

Questions and Answers on Recommended Wilderness Within Big Bend National Park

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Question: Why designate wilderness within Big Bend National Park?

Answer: Wilderness designation ensures that an area's natural resources and wilderness values are preserved in perpetuity. Wilderness areas remain open to hiking, camping, fishing, and other forms of recreation, but are closed to development and motorized and mechanized vehicles. This will help to ensure that the wonderful ecosystems of Big Bend are maintained in a natural state for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

Question: What parts of the park qualify for wilderness designation?

Answer: The National Park Service has identified 533,900 acres in 13 separate units that qualify for wilderness within Big Bend. These units contain all or part of the Chisos Mountains, Mesa de Anguila, Burro Mesa, the north part of Santa Elena Canyon, Pulliam Peak, Mariscal Mountain and the north side of Mariscal Canyon, Talley Mountain, Chilicotal Mountain, Boquillas Canyon, Sierra del Carmen Mountains, Paint Gap Hills, McKinney Hills, Slickrock Mountains, Little Christmas Mountains, and Maverick Mountains.

Question: How does the National Park Service view wilderness in Big Bend?

Answer: In 1974, the National Park Service surveyed the entire park and recommended 533,900 acres to be designated as wilderness. In 1984, President Reagan's administration completed an environmental review and proposed that these areas be designated as wilderness. That recommendation was carried forward in the park's 2004 management plan that still governs the park today. *The wilderness recommendation has spanned six separate presidential administrations over 35 years and is endorsed by current National Park Service leadership.*

Question: How would current park use be affected by wilderness designation?

Answer: National Park Service regulations require that agency recommended wilderness be managed as wilderness. Since 1984, the Park Service has managed the 533,900 acres of recommended wilderness within Big Bend as if it were wilderness. Wilderness designation would not have any impact on current park uses, including driving on dirt roads, mountain biking, or visitor or staff facilities.

Question: What activities are allowed in wilderness?

Answer: Wilderness areas remain open to hiking, camping, horseback riding, and fishing—in short, all of the activities that are currently allowed in these areas would continue to be allowed if the areas were designated wilderness.

Question: Which areas of the park are outside of recommended wilderness?

Answer: All dirt and paved roads are excluded from recommended wilderness. Also, other developed portions of the park, including the visitor's center, visitor housing, park headquarters, Rio Grande Village, Panther Junction, and Chisos Basin are excluded from recommended wilderness. Activities in these areas would not be affected by wilderness designation.

Question: Who supports designating wilderness in the park?

Answer: Current supporters include the National Parks Conservation Association, Friends of Big Bend, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, and The Wilderness Society. Other supporters will be added as the effort progresses. When the Park Service unveiled its original recommendations in 1974, the agency noted after a public hearing that "the overwhelming sentiment was for more wilderness."

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