



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River

Big Bend National Park
PO Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX

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News Release Digest 2007

January 04, 2007

Successful Search and Rescue at Big Bend National Park

On the evening of December 30th, the U.S. Air Force notified Big Bend National Park that a personal locator beacon (PLB) signal had been received.

January 11, 2007

Big Bend National Park Announces Increased Camping Fees

Effective January 24, 2007, Big Bend National Park will be increasing the developed campground camping fees to \$14.00 per site per night.

January 22, 2007

Superintendent's 2007 Compendium Public Review and Comment Period

The annual review and comment period for the Superintendent's compendium is now underway.

January 29, 2007

Big Bend National Park Reinstates Temporary Closures for Peregrine Falcons

Big Bend National Park will again temporarily close or place restrictions on the use of certain park lands to protect and monitor nesting peregrine falcons.

March 12, 2007

Comments sought regarding the environmental assessment for the Emory Peak Trail realignment

The National Park Service at Big Bend National Park is proposing a major trail realignment of the existing Emory Peak trail in the high Chisos Mountains.

June 04, 2007

Environmental Assessment to introduce biocontrol agent to control saltcedar in Big Bend National Park

The National Park Service is proposing to introduce biocontrol insects to control saltcedar, an exotic invasive plant, in Big Bend National Park.

June 04, 2007

Public meetings to garner input on introduction of biocontrol insects to control saltcedar

The National Park Service is proposing to introduce biocontrol insects (*Diorhabda elongata*) to control saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.), an exotic invasive plant.

June 14, 2007

Proposed Environmental Assessment for Proposed Construction in Big Bend National Park

Big Bend National Park is proposing to develop an Environmental Assessment (EA) covering facilities supporting park operations.

July 09, 2007

Big Bend National Park plans a prescribed fire operation

Big Bend National Park plans to start prescribed fire operations the week of July 9, 2007.

August 24, 2007

Centennial proposals eligible for matching funds

Project to construct a picnic facility and trailhead for access to a proposed multi-use trail is one of 201 proposals.

September 14, 2007

Chisos Basin receives over twenty inches of rainfall for the year

The Chisos Mountains Basin, located in the center of Big Bend National Park, has received over twenty inches of rainfall for the calendar year.

October 12, 2007

Big Bend National Park Begins Expansion of The Panther Junction Visitor Center

Big Bend National Park has begun construction to rehabilitate and improve the park's main visitor center at Panther Junction.

October 29, 2007

Big Bend National Park Seeks Comments on Use of Asian Beetle to Control Saltcedar

Big Bend National Park is seeking public comment on a proposal to use a beetle from Asia to help reduce infestations of saltcedar, also known as tamarisk.

November 26, 2007

Big Bend National Park Seeks Public Comment on Proposed New Dorgan-Sublett Trail

The National Park Service proposes to construct a ½-mile walking trail for visitor access to the Dorgan and Sublett historic sites.

December 03, 2007

Big Bend National Park Ornament Displayed on the Official White House Christmas Tree

Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River ornaments are prominently displayed on this year's official White House Christmas Tree.

December 05, 2007

Big Bend National Park Christmas Bird Counts

Big Bend National Park will hold its annual Christmas Bird count on December 28 and 29 this year.

December 15, 2007

Big Bend National Park to temporarily relocate Panther Junction Visitor Center

On January 6, 2008 the Panther Junction Visitor Center will relocate temporarily due to construction.

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 4, 2007

David Elkowitz
432-477-1108

SUCCESSFUL SEARCH AND RESCUE AT BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

On the evening of December 30th, the U.S. Air Force notified Big Bend National Park that a personal locator beacon (PLB) signal had been received from a backcountry location within the park. That evening, rangers headed to a backcountry campsite about six miles from the coordinates given by the PLB and found a vehicle registered to a 48-year-old visitor from San Antonio who had a solo hiker permit for that zone of the park. Two rangers then hiked to the approximate PLB coordinates, but were unable to find anyone in that area. The following morning they were joined by another team of searchers and a Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) helicopter.

