



# The Paisano

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

Volume 40 Number 1 2023



The free-flowing Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River winds its way through Boquillas Canyon.

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## Big Bend in Your Pocket



## Superintendent's Welcome

Welcome to Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River! Your visit comes at an opportune time, as increasing visitation and pressures on park infrastructure put us at a crossroads. Today's decisions have huge implications for the future, in both the developed and wild areas of these parks.

- In 2024, we expect to begin demolition of the old Chisos Mountains Lodge and construction of its replacement. The design and quality of the new, highly-sustainable facility is what this crown-jewel national park deserves. Thank you for your patience during the transition. We recognize that this will impact your experience greatly.
- Efforts to see permanent protection for more than 535,000 undeveloped acres of Big Bend are gaining momentum. This protection will not impact existing developments or uses in any way but will assure that our grandchildren experience Big Bend as we do today. You can help—see [www.keepbigbendwild.org](http://www.keepbigbendwild.org). Superintendent Bob Krumenaker

# 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 wilderness 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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432-477-2251

**Park Websites**

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

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

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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, arrowpoints, 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.



## Your Fee Dollars at Work

There are 423 National Park sites across the country, and 108 of those—including Big Bend National Park—collect fees under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. This act allows parks to collect fees for entrance and recreational activities.

Visitation in Big Bend has climbed in recent years and so has our revenue! Big Bend now collects a little over \$2 million in recreation fees annually and the law dictates that 100% of that money stays in the National Park Service. Not only that, 80% of recreational fees collected in the park are reinvested right here in Big Bend!

Where does the other 20% go? The funds that we do not retain in Big Bend go to sites that don't collect fees and need additional funding for projects with direct benefit to visitors.

Approximately \$1.7 million per year is spent directly on projects benefiting the visitor experience at Big Bend. These projects may include deferred maintenance projects or projects that improve park roads, campgrounds, trails, and visitor centers.

Below are a few of the recent projects made possible by money collected from park fees.

**Lone Mountain Trail**

This new 2.7-mile trail was completed in 2022 using recreation fee dollars. It is the first new trail in many years in Big Bend and

one of the only trails around the Panther Junction Visitor Center area. The trailhead is located one mile north of Panther Junction. The trail circumnavigates Lone Mountain, a remnant of a volcanic intrusion, providing unique views of the Chisos, Rosillos, and Dead Horse mountains.

**Cottonwood Campground**

In 2008, a major flood event washed away five campsites at Cottonwood Campground. In 2022, those five sites were rehabilitated using your fee money, increasing the total sites at Cottonwood from 24 to 29 and adding to the available inventory for visitors seeking to experience solitude and grand vistas from the comfort of their tent.

**Providing Shade for Campers**

Anyone who has camped at Big Bend knows shade is vital to an enjoyable trip. Shade is even more valued at Rio Grande Village campground where daily temperatures exceed 100°F for more than 3 months out of the year. The lack of shade has also become strikingly obvious in recent dry years, as many of the shady cottonwood trees that once stood tall over the campsites have died.

Using recreation fee dollars, the park added more than twenty shade structures at Rio Grande Village Campground in 2022. This addition should make the campground more enjoyable for generations to come!



Your fee dollars paid for the construction of the new Lone Mountain Trail. The nearly three-mile loop trail starts within a mile of Panther Junction and circles the mountain, offering stunning views of the Chisos Mountains.



# 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 shade to both resident and migrant 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). 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 only. There is no other legal access to Mexico within Big Bend National Park.

### 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 (\$10 round-trip as of 5/22). 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

## 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 Dog Canyon/Devil's Den and Mariscal Canyon Rim. Be sure to ask rangers at a visitor center for more information.

### Tuff Canyon

*Easy. 0.75 miles roundtrip.*

Tuff Canyon, located along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, offers two viewing areas and a trail that leads you into the canyon. "Tuff" refers to the white rock made of compressed ash particles. Along the trail, you'll see evidence of Big Bend's volcanic history. Look for hardened lava flow with holes from gas bubbles and ballistic blocks embedded into the canyon walls.

