

## WILDERNESS IN BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

Nestled in southwest Texas, the vast, 800,000-acre expanse of Big Bend National Park features pristine desert landscapes, lush river canyons, and scenic mountains. Flanked by the Wild and Scenic Rio Grande River along the United States-Mexico border, Big Bend is a crown jewel and tremendous resource for residents and visitors alike.

### **A PLACE FOR NATURE AND FOR PEOPLE**

Big Bend is home to an amazing array of plants and animals, including over 450 species of birds, 75 varieties of mammal and 67 types amphibians and reptiles. In fact, the park is home to more tropical butterflies, birds, cacti, and bats than any other park in the United States. The park also provides refuge for numerous imperiled species, including the black-capped vireo, Mexican long-nosed bat, Lloyd's mariposa cactus, and Cory cactus.



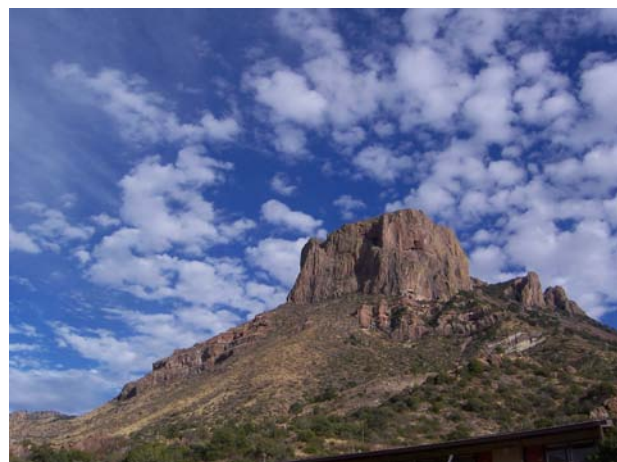
Alan Spears

Big Bend's majestic mountains, cool rivers, and lush canyons provide a welcoming environment for visitors and each year, over 350,000 visitors enjoy the park's wonderful natural features and scenic beauty. Big Bend offers many recreational options for its visitors, from camping and wildlife watching, to hiking and boating. These visitors bring needed economic resources to local communities.

Cultural resources in the park range from the Paleo-Indian period 10,500 years ago through the historic period represented by Native American groups, such as the Chisos, Mescaleros, and Comanche.

### **Big Bend National Park Wilderness**

In 1984, to protect the wild and remote nature of Big Bend, the administration of President Reagan recommended that Congress designate 533,900 acres of the park as federally protected wilderness. A quarter century later, Congress has still not acted on this proposal.



Courtney Lyons-Garcia

Wilderness designation provides the highest level of protection available to public lands. Such a designation is often applied to backcountry portions of natural parks to help

ensure that these areas remain undisturbed. Yosemite National Park, for example, contains over 700,000 acres of fully protected wilderness. These areas are kept in a natural condition and remain free from roads and development so that visitors to the park can enjoy them in a natural state.

### **BENEFITS OF WILDERNESS DESIGNATION WITHIN THE PARK**

Wilderness designation at Big Bend will help ensure that the park's natural resources, including its plants and animals, water and air quality, and cultural resources, are preserved in perpetuity. This designation will also ensure that visitors to Big Bend will always be able to enjoy the park's backcountry in its natural state.

And Texans love their parks. According to one survey, close to four million Texans—nearly a quarter of the state's population—enjoy trail hiking.<sup>1</sup>

Protecting wilderness within Big Bend also makes sense economically. By attracting visitors who enjoy outdoor recreation like fishing, bird watching, hiking, camping and boating, wilderness areas strengthen rural economies. Wilderness and other protective designations have been shown to increase local tourism and to attract new residents who treasure the quality of life that reserved lands provide. This preservation is crucial for maintaining a healthy local economy.



Courtesy of Wilderness.net

### **Wilderness designation in Big Bend National Park will:**

- Ensure that backcountry areas of the park remain in a natural condition.
- Provide outstanding outdoor recreation while supporting local economies.
- Help protect plants and animals that live within the park.

Nationwide, outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion to the American economy, while supporting 6.5 million jobs.<sup>2</sup> Outdoor recreation in Texas national forests generates \$8.4 billion in economic activity across the state each year.<sup>3</sup> Designating wilderness in Big Bend could help spur this economic development.

***Congress should finally act upon President Reagan's recommendation and designate the wilderness within Big Bend National Park.***

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<sup>1</sup> Environment Texas Research and Policy Center. 2007. *Worth More Wild: The Value of Texas' National Forest Roadless Areas*.

<sup>2</sup> Outdoor Industry Foundation. 2006. *The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy: A \$730 Billion Contribution to the U.S. Economy*. Available at <http://www.outdoorindustry.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Interior. 2007. Preliminary State Reports, 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. Available at [http://library.fws.gov/nat\\_survey2006\\_state.pdf](http://library.fws.gov/nat_survey2006_state.pdf).