The crew of the helicopter homed in on the distress transmission from the PLB within minutes of arriving on scene and soon spotted the hiker, who was waving a space blanket at them. The visitor had “cliffed out” on the side of Elephant Tusk Peak, but gave the helicopter crew a thumbs-up signal indicating that he was okay. Although the helicopter was unable to land, the crew directed searchers to the man’s location, then ferried rope and climbing equipment to the rangers on scene. Rangers climbed to his location and helped him down.

The man told rangers that he’d attempted to climb to the top of Elephant Tusk the day before. He’d cached his backpack, tent, and sleeping bag, and had made the ascent carrying only a space blanket, food, water, a whistle, an LED light, and a PLB. After topping a 40-foot chimney, he decided to turn back – only to find he couldn’t climb down from his location. He spent the night on a 6-foot by 50-foot ledge wrapped in the space blanket, with his PLB tied to a bush to keep it from being blown away by high winds.

This incident marks the first time in Big Bend that a PLB has been used by a hiker to call in rescuers. Without the PLB and assistance from the DPS helicopter, it would have been extremely difficult to find and rescue the man in a timely fashion. The PLB probably saved his life.

“This is a perfect example of the park’s professional rangers and partners combining efforts to accomplish a successful outcome,” stated Acting Superintendent David Elkowitz. “We are very pleased to receive aid from our partner agencies and even happier with the result.”

--END--

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U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 11, 2007

David Elkowitz
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Big Bend National Park News Release

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK ANNOUNCES INCREASED CAMPING FEES

Effective January 24, 2007, Big Bend National Park will be increasing the developed campground camping fees to \$14.00 per site per night. The park developed camping fees were last increased in February, 2003, when the price went from \$8.00 to \$10.00 per site per night.

Big Bend National Park participates in the National Park Service Recreation Fee Demonstration Program. Eighty percent of the entrance fee revenue collected returns to the park and is used to fund backlogged maintenance and visitor related projects that provide direct benefit to park visitors. Past fee demonstration projects include the replacement of the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail boardwalk, the installation of a permanent vault toilet at the Hot Springs parking lot, a new interpretive contact station and exhibits at Castolon, and the soon to be expanded Panther Junction Visitor Center.

--END--

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U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 22, 2007

David Elkowitz
432-477-1108

Big Bend National Park News Release

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK SUPERINTENDENT'S 2007 COMPENDIUM PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT PERIOD

The annual review and comment period for the Superintendent's compendium is now underway, with comments required to be received by February 26, 2007.

The Superintendent's Compendium is a supplemental document that addresses specific management needs and concerns of an individual national park area. The Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River 2007 Superintendent's Compendium is now being reviewed and updated. The compendium is authorized by Title 16, United States Code, Section 3, and Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 1 through 7; these regulations are established by the Park Superintendent. The Superintendent's Compendium is revised annually to continually address specific management needs of the park. These regulations apply in addition to the criminal laws of the United States and the regulations contained in Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

The following represent changes or clarifications of note for purposes of public review and notification:

- The developed campground quiet hours are 10 PM to 6 AM, changed from 8 PM to 8 AM. Generator use hours remain at 8 AM to 8 PM.
- Group campground minimum number of persons is now 9 or more, changed from the former 10, with the maximum number in a family site at 8 persons.
- Incorporates the new backcountry and river use permit fee for overnight usage.
- Bans smoking year round on the Chisos Mountain trails due to high fire danger concerns during large portions of the year and due to litter (cigarette butts).
- The elimination of a number of backcountry sites from permitting for stock use. This is based upon a determination drawn from low permit numbers, inadequate site sizes to accommodate large pickup/horse trailers, and areas not used by horsemen due to unsuitable riding country.
- Backcountry campsites still open for camping with stock:
Grapevine Hills 1; K-Bar 2; Hannold Draw 1; Nine Point 1; Nugent Mountain-as a group site; Glenn Springs 2; Tally 4; Dominguez Trailhead1; Jewell camp1 and 2; Loop Camp1 and 2; Johnson Ranch 1 and 2; Buenos Aires 1; La Clocha 1; Solis 3.
These sites were retained because of adequate size, use patterns, and ease of access to water for stock.