### Red Rocks Canyon

*Easy to Moderate. 2.5 miles roundtrip.*

Red Rocks Canyon is a series of red rock 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. Homer Wilson used this trail to move his sheep and goats to graze at higher elevations.

### 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. An easier, yet spectacular route is to 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.



### Bike Rides

#### Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive Loop.

Start at the west entrance, ride Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive to Santa Elena Canyon, and return on the Old Maverick Road. 56 miles (43 paved road, 13 dirt road).

Laura: "Perfect 50ish mile loop. Especially perfect during Big Bend bluebonnet bloom season."

#### Chisos Basin to Santa Elena Canyon.

One way, 46 miles on paved road.

Eric: "From the Basin to Santa Elena Canyon is one of the most epic rides I've ever done! Descending from the Basin is WILD!"

#### Rio Grande Village to Panther Junction.

20 miles one-way on paved road.

Whiskey: "I rode from Rio Grande Village to Panther Junction & returned. Love that smooth descent on the trip back! Gorgeous views everywhere!"

#### Old Ore Road.

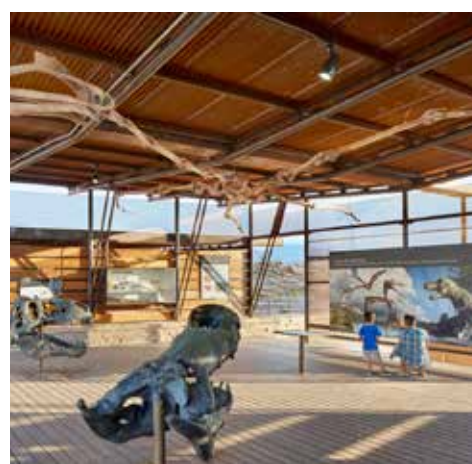
26 miles one way on rough dirt road.

karjbar: "30 miles of incredibly beautiful landscape. Terrain is challenging, but doable. This is for mountain bikes. Start at the top and ride south. Helps to have two cars. When finished...go jump in the Hot Springs!"

#### Panther Junction to Fossil Exhibit.

8 miles one-way on paved road.

Jenny: "Fabulously scenic and really gets your heart pumping on the way back to Panther Junction."



### 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.





## 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 spring 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 unmitigated clay soils and soon suffered as the foundation moved and settled. Over the years, the settling has 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 natural stucco, 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 2024. Significant disruptions to visitor services are expected. Stay tuned as construction timelines are established or ask a ranger for the latest updates as we work to improve facilities and services at your park.

Park Ranger T. VandenBerg



The banner image and the 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."

## Just Being Wild

### Wildlife Cameras Provide A Peak Into the Private Lives of Animals

A coyote glances at you before melting into the bushes. A bear huffs at you as her cubs shinny up a tree. Seeing wildlife in Big Bend is always a thrill, but what we witness is often a reaction to our presence. What do animals do when people aren't around?

Thomas Athens, Big Bend National Park wildlife biologist, and Dr. Eric Anderson, park volunteer and Professor Emeritus of Wildlife Ecology at the University of Wisconsin, had an idea: establish a network of wildlife cameras across the Chisos Mountains.

"We want to monitor the wildlife from the foothills at about 3500 ft. to the mountain peaks at over 7000 ft.," Anderson says. Over the long term, the cameras will help Thomas Athens answer questions about the movement of animal populations in response

to climate change or the spread of invasive exotics such as wild hogs or elk.

But the immediate value is the ability to gather basic information about activity patterns of wildlife in the park. Who lives where? How do they behave seasonally? Daily? How do animals react to temperature or water availability changes?

"The wildlife biologist bought himself 12 sentinels to stand in one place in the park and watch 7 days a week, 24 hours a day," says Anderson.

