become aggressive if they learn to take food from human sources.

Each campsite has bear-proof storage lockers for storing edibles. Hard-sided vehicles are also suitable for storing food and things that smell. Help us keep bears healthy and wild!



## Mountain Lions

Solitary and secretive, the mountain lion is Big Bend's top predator and is vital in maintaining the park's biological diversity. Mountain lions live throughout the park—from mountain to desert. Biologists estimate a stable population of about two dozen lions.

Everywhere in Big Bend, you are in the territory of at least one mountain lion. Within their territories, mountain lions help keep both deer and javelina populations within the limits of their food resources.

Each year, visitors report around 130 mountain lion sightings in Big Bend National Park. Over half are seen along roadways but encounters also occur on trails.

To protect yourself (and the mountain lions), be aware of your surroundings and avoid hiking alone or at dusk and dawn. Watch your children closely. Never let them run ahead of you as they may look like prey to a hungry mountain lion.



## Javelina

Also known as collared peccaries, javelinas (pronounced hav-uh-LEE-nuhs) are only found in the U.S. in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

They are covered with black, bristly hairs and weigh between 40 to 60 lbs. They usually travel in bands that consist of 10 to 25 individuals. Javelinas have a highly developed sense of smell but poor vision.

Physically, they resemble pigs, but are not closely related. Javelinas eat prickly pear

cactus, grasses, mesquite beans, piñon nuts, fruits, berries, and seeds.

Every year, campers report campsites being raided by javelinas. Although not normally aggressive, they can be when food is involved. Protect yourself and the javelina by storing all food inside a vehicle or in the food storage lockers provided at the campsites. Do not leave coolers or food boxes unattended at any time.



## Coyotes

Nothing in Big Bend speaks of wilderness more than the song of a coyote. Their vocalizations range from yips to mournful howls. Their narrow-set, yellow eyes and long snout may seem intimidating, but in general, coyotes do not bother humans.

Coyotes range over the entire United States. These highly adapted members of the canine family are omnivores, dining on small mammals, reptiles, and insects.

Coyotes will also eat berries and other vegetation when meat is unavailable. Carrion is an important food source in winter.

Coyotes are typically solitary but will hunt in small groups when individuals converge in areas where food is plentiful. They will work cooperatively, either chasing an animal in relays to tire it or waiting in ambush. Unlike wolves, coyotes do not form lasting packs.



## Rattlesnakes

Four species of rattlesnakes live in Big Bend National Park—the western diamondback, black-tailed, Mojave, and rock rattlesnakes.

This often-feared reptile is beneficial to the environment, eating mice, rats, and other small animals.

Perhaps surprising, rattlesnakes are not a top predator. They themselves are often a meal for roadrunners, skunks, coyotes, and even other snakes. The western coachwhip is a notorious rattlesnake predator.

The buzz of a rattlesnake is an unmistakable sound that will stop you in your tracks. Rattlesnakes use this warning when they perceive a threat. Continue toward them and you risk provoking a self-defense bite.

A few rattlesnake bites have occurred in Big Bend. If bitten, contact a ranger promptly, as permanent damage can occur within 12 hours of a bite. If possible, note which species bit you. This is important for treatment.



## Wild Animal Encounters

For many people, the chance to see a bear or mountain lion in the natural environment is an amazing opportunity.

However, one must always remember that we are entering their home, their territory. As such, we need to respect wildlife and know what to do if we encounter a wild predator:

- **Do not run** but back away to get out of range of the perceived threat.
- If you feel threatened, try to look large, wave your arms, throw rocks or sticks.
- If attacked, fight back.
- Watch children closely and never let them run ahead or lag behind.
- Report bear or mountain lion sightings or encounters to a park ranger as soon as possible.

To help preserve healthy environments for both visitors and predators, please remember:

- Never leave food or trash unattended, as bears and other wildlife easily develop a taste for human food.
- Never feed wildlife since no park animal is tame, and feeding leads to aggressive future behavior.
- Never approach wildlife and always keep a safe distance.

## Please Help

### At the Lodge

- Leave nothing outside your room, on the balcony, or on the porch.