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- Backcountry campsites closed for stock use:

Grapevine Hills 2 and 3; Paint Gap 1; Croton Springs 1 and 2; K-Bar1; Nugent Mountain can only be booked as a group site - not as individual sites; Pine Canyon 1 and 2; Juniper Canyon 2; Willow Tank; Telephone Canyon 2; McKinney Springs; Gravel Pit 1 and 2; La Clocha 2; Solis 4; Buenos Aires 2; and Terlingua Abaja.

To see the full draft document please visit the park's website at the following address:

<http://www.nps.gov/bibe/parkmgmt/lawsandpolicies.htm>

Comments regarding the 2007 Compendium can be sent to:

Superintendent
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River are jointly managed and as such the Park Superintendent is responsible for preserving and managing the two parks and their resources for the enjoyment and continued use of current and future generations.

--END--



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U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 29, 2007

David Elkowitz
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Big Bend National Park News Release

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK REINSTATES TEMPORARY CLOSURES FOR PEREGRINE FALCONS

In August 1999, the Peregrine falcon was removed from the federal endangered species list, a move prompted by the falcon's comeback from the brink of extinction. However, throughout Texas there are less than a dozen known nesting pairs and the falcon remains on the state's endangered species list.

Federal Endangered Species policy requires that Peregrine populations continue to be monitored. National Park Service policies require the protection and preservation of all state-listed species and all species of concern, regardless of federal or state classification. In keeping with this mandate, and to provide the nesting falcons with areas free of human disturbance, Big Bend National Park will again temporarily close or place restrictions on the use of certain park lands.

The areas closed to public entry from February 1 through May 31 are:

- The Southeast Rim Trail and a portion of the Northeast Rim Trail from the Boot Canyon/Southeast Rim junction to a point just north of Campsite NE-4.
- All Southeast Rim campsites as well as Northeast (NE) campsites 4 and 5 are closed during this period.

Technical rock climbing on rock faces within ¼ mile of known peregrine eyries, as posted, will not be allowed between February 1 and July 15.

The park does not plan to close any other areas but restrictions may be modified if Peregrine behavior or nesting sites do not follow traditional trends.

Through the efforts of federal, state and private agencies, the Peregrine has staged a remarkable comeback since it was placed on the federal list in 1970. Superintendent Bill Wellman remarked, "The small population found in Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River represents most of the peregrines found in Texas. We appreciate the public support and cooperation that we continue to have for protecting these remarkable birds."

-END-

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 12, 2007

David Elkowitz
432-477-1108

Big Bend National Park News Release

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK SEEKS COMMENTS REGARDING THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE EMORY PEAK TRAIL REALIGNMENT

The National Park Service at Big Bend National Park is proposing a major trail realignment of the existing Emory Peak trail in the high Chisos Mountains. This proposed realignment will encompass the construction of 1.21 miles of new trail from just above the Pinnacles Pass area (approximately 3 miles from the Chisos Basin). The project proposal, including a map of the reroute, may be reviewed by visiting the NPS Planning, Environmental, and Public Comment website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>.

The proposed new alignment will follow terrain contours more closely, thus greatly improving drainage of the trail and reducing erosion. Further anticipated benefits of the realignment will include reduced trail maintenance, enhanced protection of natural and cultural resources, and a safer and improved visitor experience by significantly reducing the grade. Material removed during the construction of the new trail will be utilized to fill in severely eroded sections of the existing route. All unused sections of the existing trail will be fully rehabilitated with erosion checks, re-contouring to natural slope, and re-vegetated to natural specifications.

Rock structures will be installed (retaining walls, checks, water bars) when necessary to gain elevation and control drainage. National Park Service trail crews and volunteer groups will perform the work with hand tools in accordance with the guidelines of the Wilderness Act.

The National Park Service has prepared an Environmental Assessment to look at possible environmental impacts and is soliciting comments from the public on concerns and issues dealing with this project. Please submit your written comments online at the NPS Planning, Environmental, and Public Comment website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>. The 30 day comment period starts on March 12 and ends on April 11, 2007.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Written comments can be submitted to:

Superintendent
Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

--END--

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National Park Service
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P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 4, 2007

Vidal Davila
432-477-1143

Big Bend National Park News Release

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TO INTRODUCE BIOCONTROL AGENT TO CONTROL SALT CEDAR IN BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

The National Park Service is proposing to introduce biocontrol insects (*Diorhabda elongata*) to control saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.), an exotic invasive plant, in Big Bend National Park.