#### **Establishing a Camera Network**

Placing a camera is an art of its own. First, a 12-square grid—each cell within the grid representing 16 sq. km—was draped over a map of the Chisos Mountains. Science and Resource Management staff and volunteers then attached a single camera to a tree or

post in each grid cell. But not randomly. This is where the art comes in.

"There are two aspects to an animal being in a location," says Anderson. "One: is the habitat suitable? But then there's the detectability. Maybe the animal is there, but we didn't detect it because we have the camera in the wrong spot."

The right spot has food, cover, and water. The *ideal* spot is a funnel where animals move from low to high elevation or from a resting place to a foraging area or watering hole.

Of course, the cameras must also be accessible to park staff and volunteers who check camera batteries and swap out image cards once a month.

Then comes the fun part.

#### **Big Bend Wildlife**

Over the last year, staff and volunteers sorted and identified over 15,000 wildlife photos. The quizzical grey fox, with its long, bushy tail, coal-black eyes, and alert ears, was the most common of the 21 species photographed. But the cameras also documented some surprises. Long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*), porcupines (*Erethizon doratum*), and hooded skunks (*Mephitis macroura*) all made an appearance.

And bears. Of course, there were bears.

In 2021, bears were immortalized on camera 527 times. They were not distributed equally across the Chisos. Most bears preferred to hang out at mid-elevation—between about

4200 and 5300 ft. Anderson isn't sure why. Was it because temperatures were ideal? Food was plentiful? Or was it because the South Rim fire burned through much of the high-elevation habitat in April 2021?

Bears were inactive in January through March—the traditional months of torpor. In July, bears were particularly active, moving from their spring food sources in the low elevation sotol-yucca grasslands to their summer/fall food sources in the mid-elevation oak woodlands.

As with many desert animals, the cameras revealed that bears are most active near dawn and dusk.

Bears are okay, but Anderson has a soft spot for the big cats. "Deb [a park volunteer] set a camera down near a cottonwood tree at Oak Spring. We caught a female mountain lion and one of her cubs lounging there one night. They just lay there in front of the camera. Occasionally, they'd get up and tromp off into the woods after something they heard. We'd see them looking up at something in the trees. There's a whole sequence of photographs that tell a really interesting story of one night in the life of these mountain lions."

The camera traps gather valuable data for the wildlife biologist who can use the images to make informed decisions about wildlife management. But it's also rewarding to see a mountain lion and her cub relax under the canopy of a cottonwood tree—without fear, without reacting to a human presence.

Park Ranger C.A. Hoyt



Grey foxes were the most common species seen on the wildlife cameras.