### In Developed Campgrounds

- Store food, beverages, toiletries, pet food, and dishes in the bear-proof storage locker provided at your site.
- Keep your campsite clean. Take trash and food scraps to a dumpster.
- Dump liquids in restroom utility sinks, not on the ground.
- Ice chests and coolers are not bear-proof; store them in your vehicle.

### In the Backcountry

- Never leave packs or food unattended. Carry everything with you or store in a bear-proof locker.
- Avoid carrying smelly food and toiletries.
- Carry out all trash, including fruit peels, cigarette butts, and left-over food and cooking grease.

### Cyclists

- Use food storage lockers when provided.

## Services Inside the Park

### Emergency Call 911

#### National Park Service

General Information 432-477-2251

#### Big Bend Natural History Association

Booksales & Seminars 432-477-2236

#### Visitor Centers

Panther Junction (Hdqtrs) 432-477-1158  
 Chisos Basin 432-477-2264  
 Castolon 432-477-2666  
 Persimmon Gap 432-477-2393  
 Rio Grande Village 432-477-2271

#### U.S. Post Office

Panther Junction 432-477-2238

#### Lodging/Restaurant

Chisos Mountains Lodge 432-477-2291

#### Gas Stations

Panther Junction 432-477-2294  
 Rio Grande Village 432-477-2293

#### Camper Stores

Rio Grande Village 432-477-2293  
 Chisos Basin 432-477-2291  
 Castolon 432-477-2222

## Services Outside the Park

*These listings are not an endorsement by the National Park Service or Big Bend National Park, nor is this a comprehensive list.*

### GUIDES/OUTFITTERS

#### River Trips

Angell Expeditions 432-384-2008  
 Big Bend Boating & Hiking 469-607-9869  
 Big Bend River Tours 800-545-4240  
 Desert Sports 432-371-2727  
 Far Flung Outdoor Center 432-371-2633  
 Far West Texas Outfitters 432-229-2054  
 Go Big Bend 432-386-5635  
 Hidden Dagger Adventures 512-788-1707  
 WILD Adventure Outfitters 432-247-3262

#### Vehicle Tours

Big Bend Overland Tours-  
 Big Bend Station 432-371-3382  
 Far Flung Outdoor Center 432-371-2633  
 Get Lost Tours 432-371-3301  
 Go Big Bend 432-386-5635  
 Lucky Sun Jeep Tours 817-965-6143  
 West Texas Adventure Co. 915-231-8526

#### Backpacking/Hiking

Angell Expeditions 432-384-2008  
 Big Bend Boating & Hiking 469-607-9869  
 Explore Big Bend 432-245-0072  
 Far West Texas Outfitters 432-229-2054  
 Get Lost Tours 432-371-3301  
 Hidden Dagger Adventures 512-788-1707  
 Lucky Sun Jeep Tours 817-965-6143  
 WILD Adventure Outfitters 432-247-3262

#### Bike/Mountain Biking

Angell Expeditions 432-384-2008  
 Desert Sports 432-371-2727

#### Horseback Riding

Big Bend Stables 800-887-4331  
 Lajitas Livery 800-887-4331

### GENERAL SERVICES

#### Convenience Stores/Gasoline

Big Bend Resorts 800-848-2363  
 Cottonwood General Store 432-371-3315  
 Stillwell Store & Station 432-376-2244

#### Medical Services

Terlingua Fire & EMS 911  
 Big Bend Medical Center 432-837-3447

#### Banks

West Texas National/ATM 432-371-2211



### Accessibility

All visitor centers are accessible, as are the Chisos Mountains Lodge restaurant and some motel rooms. The Window View Trail and the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail boardwalk are wheelchair accessible. ADA campsites are available by reservation.

### Entrance Fees (valid for 7 days)

- Private, non-commercial vehicle \$30
- Motorcycle \$25
- Individual entering without vehicle (bicyclist, etc.) \$15 per person
- Big Bend Annual Pass \$55

All Interagency passes are sold and accepted at Big Bend. Inquire at a visitor center or entrance station for more information.

### Visitor Centers

Panther Junction and Chisos Basin Visitor Centers are open year-round. Rio Grande Village, Persimmon Gap, and Castolon visitor centers are open November–April.

Passport stamps and Junior Ranger booklets are available at park visitor centers.

