

Many Parks, Two Countries, One Ecoregion (shared management for the Chihuahuan Desert)



U.S. – Mexico Sister Park Bi-national Monitoring Workshop August 24-28, 2015

Through August 24-28, 2015, Mexican Protected Areas, National Park Service (NPS) Parks, and NPS Inventory and Monitoring Network all from the Chihuahuan Desert Ecoregion came together for a bi-national meeting held at Big Bend National Park. The meeting was also attended by the Northern Director of the Mexican Protected Areas, National representatives from the Mexican Protected Areas, the Intermountain Regional Coordinator for the I&M Networks and members from the Sonoran Desert I&M Network. The primary objective of the workshop was to reach beyond the park and protected area boundaries to develop a framework for collaboration, understanding, and management for the entire Chihuahuan Desert Ecoregion.

The 2015 bi-national workshop was focused on the monitoring efforts within Sister Parks in the U.S. and Mexico Chihuahuan Desert. The goal of the meeting was to exchange ideas, approaches, and techniques of scientific monitoring, data management, and applications, as well conservation of shared resources. The international sister park relationships are authorized under the Joint Declaration of Sister Park Partnerships by the NPS and the Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP), which in turn is based on a series of environmental cooperation agreements between the U.S. and Mexico dating back to 1997. Three of NPS units within the Chihuahuan Desert have sister parks located in the same ecoregion that share similar natural resources these are Big Bend National Park, Guadalupe Mountains National Park, White Sands National Monument, and their associated

sister parks Cañón de Santa Elena ,Ocampo, Maderas del Carmen, La Michilia, and Cuatrociénegas. The participants at this event included U.S. National Park Service and the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas of the Natural Resources and Environment Secretariat of Mexico (SEMARNAT/CONANP).



The August meeting was the second Phase of a three Phased approach. Phase 1 was articulated at a meeting held in August 2013 the Chihuahuan Deserts Parks and their associated sister parks (Cañón de Santa Elena, Ocampo, Maderas del Carmen, La Michilia, and Cuatrociénegas). CONANP (roughly the Mexican equivalent of the NPS) is in the early stages of developing and implementing a coherent monitoring program across their units. CONANP staff attending the 2013 meeting specifically requested assistance with development of their program. For Phase 2 the Sister Parks, in collaboration with the Inventory & Monitoring Networks, came together this year to share monitoring techniques and protocols, chose a set of vital signs that can be established throughout the Chihuahuan Desert Ecoregion, and drafted a framework outline to document and accomplish the shared effort. We will continue this exchange with the third phase that will consist of developing a set of five conceptual models and continue with the process started in Phase 2 for implementing the monitoring of vital signs for the most critical shared resources and issues. The five models identified during the Phase II workshop include water (both surface and groundwater), climate change, threatened and endangered species, animals of special interest, and invasive species such as the cactus moth.

The NPS Parks and Mexican Protected Areas have been given the mission to protect and preserve the most unique and best representative areas of the entire Chihuahuan Desert. Having Sister Park units of shared resources provides a great analog for how a system can and should function (it also provide strong justification for protection and correction for conservation issues). Establishing a monitoring network with partnership across the entire ecoregion will allow for an early warning system for the invasion of the cactus moth, the effects of climate change, and lead to the rapid advancement in monitoring techniques and exchange of information over the entire ecosystem.

Working bi-nationally allows us to spearhead conservation through public outreach, education, and interpretation across the entire ecoregion.



Although there is still much to be done, there has been great progress in developing a strong partnership between Chihuahuan Desert Parks, and like all good journey this one began with a single step. All of the sister park units and protected areas are extremely grateful for the leadership and support for the Southwest Border Resource Protection Program and the international park and border crossing that has greatly aided in the formation of this important partnership.