# Places to Visit

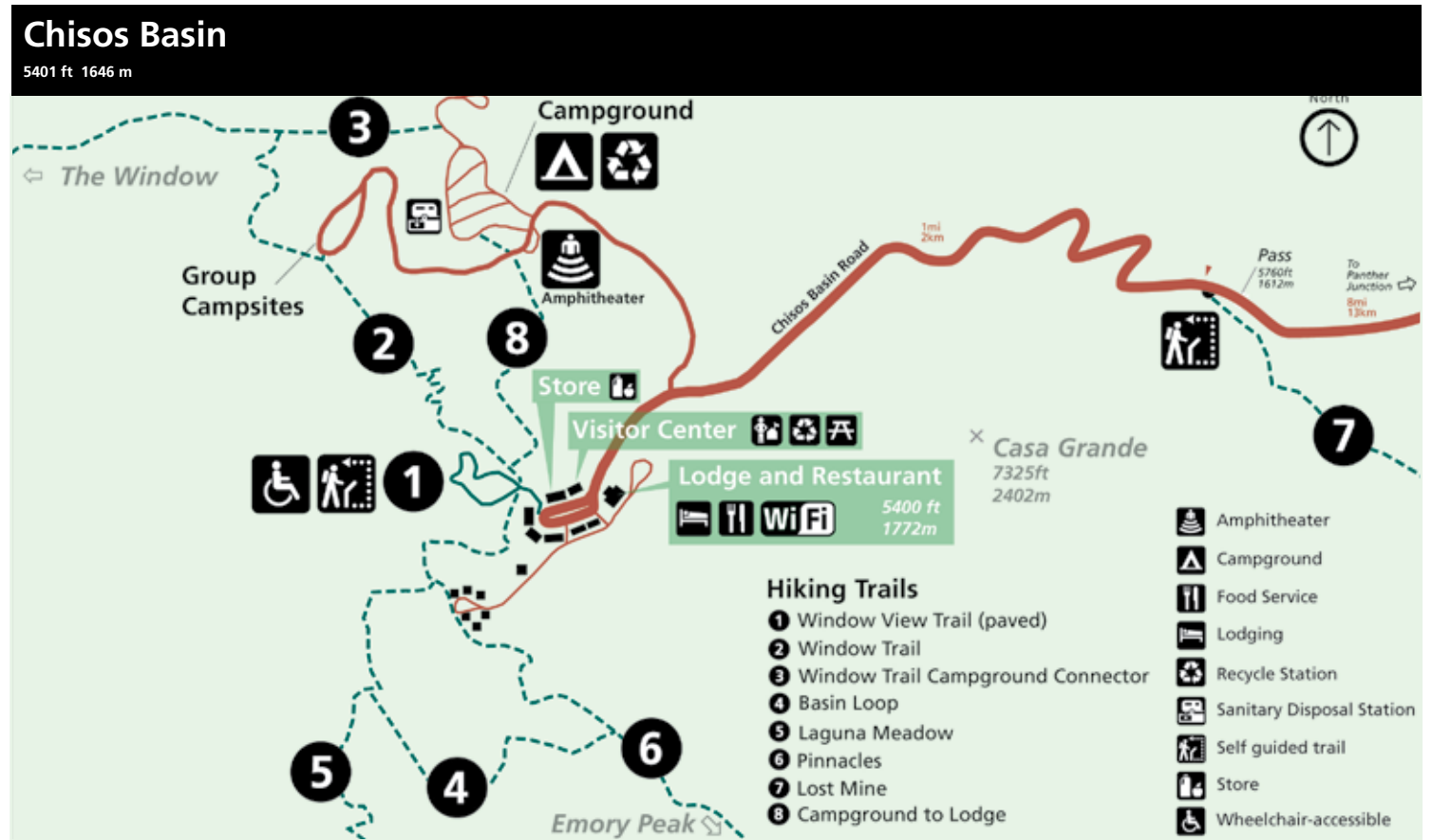
## Chisos Basin

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 leads to the popular Hot Springs.

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.