Saltcedar is a deciduous small tree or shrub that was introduced from Eurasia and has colonized riparian areas throughout the western United States. Where established, it has become dominant and has resulted in the exclusion of native flora, degradation of wildlife habitat, increasing salinity of surface soils, alteration of historic hydrologic processes, and decreasing biodiversity. In Big Bend National Park, saltcedar now occupies large areas of riparian floodplains and terraces along the Rio Grande and over 150 upland water sources.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed an effective biocontrol agent for saltcedar. Over the past 15 years, saltcedar leaf beetles, native to Asia and the Mediterranean, have been thoroughly tested for host specificity and effectiveness at defoliating saltcedar in North America. The beetles have been effective in defoliating large areas of saltcedar in Utah and Nevada. The beetle is not known to feed on any plant species, including important crop plants and habitat associates, outside of the Tamaricaceae family.

The proposed project includes the release of biocontrol agents, monitoring of agents survival and dispersal, monitoring effectiveness of agent, and monitoring of ecosystem variables such as plant community composition and wildlife use of habitat.

In July 1999, USDA-APHIS completed an Environmental Analysis (Field Release of a Nonindigenous Leaf Beetle, *Diorhabda elongata* (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae), for Biological Control of Deciduous Saltcedar, *Tamarix ramosissima* and *T. parviflora* (Tamaricaceae). In 2005, USDA-APHIS completed the EA Program for Biological Control of Saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.) in thirteen states. Neither of these documents addressed release of biocontrol agents specifically on the Rio Grande nor within Big Bend National Park. In 2006, USDA-APHIS approved release of all available ecotypes of *Diorhabda elongata* for biological control of saltcedar in Texas.

An environmental assessment (EA) will be prepared to analyze the proposal and alternatives and their impacts on the environment. This EA will be prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9).

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Big Bend National Park invites comments from interested agencies and public in both the U.S.A. and Mexico. Big Bend National Park, in coordination, with the Texas/New Mexico Saltcedar Biocontrol Consortium, is cooperating with Mexican resource managers and landowners in this assessment of biocontrol use.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Written comments can be sent to:

Superintendent

P.O. Box 129

Big Bend National Park, Texas 79834

or you can access our website and make comments at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>. The 30-day scoping comment period starts on June 1, 2007 and ends on June 30, 2007.

--END--



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 4, 2007

Vidal Davila
432-477-1143

Big Bend National Park News Release

PUBLIC MEETINGS TO GARNER INPUT ON INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL INSECTS TO CONTROL SALT CEDAR (TAMARISK) IN BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

The National Park Service is proposing to introduce biocontrol insects (*Diorhabda elongata*.) to control saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.), an exotic invasive plant, in Big Bend National Park.

The proposed project includes the release of biocontrol agents, monitoring of agents survival and dispersal, monitoring effectiveness of agent, and monitoring of ecosystem variables such as plant community composition and wildlife use of habitat.

Big Bend National Park Superintendent Bill Wellman said, "We are proposing to use a beetle that will feed on the saltcedar and will eventually kill it. The early test results in other parts of Texas, mostly the San Angelo area, are promising and we are anxious to control saltcedar in the park." Comments from the public are welcomed in order to make a sound management decision on the use of the beetle to control this invasive plant.

The public is invited to provide input on this project proposal at two meetings; Monday, June 11, 2007, in Alpine, Texas, at Sul Ross State University, Room 210 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.; and Tuesday, June 12, 2007, at the Study Butte Community Center, Highway 118, Terlingua, Texas, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

--END--

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U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 14, 2007

Vidal Davila
432-477-1143

Big Bend National Park News Release

PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION IN BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

Big Bend National Park is proposing to develop an Environmental Assessment (EA) covering the areas of development identified in the 2004 General Management Plan for facilities supporting park operations at Panther Junction, Rio Grande Village, and Castolon. Facilities will include various housing units, including two and three bedroom houses, multiplexes units, apartments and dorms, for National Park Service, concessionaire, and Border Patrol employees living and working in Big Bend National Park. Other facilities would include NPS Ranger and Border Patrol offices and associated facilities such as boat storage, parking, etc.

