



Fact Sheet

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

Overview

Park Purpose

Big Bend National Park’s purpose is threefold:

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

Establishment

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

Name

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

Park Significance

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



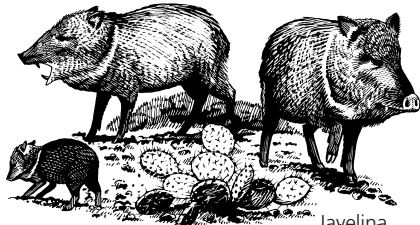
Cactus Wren

Staffing

- National Park Service Superintendent**  
Robert Krumenaker  
83 permanent employees  
26 seasonal employees
- Big Bend Natural History Association**  
3 permanent / 2 seasonal employees
- Forever Resorts (concessioner)**  
32 permanent employees  
39 seasonal employees

Volunteers in Parks

Dedicated Volunteers contribute thousands of hours to Big Bend National Park each year.



Javelina

Park Partners

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

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

Natural Resources



Century Plant

Size

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

Elevation

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

River Canyons

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

Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River

196 miles of river

US/Mexico Border

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

Landmarks and Elevations

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

Climate and Weather

Fall and spring are usually warm and pleasant. Summers are hot, although temperatures vary greatly between the desert floor and the Chisos Mountains; May and June are the hottest months. Winters are generally mild, although periods of cold weather (*including light snow*) are possible.

Average Rainfall

Chisos Basin	16.34"
Panther Junction	14.44"
Rio Grande Village	6.21"

Flora and Fauna

1,295 species of plants  
75 species mammals  
450+ species of birds  
3,600 species of insects  
56 species of reptiles  
11 species of amphibians  
38 species of fish

Major Resource Issues:

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

Cultural Resources

Human History

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

Collection Summary

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

Cataloged Museum Objects

287,342

Archeological Resources

Nearly 2,340 sites (8% of park surveyed to date)

National Register of Historic Places

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

Visitor Services

Visitation

In 2021 581,000 visitors enjoyed Big Bend NP

Frontcountry Camping

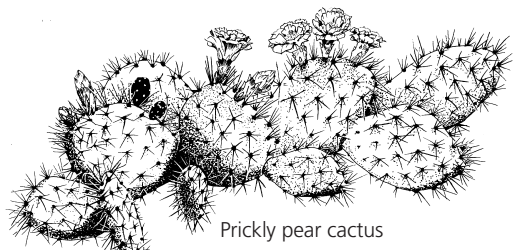
Chisos Basin Campground: 63 sites  
Cottonwood Campground: 31 sites  
Rio Grande Village Campground: 100 sites  
Rio Grande Village RV Park (hookups): 25 sites

Picnic Areas

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

Backcountry Camping

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



Prickly pear cactus

Hiking trails

201 miles

Roads

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

Concessioner

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

Major Visitor Activities

Camping  
Hiking/Backpacking  
Rafting/Canoeing  
Birdwatching/Wildlife Viewing  
Night Sky Viewing  
Exploring Backcountry Roads  
Enjoying Scenic Drives  
Exploring Historic Sites  
Attending Guided Ranger Programs