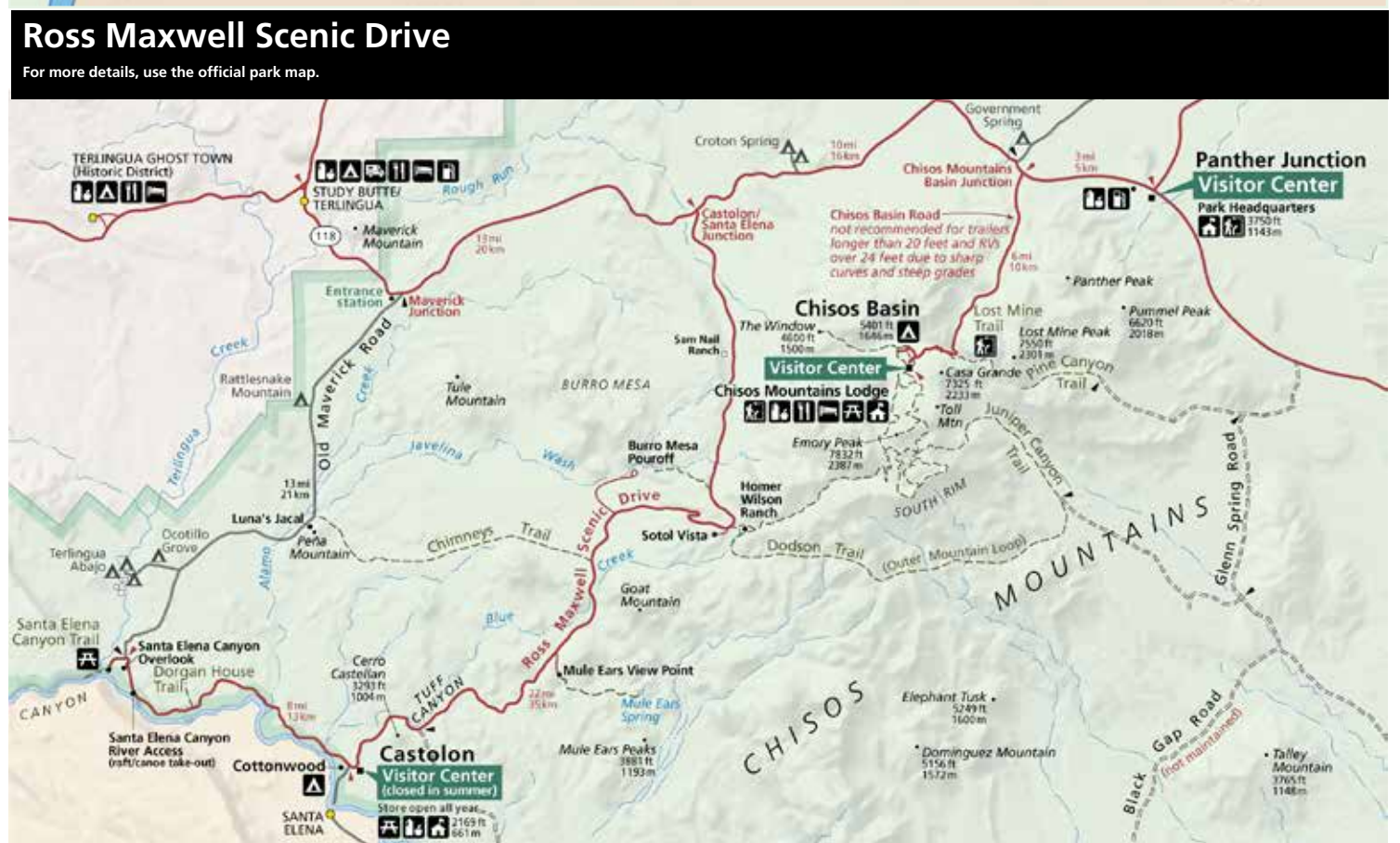
## Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

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, Mule Ears Overlook, and Tuff Canyon are all worthwhile stops.

History is highlighted at Sam Nail Ranch, Homer Wilson (Blue Creek) Ranch, and the Castolon Historic District. Castolon has a visitor center, camp store, and 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. This road 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 Trail</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.</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 forever is one reason we love our park.

But are they truly protected from future development?

Park visitation is rapidly increasing. Does anything absolutely prohibit building new roads or other infrastructure, dissecting those vast open spaces?

The answer is no.

The good news is that the National Park Service (NPS) is committed to protecting wild Big Bend. In 1978, the NPS formally recommended that about 2/3 of the park be designated as federal wilderness. Only Congress can make those protections permanent, and they have yet to act.

In the absence of *law*, agency *policy* mandates that we preserve the wilderness values of Big Bend until Congress acts. But the protections we take for granted are not necessarily permanent. Policy is like a handshake deal—only as good as the commitment of the people involved.