The EA will be prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), and will analyze a reasonable range of alternatives and their impact on the environment.

Big Bend National Park invites comments from interested agencies and public. Please access our website and make comments at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bibe>. Written comments can be sent to: Superintendent, P.O. Box 129, Big Bend National Park, Texas, 79834. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. The 30-day scoping comment period starts on June 14, 2007 and ends on July 14, 2007.

--END--

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 9, 2007

For More Information Contact:
David Elkowitz (432) 477-1108

Big Bend National Park News Release

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK PLANS A PRESCRIBED FIRE OPERATION

Big Bend National Park plans to start prescribed fire operations the week of July 9, 2007, if environmental factors such as wind, temperature, relative humidity, and fuel moisture levels are favorable. The area to be burned includes two plots, for a total of 30 acres in the Rio Grande Village developed area, on either side of the campground. The prescribed fire is planned to last up to three days, including initial preparations, the actual burn and clean-up activities.

The burn's objectives are to remove the canopy of exotic plants (tamarisk) along this stretch of river, to begin restoration of wetlands, and to retain native vegetation such as cottonwoods and willows. In addition, prescribed fire is expected to be one of the most effective tools available to resource managers for restoring and maintaining flood dependent ecosystems.

Prescribed fires are based on burn plans that must be approved by the park Superintendent before any of the recommended actions are implemented. Park fire managers plan the prescribed burns in consultation with resource managers, and all prescribed fires are managed with firefighter and public safety as the first priority.

Thorough planning is used to minimize smoke and visitor closures; however, it is impossible to predict weather patterns and smoke behavior with complete accuracy. Smoke impacts or delays may be possible along the adjacent trails. Road, campground and trail closures will include several, but not all, regular RGV campground roads and campsites, all of the RGV group campground, RGV Nature Trail and RGV River access. These closures will be kept to the shortest timeframe possible, and are expected to last at least during the one day of fire ignition.

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Centennial Initiative News Release



Release date: Immediate

Contact(s): David Elkowitz, Chief of Interpretation

Phone number: 432-477-1108

Date: August 27, 2007

Centennial proposals eligible for matching funds

Big Bend, Texas – Big Bend National Park’s project to construct a picnic facility and trailhead for access to a proposed multi-use trail is one of 201 proposals National Park Service Director Mary Bomar and Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne announced at a press conference in Yosemite National Park today to celebrate the 91st anniversary of the NPS. The potential multi-use trail in the vicinity of Lone Mountain will still need to proceed through the environmental assessment process to allow for public comment and consideration of a range of alternatives before construction could begin.

“The National Park Service has, after a rigorous review, certified these proposals as eligible for centennial challenge matching funds,” Bomar said. “And they are ready to go in Fiscal Year 2008 which begins October 1.”

The picnic facility and access for the potential multi-use trail is one of nearly \$370 million of proposals eligible for centennial challenge matching funds. The centennial match will allow Big Bend National Park to construct a pull-through parking area, shaded picnic facilities and trailhead access to a potential multi-use hiking and biking trail around Lone Mountain in partnership with the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA); the multi-use trail still requires public input and comment through the environmental assessment process.

Director Bomar said, “The centennial challenge is a critical element in the National Park Centennial Initiative put forward by President Bush and unveiled by Secretary Kempthorne one year ago. The full centennial initiative is a potential \$3 billion investment in our national parks, two-thirds of it a public-private partnership of matching money.”

The President’s fiscal year 2008 budget called for an additional \$100 million a year for 10 years to be dedicated to bolster basic park operations, Bomar said. Congress has included the first \$100 million for operations in the fiscal year 2008 budget that awaits final passage.

“The second part of the initiative is the centennial challenge – a funding mechanism to match up to \$100 million a year over 10 years of public money with \$100 million a year for 10 years in

private donations,” Bomar said. “Congress has yet to finish legislation necessary to create the public-private centennial challenge.”

“I’ve testified before Senate and House subcommittees and judging by the warm reception we received, I believe Congress will include centennial challenge money in our next budget. We look forward to working with members from both sides of the aisle to provide the key to the centennial challenge. When that happens we can make decisions on which of these wonderful proposals to begin in the fall,” Bomar said.

