



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

White Sands National Monument

PO Box 1086
Holloman AFB, NM 88330

Phone 575-479-6124
www.nps.gov/whsa

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Purpose Statement

White Sands National Monument protects the world's largest geologically unique gypsum dunefield, and the flora and fauna living within it, while providing educational, research, and recreational opportunities compatible with the protection of the resources and maintenance of the solitude and silence of the dunes.

Significance Statements

In 1933, President Hoover established White Sands National Monument for the preservation of the world's largest gypsum dunefield and its sources of gypsum sand. This enormous dunefield—over 275 square miles in size—is used by astronauts in space as a geographic reference.

The hydrologic, geologic, and climatic forces of the Tularosa Basin create the gypsum cycle that gave birth to and sustains this active and dynamic gypsum dunefield. Rainfall, ground water, and a regional aquifer are essential ingredients that nourish the world's largest gypsum dunefield.

Vast and brilliant white, the geologically young—less than 10,000 years old—gypsum dunefield has provided the conditions for evolution through rapid adaptation in the flora and fauna of the dunefield and surrounding desert scrub communities. Adapted “white-colored” species include an animal from every class of vertebrate in North America.

Legislated to protect resources of scientific interest, the uniqueness of White Sands National Monument promotes a wide range of innovative research that globally leads the way in the fields of rapid evolution and dune dynamics. Internationally recognized experts in their fields study aspects of the monument to expand understanding in subjects as diverse as soil micro fauna to space exploration.

At first glance, the dunefield appears inhospitable and uninhabitable, yet the monument protects numerous and diverse evidence of over 10,000 years of human history. The physical properties of gypsum create a time capsule when heated, preserving dateable charcoal, plant, and animal remains, and other cultural material; producing unique archaeological sites called gypsum hearth mounds not known to occur anywhere else in the world.

The monument protects a mega-track site containing the highest density of fossilized Pleistocene animal tracks in North America. These highly ephemeral tracks are found in sediments of ancient Lake Otero and range in age from 20,000 to 40,000 years old. The tracks in the sand and lake sediments are revealed in an unpredictable manner by wind and rain.

White and stark, the awe-inspiring dunefield offers distinctive opportunities to hike barefoot on moist and cool sands, sand sled year-round, and experience solitude broken only by wind and occasional military sounds. This unique setting inspires learning, appreciation, and stewardship.

Summary of Legislative History

January 18, 1933: White Sands National Monument established by President Herbert Hoover with Presidential Proclamation No 2025 (47 Stat. 2551).

November 28, 1934: Boundaries enlarged by Presidential Proclamation No 2108 (49 Stat. 3426).

August 29, 1938: Boundaries modified by Presidential Proclamation No 2295, eliminates all sections included in the right-of-way for United States Highway Route 70 (53 Stat. 2465).

June 6, 1942: Former White Sands Recreational Demonstration Project added to the monument (56 Stat. 327).

June 27, 1953: Public lands added to the monument. Presidential Proclamation No. 3024 (18 F.R. 3683).

November 10, 1978: Monument boundaries adjusted by adding certain lands and deleting others (92 Stat. 3467).

September 28, 1996: Monument boundaries adjusted by adding certain lands and deleting others (110 Stat. 2803).