Big Bend visitation has increased rapidly in recent years. Pressure to develop more

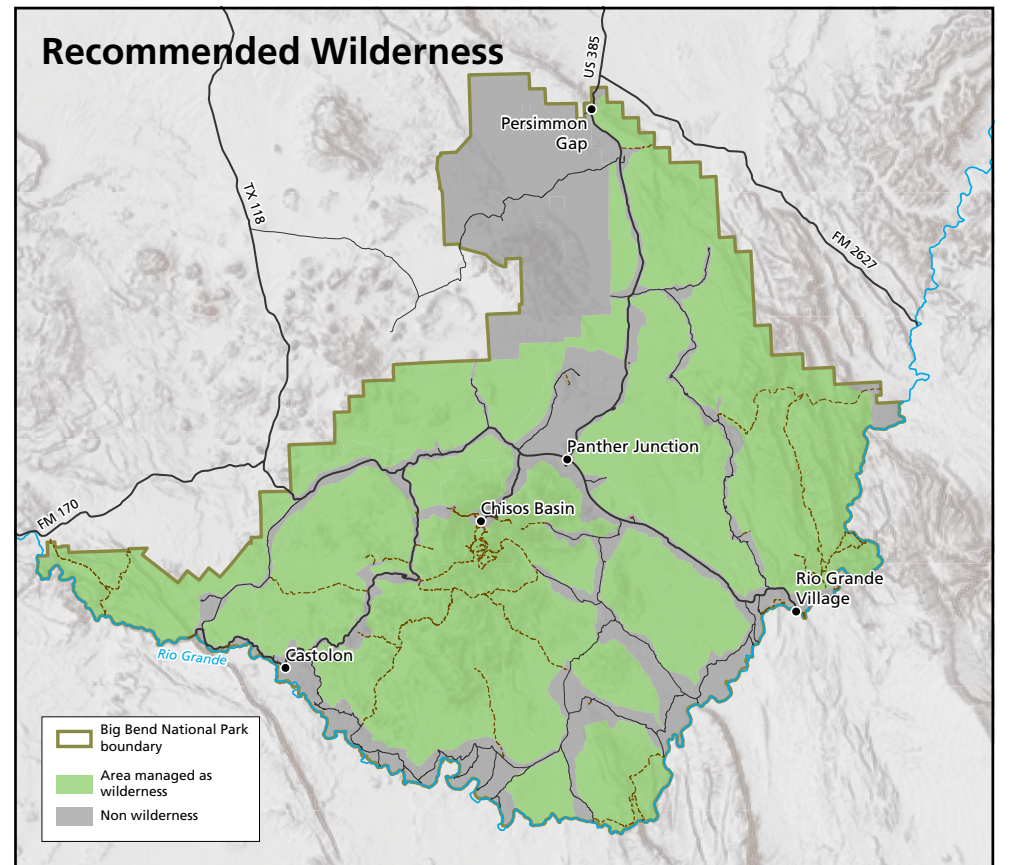
facilities is real and likely to increase. The NPS is committed to maintaining the quality and condition of the facilities in Big Bend's developed areas, enhancing the visitor experience while preserving essential park values. Limiting infrastructure growth inside the park also encourages economic development in the gateway communities of Terlingua, Lajitas, Marathon, and Alpine. It's a win-win-win.

But if current policy changes, roadless areas could be developed with new roads, campgrounds, or lodges, altering the character of the park forever. Wilderness designation would formalize protections against such changes and provide permanent protection for the open spaces we value so highly.

### Defining Wilderness

The 1964 Wilderness Act passed Congress overwhelmingly. Signed by President Lyndon Johnson of Texas, it is one of the most eloquent laws ever written, lyrically defining wilderness and why it is crucial to protect it.

*“A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”*



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

The land must be free of modern developments, retain its primeval character, and have outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation. Such areas are to be “devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.”

We hear sometimes that wilderness “locks up” public land. Not so. The law requires that the land will be for the “use and enjoyment of the American people.”