Locally, Superintendent William Wellman said IMBA has committed matching money to study the feasibility and to complete required compliance of the proposed multi-use trail. "The new fiscal year begins October 1 and we are excited to get this centennial project underway."

To be certified, proposals had to be imaginative and innovative, addressed critical Service needs, had a philanthropic partner, required little or no additional recurring operating funds to be sustainable, improved the efficiency of park management, operations and employees and produced measurable results.

Other proposals:

- Lewis and Clark National Historical Park adopting the Class of 2016 with the goal of turning students to stewards.
- Additional student education through Acadia National Park’s “No Child Left Inside” project.
- Strengthening efforts to save Kemp’s Ridley sea turtles – the world’s most endangered sea turtle – with citizens assisting park rangers to observe and relocate nests on Padre Island National Seashore, the turtle’s most important U.S. nesting habitat.
- Restoration of more than 50 miles of important foot trails in Yosemite National Park.
- Climate change research of glaciers at Mount Rainier National Park and
- Utilizing scientists and volunteers to study life along the Appalachian Trail seeing national parks as an environmental barometer.

“There is a huge wave of excitement among National Park Service professionals and our partners,” Bomar said. “We will create park-based centers for Junior Rangers, implement cutting-edge energy projects like fuel cells and geothermal and build multimedia wayside exhibits that “talk” to visitors. This is a victory for national parks and over 270 million park visitors we see each year.

“Last week, I sent an email to the men and women of the National Park Service to inform them of our announcement. One of the replies I received says it best: ‘This is thrilling! A win/win opportunity like we’ve never seen before. Thanks for the energy and vision for the NPS.’

“That thanks,” Bomar said, “is for the many who worked to transform vision into action: Secretary Kempthorne and our friends in Congress, from both sides of the aisle who introduced legislation to support the Centennial. But most of all, our thanks go to park superintendents, friends groups, partners and an army of supporters.

“When history is written,” Bomar said, “the Centennial Initiative will be second only to the creation of the national park system itself.”

The full list of centennial challenge-eligible projects and programs is available on-line at the National Park Service centennial web site www.nps.gov/2016

-NPS-



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U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 14, 2007

David Elkowitz
432-477-1108

Big Bend National Park News Release

CHISOS BASIN RECEIVES OVER TWENTY INCHES OF RAINFALL FOR THE YEAR

The Chisos Mountains Basin, located in the center of Big Bend National Park, has received over twenty inches of rainfall for the calendar year. This is the second time since 1992, and the first since 2003, that rainfall in the Chisos Basin has eclipsed the twenty-inch mark.

Throughout much of the 1990's rainfall in the Big Bend region was low and drought conditions developed and persisted even unto recently. With several years of well above average precipitation in the 2000's drought conditions in the region have been lifted.

Rainfall in 2007 has been well spaced and has been more abundant than in many of the recently preceding years. This pattern has often resulted in many areas of the park having a brilliant green color and other positive effects such as healthy spring flows and many visiting bird species. The relatively high levels of rainfall should benefit much of the park's flora and fauna and possibly provide for excellent future shows of wildflowers.

Park Superintendent William E. Wellman said, "We are pleased to be receiving rainfall amounts that are in line or even above our normal expectations and look forward hopefully to an abundant spring wildflower bloom this coming season." With three months to go until year's end, the park hopes to meet or exceed annual average rainfall amounts throughout its varied areas.

--END--

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October 12, 2007

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Big Bend National Park News Release

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK BEGINS EXPANSION OF PANTHER JUNCTION VISITOR CENTER

Big Bend National Park, in partnership with Big Bend Natural History Association and the Friends of Big Bend National Park, has begun construction to rehabilitate and improve the park's main visitor center at Panther Junction. The first phase of the project will completely rehabilitate and expand the current restroom facilities including upgrading them to handicap accessible standards. The second phase will include expanding the current visitor center to allow for a larger visitor center desk, new exhibit space, and a larger and more efficient bookstore.

During construction, visitors can expect some disruption and reroutes of access. However, the visitor center remains open to serve park visitors.

Once the expansion is complete a secondary and exciting project will occur to completely replace and upgrade the visitor center's interior exhibits through funding raised by the Friends of Big Bend National Park. The design and text layout for the new exhibits is complete and fabrication is underway in anticipation of an April 2008 installation for the new exhibits.