### Lodging

The Chisos Mountains Lodge, located in the Chisos Basin, includes 72 rooms, gift shop, restaurant, and camp store. For more information call 432-477-2291.

### Post Office

A full-service post office is located at Panther Junction, open M–F, 8:30am–11:00am and 12:00pm–3:00pm. A mail drop is also available at the Chisos Basin Store.

### Camp Stores & ATMs

Aramark operates stores at Castolon, Chisos Basin, Panther Junction, and Rio Grande Village. ATMs are available at the Chisos Basin store, Rio Grande Village store, and Panther Junction service station.

### Gas Stations

Gasoline and diesel are available at Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village service stations. Rio Grande Village offers propane refilling on weekdays only. Call 432-477-2293 for an appointment.

### Showers and Laundry

Coin-operated showers and laundry facilities are available at the Rio Grande Village Store and have 23-hour access (closed for 1 hour after store opens for cleaning). Out-of-park facilities are available in Study Butte.

### Phones

Cell phone service is available in the Chisos Basin and Panther Junction but is sporadic. A public pay phone is located outside the Chisos Mountains Lodge. There is no cell phone coverage at Rio Grande Village.

### Wi-Fi/Internet

Free wireless internet is available at the Panther Junction and Chisos Basin visitor centers, the Chisos Mountains Lodge, and the Rio Grande Village Camp Store.

### Recycling

Recycling bins are provided in campgrounds and near stores and visitor centers. Please help us divert trash from our landfill by recycling!

### Camp Rules

- Visitors can stay in the park up to 14 consecutive nights.
- Each site has people, tent, and vehicle limits. Make sure your group fits.
- If in a campground, do not leave your site unoccupied. If leaving for the day, leave something in your site so we know you plan to return.
- Generators are only permitted in specific campground sites for specific, limited hours. Do not ever use generators in backcountry sites.

### Fires Prohibited

Ground fires and wood fires are prohibited throughout the park. Gas stoves and charcoal contained in a grill may be used.

**Do not smoke on trails.** Smoking is allowed in paved areas, campsites without vegetation, and park roads.

Can't find what you're looking for? The website has the answer: [www.nps.gov/bibe](http://www.nps.gov/bibe)

## Volunteers Make the Difference

Big Bend National Park depends on dedicated volunteers to perform many duties throughout the year. Are you ready to volunteer?

“Hello! Welcome to Big Bend! Is this your first time here? Are you looking for a particular hike? How many days will you be visiting?” These are just a few of the questions asked by our summer volunteers in the Chisos Basin.

Chisos Basin volunteers Cheryl Hamilton, Alan Montemayor, and Colin McMechan work as Preventative Search and Rescue (PSAR) volunteers and George Hazlehurst and Jeff and Kim Reilly serve as Camp Hosts. All six work together as a team to ensure visitor safety and enjoyment of the park.

Each day, the volunteers situate themselves at the Chisos Basin Trailhead and interact with hikers, making sure they have adequate water, experience, and knowledge of the trail they plan to hike.

In addition to participating in PSAR efforts, the volunteers stop and speak to every camper in the Chisos Basin Campground, checking in visitors and providing advice on how to best utilize their time in the park.

Coming together a few years ago, Cheryl, Alan, George, Jeff, and Kim realized they worked well together and return each year as a team. The team was strengthened in 2023 with the addition of Colin. Using radios, they communicate on the status of hikers in the area and important wildlife sightings. Nearly every day they complete a “3 pm sweep”



of the Window Trail; assisting hundreds of visitors suffering from heat-related illnesses over the years and saving countless lives.

Thank you for sharing your decades of experience with visitors and your service to Big Bend National Park!

### How Can I Get Involved?

Are you interested in volunteering at Big Bend National Park? Here are some things to keep in mind before submitting an application:

**Time Commitment:** Volunteers should be able to stay for at least 3 to 6 months.

**Housing:** Volunteers need to bring an RV or trailer. The park will provide an RV site, electricity, water, and reimburse propane expenses.

**Work Schedule:** Volunteers work 32 hours per week and may work weekends and holidays.

**Interested?** Most volunteer positions include training, references, and an extensive background check.

For current volunteer opportunities, check [www.volunteer.gov](http://www.volunteer.gov) or call 432-477-1195.