Motorized vehicles and mechanical equipment are prohibited in wilderness, but trails, primitive campsites, and human-powered, non-mechanized travel are allowed. Since 1964, every president has signed laws creating new wilderness areas. National parks such as Death Valley, Everglades, Yosemite, and even Guadalupe Mountains here in Texas have substantial acreage protected as federal wilderness.

*Why not Big Bend?*

## FAQ About Wilderness at Big Bend

### What are the advantages of wilderness designation?

The advantages of wilderness designation include:

1. Assuring future management can't easily change direction and that our grandchildren can experience the park as close as possible to the way we do today.
2. Increasing opportunities for private businesses to provide visitor services such as food or accommodations outside park boundaries, a positive economic impact on gateway communities while limiting adverse impact on the park.
3. Protecting habitat and preserving our dark night skies.

*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.



## 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 has raised the visibility of this issue. While the NPS did not initiate it, park leadership works closely with KBBW.

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 will publish a draft map and seek community 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 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 me at [BIBE\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:BIBE_superintendent@nps.gov). I am happy to talk with anyone and meet with groups across the state to discuss wilderness and other park issues.

Superintendent Bob Krumenaker





# Nonprofit Partners

## Big Bend Conservancy

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

The Big Bend Conservancy has raised over \$4.3 million for projects in both park units. The goal of the Conservancy is to ensure the parks' conservation while providing support for exceptional visitor experiences. To do this, the Big Bend Conservancy funds student fellowships, restoration projects, educational films, Fossil Discovery and James A. "Buddy" Davidson Trails endowments, and the Fossil Discovery Exhibit.

Opened in 2016, the \$1.5 million Fossil Discovery Exhibit showcases Big Bend's incredible fossil landscape in an award-winning green building designed to complement its natural surroundings. Generous donors established the Fossil Discovery Endowment in 2020. This permanent fund provides for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the exhibit.

Your contributions and support of the Conservancy directly impact Big Bend National Park. From trail maintenance and interpretive additions, sustainability initiatives to keep the park beautiful, recovery efforts in response to the Castolon

fire, and land acquisition to promote continued conservation—every donation plays a part in keeping the park pristine.

If you'd like to take your love of the park along for a ride, consider purchasing a Big Bend license plate from the Big Bend Conservancy. Since 1997, thousands of Texans have shown their Big Bend National Park pride with a Big Bend license plate. The result? Almost \$1 million contributed for trail signs, visitor center improvements, and numerous other park projects.

Keep your eyes out for the toothsome new fossil license plate launched in mid-2021! You can purchase either Big Bend license plate at [bigbendconservancy.org](http://bigbendconservancy.org).

### Join Us!

To become involved with the Big Bend Conservancy, make a donation, or learn more about events hosted by the Conservancy in the park and across the state, visit [www.bigbendconservancy.org](http://www.bigbendconservancy.org), or call 512.529.1149.



Big Bend Conservancy teamed up with the National Park Foundation and the Center for Big Bend Studies at Sul Ross State University to restore adobe work at the historic Alvino house in the Castolon area.



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

## Big Bend Natural History Association

Supporting the park and park programs through bookstore sales.

BBNHA's primary mission is to provide educational material to the visiting public in hopes that an educated public will love and support the parks and help preserve them for future generations. We carry popular and hard-to-find books about a wide variety of historical and scientific topics, detailed guides, and maps. These include some BBNHA original publications, plus some unique collectibles to help you remember your visits or to share your experiences with friends and family.

To directly support its mission, BBNHA recently completed a project more than ten years in the making: the construction of a "green" duplex building in the Panther

Junction housing area. This effort could not have been accomplished without the close collaboration of our NPS partners. The duplex consists of two, 2-bedroom apartments each containing 972 square feet of living area. The duplex was constructed entirely offsite in Lubbock, Texas, reducing the environmental impact within the park. Now, BBNHA seasonal and permanent employees can live and work in one of the most beautiful parks in the national park system.