Park Superintendent Bill Wellman said, "We are pleased with the terrific response from our partners towards making the expansion and new exhibits for Panther Junction a reality. Visitors to the park will be the true beneficiaries of these long-term efforts."

--END--

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

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



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 29, 2007

David Elkowitz
432-477-1108

Big Bend National Park News Release

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK SEEKS COMMENTS ON USE OF ASIAN BEETLE TO CONTROL SALT CEDAR

The National Park Service is seeking public comment on a proposal to use a beetle from Asia to help reduce infestations of saltcedar, also known as tamarisk. The proposal is contained in a Draft Environmental Assessment that is available for public review and comment.

A native of Asia, the Tamarisk tree has become established in many areas of the South and Southwestern United States. In the Big Bend, the non-native plant can often be found growing in abundance in drainages, near springs and along the banks of the Rio Grande. The National Park Service is responsible for preventing the damage saltcedar causes to natural resources, as it competes with and displaces native species and alters the natural environment. Despite a variety of efforts to reduce or control the spread of saltcedar, including cutting and application of herbicides, no successful and cost-effective long-term control strategy has been developed.

After extensive research to ensure the beetle would not feed on native or beneficial plants, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Bureau of Reclamation have in recent years released the beetle, *Diorhabda elongata*, into saltcedar infestations elsewhere in the western United States, including near Big Spring, Texas, and along the Rio Grande upstream of Candelaria, Texas. According to Big Bend National Park Superintendent Bill Wellman, "Initial results from other sites are promising, and we believe the beetle can play an important role in the park's struggle to prevent saltcedar from damaging the native vegetation and habitats we are responsible for protecting."

The proposed project would include studies of the beetle's survival and spread, its effect upon saltcedar, and on the response of native plants and animals.

The National Park Service is making the draft document available for a 30-day public review beginning November 5, 2007 and ending December 4, 2007. Public comments will be reviewed and addressed in the Final Environmental Assessment before a decision is made regarding the proposal.

The Environmental Assessment is available for review online at the NPS Planning, Environmental, and Public Comment (PEPC) website, <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/> and on the park website, <http://www.nps.gov/bibe/planning>. Comments may be posted on the PEPC site or mailed to: Superintendent, Attn: Saltcedar Beetle Environmental Assessment, Big Bend National Park, P.O. Box 129, Big Bend National Park, Texas 79834-0129.

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 26, 2007

David Elkowitz
432-477-1108

Big Bend National Park News Release

Big Bend National Park Seeks Public Comment on Proposed New Dorgan-Sublett Trail

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to construct a ½-mile walking trail for visitor access to the Dorgan and Sublett historic sites near the Rio Grande River between Castolon and Santa Elena Canyon in Big Bend National Park (Park). The trail would provide interpretation of the Rancho Estelle Historic District, which is important to communicating Park farming and ranching history. The trail is needed to address erosion and resource damage caused by multiple informal “social trails” formed by foot traffic from visitors exploring the historic sites adjacent to Park Route 16 (Santa Elena Canyon Road). Following trail construction, areas damaged by social trails would be rehabilitated to prevent further resource damage. The new trail would provide visitors a safer opportunity to experience important Park resources, and it would facilitate the correction of erosion problems that threaten natural and cultural resources.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzing the proposed action will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality’s regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1508.9). The EA will also include an “assessment of effect” to cultural resources, in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Big Bend National Park invites comments from interested agencies and the public. For more information, please visit the Big Bend National Park website <http://www.nps.gov/bibe/planning> or the National Park Service Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bibe>. Written comments may be submitted on the PEPC website or may be sent to: Superintendent, P.O. Box 129, Big Bend National Park, Texas, 79834.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. The 30-day scoping comment period starts on November 29, 2007 and ends on December 29, 2007.

--END--

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 3, 2007

David Elkowitz
432-477-1108

Big Bend National Park News Release

“Holiday in the National Parks” Celebrated at the White House

Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River Ornaments Displayed on the Official White House Christmas Tree

Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River ornaments are prominently displayed on this year’s official White House Christmas Tree. The tree is the centerpiece of elaborate decorations celebrating the theme of “Holiday in the National Parks.”

