



## 2008 Fact Sheet



SCOTT REGAN

Big Bend National Park was authorized by Congress in 1935 to preserve and protect a representative area of the Chihuahuan Desert along the Rio Grande for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The park includes rich biological and geological diversity, cultural history, recreational resources, and outstanding opportunities for bi-national protection of our shared natural and cultural heritage.

### Overview

#### Park Purpose

Big Bend National Park's purpose is threefold:

- Preserve and protect all natural and national register-eligible cultural resources and values.
- Provide educational opportunities to foster understanding and appreciation of the natural and human history of the region.
- Provide recreational opportunities for diverse groups that are compatible with the protection and appreciation of park resources.

#### Establishment

Established as Texas Canyons State Park in May 1933; name changed to Big Bend State Park, October 1933; authorized by Congress as a National Park in 1935; established as a National Park on June 12, 1944.

#### Name

The Big Bend area of Texas derives its name from its location on the bend of the Rio Grande. The river creates a natural border that separates the United States from Mexico.

#### Park Significance

The park is significant because it contains the most representative example of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem in the United States. The park's river, desert, and mountain environments support an extraordinary richness of biological diversity, including endemic plants and animals, and provide unparalleled recreation opportunities. The geologic features and Cretaceous and Tertiary fossils in Big Bend National Park furnish opportunities to study the sedimentary and igneous processes. Archeological and historic resources provide examples of cultural interaction in the Big Bend Region and varied ways humans adapted to the desert and river environments. The Rio Grande is life-sustaining for plants, animals, and human inhabitants beyond its banks. Along with the two Mexican protected areas for flora and fauna, Maderas del Carmen and Cañon de Santa Elena, Big Bend is now part of one of the largest transboundary protected areas in North America. More than two million acres of Chihuahuan Desert resources, along with more than 200 miles of river, are now under the national protection of the United States and Mexico.

### Staffing

#### National Park Service

Superintendent William E. Wellman  
88 permanent employees  
42 seasonal employees

#### Big Bend Natural History Association

3 permanent employees

#### Forever Resorts (concessionaire)

78 permanent employees  
63 seasonal employees

#### Volunteers in Parks

214 volunteers contributed 46,556 hours of service to the park in 2007.

#### Student Conservation Association

34 SCA interns contributed 8,225 hours of service to the park in 2007.

### Park Partners

#### Big Bend Natural History Association

A non-profit organization that supports education, research and other programs for the benefit of Big Bend. Financial aid is provided to the park through the sales of interpretive products. Outlets for these products are located in all park visitor centers.

#### Friends of Big Bend National Park

A non-profit organization whose mission is to support, promote, and raise funds for Big Bend National Park in partnership with the National Park Service and other supporters who value the unique qualities found in the Big Bend of the Rio Grande.

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## Natural Resources

### Size

801,163 acres (1,252 square miles)  
15<sup>th</sup> largest in the national park system

### Elevation

Highest point: Emory Peak; 7,832 feet (2,387 m).  
Lowest point: Rio Grande Village; 1,850 feet (564 m).

### River Canyons

Santa Elena Canyon	20 miles (32 km)
Mariscal Canyon	10 miles (16 km)
Boquillas Canyon	33 miles (53 km)

### US/Mexico Border

Shared International Border—118 miles (190 km)  
Mexican States bordering the Park—2 states:  
Chihuahua & Coahuila

### Landmarks and Elevations

Emory Peak	7,832 feet (2,387 m).
South Rim	7,375 feet (2,248 m).
Casa Grande Peak	7,325 feet (2,233 m).
Chisos Basin	5,401 feet (1,664 m).
Panther Junction	3,750 feet (1,143 m).
Castolon	2,169 feet (661 m).
Rio Grande Village	1,850 feet (564 m).

### Climate and Weather

Fall and spring are usually warm and pleasant. Summers are hot, although temperatures vary greatly between the desert floor and the Chisos Mountains; May and June are the hottest months. Afternoon and evening rains often cool the desert from July to October. Winters are generally mild, although periods of cold weather (including light snow) are possible.

### Flora and Fauna

1,200+ species of flora  
75 species mammals  
450+ species birds  
56 species reptiles  
11 species amphibians  
40 species fish

### Major Resource Issues:

Air Quality/Visibility  
Rio Grande Water Quality & Quantity  
Exotic Species  
Theft of Park Resources

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## Cultural Resources

### Human History

Evidence of nearly 12,000 years of human occupation by Paleo-Indian, archaic peoples and a variety of southwestern tribes, including the Chisos, Jumano, Mescalero Apache, and Comanche. Around 1870 ranchers began to migrate to the Big Bend, and by 1900 ranchers, miners and farmers occupied the area.

### Collection Summary

Archeological objects systematically recovered from within the park's boundaries and associated field records; historic objects related to the park's history; herbarium and associated field records; other biological specimens; geological and paleontological specimens.

### Cataloged Museum Objects

123,074

### Archeological Resources

Nearly 10,000 sites (3% of park surveyed to date)

### National Register of Historic Places

There are eight National Register of Historic Places sites or districts in Big Bend National Park. They are Burro Mesa Archeological District, Castolon Historic District, Hot Springs Historic District, the Mariscal Mining District, the Homer Wilson Blue Creek Ranch Site, Rancho Estelle, Daniel's Farmhouse and Luna's Jacal.

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## Visitor Services and Resource Protection

### Visitation

367,023 visitors in 2007. Highest visitation in the park's history was 400,945 in 2005; lowest was 1,409 visitors in 1944.

### Frontcountry Camping

Chisos Basin Campground: 63 sites  
Cottonwood Campground: 31 sites  
Rio Grande Village Campground: 100 sites  
Rio Grande Village RV Park (hookups): 25 sites

### Picnic Areas

7 (Dugout Wells, Daniels Ranch, Castolon, Cottonwood campground, Chisos Basin, Persimmon Gap, and Santa Elena Canyon)

### Backcountry Camping

Backcountry Campsites : 116  
Includes both High Chisos and primitive roadside designated campsites.

### Backcountry Use (2007)

Overnight Backpacking Permits: 1,767  
Backcountry Roadside Permits: 2,246  
River Use Permits: 678

### Hiking trails

201 miles

### Roads

304 total miles (Paved and gravel)  
123 miles of paved roads  
45 miles of improved unpaved roads  
136 miles of primitive unpaved roads

### Concessionaire

Foverever Resorts operates the Chisos Mountains Lodge (72 rooms in motel units and four historic cottages), camper stores at three locations and gas stations at Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village.

### Visitor Protection (2007)

Search and Rescue: 17 incidents  
Motor Vehicle Accidents: 29  
Emergency Medical Incidents: 107  
Fatalities: 1

### Interpretation and Education (2007)

**Programs:** 629 programs presented to 10,540 visitors  
Educational Outreach: 9 programs to 141 students  
Junior Ranger Program: 1,194 participants