Part of our profits are used to support the educational and research efforts of the parks we serve and also to provide for purchases that can't be made with government funds—

for example, meals for search and rescue operations and volunteer appreciation socials. A small sample of the programs recently funded with BBNHA donations include:

- Junior Ranger books, pencils, and badges for more than 1000 children per year.
- Support for publication of *The Paisano*.
- Spanish translations for Magdalena House exhibits.
- Ongoing support for a series of new interpretive trailhead signs.
- Development and production of *Bravo y Grande*, a film extolling the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River.
- A new *Special Edition: 2023 Best of Big Bend Calendar*, featuring some of the best photography that we have published over the years.

Despite fires, government shutdown, pandemic, and the high cost of gasoline, BBNHA has continued to find ways to serve our association members and park visitors. In 2020, we were closed for a full six months except for our online store, then an innovative staff set up shop outdoors on a patio with batteries, and we forged ahead.

### Join Us!

We're aided in our mission by more than 500 members, and we need your help. With an annual membership, you'll receive our annual park calendar with photos by a

select local professional photographer and narratives by park personnel. Members receive a 15% discount on items sold by BBNHA and a discount at over 400 other non-profit bookstores at national parks, forests, and monuments nationwide through the Public Lands Alliance (PLA). You are invited to join us in our educational mission by becoming a member in person at the Panther Junction bookstore or online at [www.bbnha.org](http://www.bbnha.org). Thank you so much for your ongoing support, especially during these challenging times.



BBNHA seasonal employee, Jenny Grayson and Butterfly Kitty Meow Meow, enjoy the view from the front porch of the new duplex.



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

**This discount is honored at cooperating park bookstores nationwide.**





# Camping in the Park

## Developed Campgrounds

Campgrounds include amenities such as flush or vault toilets, running water, grills, picnic tables, animal-proof storage boxes, and safety in numbers.

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

**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 to make reservations before coming to the park: 432-477-2293 for reservations.

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	24	\$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.		

## Backcountry Permits



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 were 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 432-384-2307  
 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  
 Hidden Dagger Adventures 512-788-1707  
 WILD Adventure Outfitters 432-247-3262

#### Vehicle Tours

Big Bend River Tours 800-545-4240  
 Far Flung Outdoor Center 432-371-2633  
 Get Lost Tours 432-371-3301  
 Go Big Bend 432-386-5635

#### Backpacking/Hiking

Angell Expeditions 432-384-2307  
 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  
 Go Big Bend 432-386-5635  
 Hidden Dagger Adventures 512-788-1707  
 WILD Adventure Outfitters 432-247-3262

#### Bike/Mountain Biking

Desert Sports 432-371-2727

#### Birding Tours

Big Bend Birding & Photo 432-386-6855

#### Photography Tours

Big Bend Birding & Photo 432-386-6855

#### 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



# Information and Services

### 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?

Robert and Glenda Overfelt have volunteered at Big Bend National Park for 13 seasons, going back to 2005. “We first visited Big Bend in 1969 and feel that we ‘found our park,’” says Glenda. “Our three children grew up coming to Big Bend at least twice every year, and now our grandchildren visit at least once a year.”

“Volunteering in a national park is a wonderful experience. Having a minimum three-month commitment means you get to truly experience the park.

We love the Rio Grande Village area and have always volunteered at the RGV Visitor Center. At a visitor center, you get to help visitors in so many ways. Not just with their entrance fees, but also by answering their questions and helping them plan their time in the park. One of our favorite things to do at the visitor center is work with kids who have completed their Junior Ranger activity books. We have them raise their right hand and recite the Junior Ranger pledge. With the little ones, we get to say ‘Your other right hand’ a lot.

To us, the highlights of volunteering at Big Bend are the wonderful friends and relationships we have developed, getting to meet people from around the world, and being able to watch the Sierra del Carmens glow at sunset each evening.”



### 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 contact the volunteer coordinator at 432-477-1195.