“It is an amazing honor for the National Park Service to be selected as the theme for the White House holiday decorations by the President and Mrs. Bush,” said National Park Service Director Mary A. Bomar. “Mrs. Bush is the best champion for our national parks, and the beautiful decorations in each state room showcase the natural and historical treasures found in parks throughout the country.”

The tree, located in the Blue Room, is adorned with handmade ornaments representing the country’s 391 National Park Service sites. “Each ornament on the magnificent 18-foot Fraser fir was designed by an artist selected by the park,” said Bomar. “The ornaments tell the stories of our parks, just as our parks tell the stories of our nation.”

The two ornaments representing Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River were created by Beatrice White, a park service employee and local artist. The Big Bend ornament features Mule Ears Peak prominently, while the Rio Grande is the focus of the Wild & Scenic River. Beatrice had the honor of attending the White House reception hosted by First Lady Laura Bush on November 28 for her contributions.

The holiday displays incorporate the wide variety of natural, cultural, and recreational features preserved by the National Park Service. Models of icons such as the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse and the Statue of Liberty share space with paintings of scenic vistas from Grand Canyon, Zion, and Rocky Mountain National Parks. Holiday garlands intertwined with park objects including seashells, pine cones, and gold aspen leaves add to each room’s festive feel.

A highlight of the decorations is a scaled-down, but architecturally accurate, gingerbread reproduction of the south view of the White House, a unit of the National Park Service. The edible masterpiece includes Bush family pets Barney, Miss Beazley, and Willie frolicking on the lawn with moose, elk, raccoons, and other animals found in national parks.

“National Parks commemorate the people, places, and events that define the American experience,” said Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne. “I am so appreciative of President Bush’s efforts to recognize the important role of national parks in American society. Our country will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016 and the President has been instrumental in establishing the National Park Centennial Initiative to prepare the parks for the next century.”

--NPS--

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

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Big Bend National Park
Christmas Bird Counts
December 28 & 29, 2007

Chisos Mountains Count
Friday, December 28

Meet:
Chisos Basin Visitor Center
parking lot
7:30 am.
Area assignments, maps,
tally sheets.

Post-count Meeting:
Friday, December 28
Panther Junction Auditorium
6:00 - 7:00 pm
Compile count data, pay
registration fee (\$5/person).

Rio Grande Village Count
Saturday, December 29

Meet:
Rio Grande Village Store
parking lot.
7:30 am
Area assignments, maps,
tally sheets.

Post-count Meeting:
Saturday, December 29
Panther Junction Auditorium
6:00 - 7:00 pm
Compile count data, pay
registration fee (\$5/person).

Come for one or both days, bring binoculars, field guides, water and snacks, and join the fun!

For more information call (432) 477-1110



Vermilion flycatcher



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 17, 2007

David Elkowitz
432-477-1108

Big Bend National Park News Release

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK TEMPORARILY RELOCATES PANTHER JUNCTION VISITOR CENTER

Construction is underway at Big Bend National Park, which in partnership with Big Bend Natural History Association and the Friends of Big Bend National Park is rehabilitating and improving the park's main visitor center at Panther Junction. The first phase of the project, to rehabilitate the facilities' restrooms, is nearly complete. The second phase, starting January 6, 2008, will include expanding the current visitor center to allow for a larger visitor center desk, new exhibit space, and a larger and more efficient bookstore. This will require that visitor center services, including information, permits, and bookstore, be temporarily located to the north side of the current compound. All the services normally found or obtained at the visitor center will remain open and available from the temporary location.

During this phase of construction, visitors can expect some disruption and reroutes of access. Signs will be posted to direct visitors from the usual parking area in front of the visitor center around the west side of the building to the temporary location.

Once the expansion is complete a third exciting project phase will occur. This phase involves completely replacing and upgrading the visitor center's interior exhibits through funding raised by the Friends of Big Bend National Park. The design and text layout for the new exhibits is complete and fabrication is underway in anticipation of an April 2008 installation for the new exhibits.

Park Superintendent Bill Wellman said, "We are pleased with work completed so far, and look forward to the project's completion in the near future. Visitors to the park will be the true beneficiaries of these long-term efforts."

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