

# DEVILS RIVER STATE NATURAL AREA



**GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
**- Initial Draft -**

## Table of Contents

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<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Site Description.....	1
Site Mission and Goals .....	1
Site Purpose .....	1
Site Significance.....	1
Site Mission .....	2
State Natural Area Guidelines and Classification .....	2
<b>Present Public Access and Use (2011)</b> .....	<b>5</b>
DRSNA - North Unit.....	5
DRSNA - South Unit.....	7
<b>Proposed Public Use - DRSNA</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Orientation Requirements .....	8
Public Use Permit Requirements/Fees.....	8
Activities and Uses .....	8
River Use .....	8
Hiking.....	8
Camping.....	8
Mountain Biking (MTB).....	8
Canyoneering and Bouldering.....	9
Equestrian Use .....	9
Public Hunting .....	9
Educational/Non-profit Groups.....	9
Scientific Research.....	10
Special Use Permits.....	10
Other Uses .....	10
Commercial Use.....	10
Commercial Permits/Commercially Guided Tours .....	10
<b>Public Use DRSNA - North Unit</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Day-Use Permits.....	11
“Devils River” Special Use Parking Permit.....	11
“Devils River Put-In & Take-Out” Special Use Permit.....	11
Overnight Permits .....	11
Bunkhouse & Dining Hall .....	11
River Cabin.....	12
Designated Campsites .....	12
Backcountry Zone Camping .....	13
Equestrian Camping .....	13
Volunteer Camp Host Sites.....	13
<b>Public Use DRSNA - South Unit</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Day Use Permits.....	15
River Day-Use Areas.....	15
River Access .....	15
River Launch Site Configuration .....	15
‘Devils River Put-In & Take-Out’ Special Use Permit .....	15
Overnight Use/Permits.....	16
Cabins and Facilities.....	16
Camping.....	16
Backcountry Zone Camping .....	18

<b>Recreational Management Zones</b> .....	<b>20</b>
River Corridor Zone (RCZ) .....	20
Backcountry Zone (BCZ) .....	20
Backcountry Camping .....	20
Backcountry Overnight Capacities.....	22
Backcountry Caches .....	23
<b>Trail System</b> .....	<b>26</b>
Trails and Cross-country Hiking.....	26
<b>Environment</b> .....	<b>27</b>
Noise.....	27
Light and Night Sky .....	27
Water Use .....	27
Designated Water Use Areas .....	28
Fires .....	28
Designated Campsites .....	28
Backcountry .....	28
Backcountry and Campsite Sanitation.....	28
Trash.....	28
Pets .....	28
Signage .....	29
Location & Information.....	29
Boundary .....	29
<b>Road Development and Definitions</b> .....	<b>30</b>
Motorized Vehicle Restrictions.....	30
Definitions.....	30
Road Closures .....	30
<b>Administrative Infrastructure</b> .....	<b>31</b>
Existing.....	31
New.....	31

## Table of Figures

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Figure 1 – Devils River State Natural Area – Location Map .....	4
Figure 2 – North Unit – Existing Conditions Map.....	6
Figure 3 – South Unit – Existing Conditions Map.....	7
Figure 4 – North Unit Public Use Plan Map .....	14
Figure 5 – South Unit Public Use Plan Map .....	19
Figure 6 – North Unit Recreational Management Zones .....	24
Figure 7 – South Unit Recreational Management Zones .....	25

## Table of Tables

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Table 1 – North Unit Campsites .....	12
Table 2 – South Unit Campsites .....	17
Table 3 – Backcountry Zones .....	22
Table 4 – Trail System.....	26

# Introduction

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The General Management Plan (GMP) for the Devils River State Natural Area (DRSNA) is intended to provide direction for developing and managing public access, recreational use, natural and cultural resource management and protection for the areas. The plan covers both DRSNA units. The original northern unit, purchased in 1988, will be known as the Devils River State Natural Area – North Unit (DRSNA-North Unit). The lower Devils River Ranch unit purchased in 2011 will be known as Devils River State Natural Area-South Unit (DRSNA-South Unit).

Through approval and implementation of this plan, and consistent with resource stewardship, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) will provide appropriate public access and resource-based recreational opportunities to the SNA. This plan will provide visitors the opportunity to experience a wild, rugged, and isolated setting. Visitors will be able to have single and multi-day recreational adventures to include hiking, backpacking, camping, equestrian, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, four-wheel drive touring, mountain biking, and limited hunting. This plan also supports scientific investigation of the park's natural and cultural resources and environmental educational and interpretive opportunities in order to better educate visitors about the unique resources and history of the area.

This GMP is intended to be a dynamic document which will be subject to modification as more knowledge of visitor use patterns and/or the natural environment change, or negative impacts occur. Should proposed changes in types of use or management of the park be necessary, such proposed changes will be made available to the public for comment prior to implementation. Should any proposed changes affect stipulations of the conservation easements held by the Texas Nature Conservancy (TNC), the TNC will be consulted. This plan shall remain in effect until it is superseded by future planning documents.

## Site Description

Devils River State Natural Area is located on the Devils River north of Del Rio, Texas, and conserves nearly 38,000 acres at the confluence of Chihuahuan Desert from the west, Edwards Plateau to the north, and Tamaulipan shrub land to the south and east. Collectively this SNA holds 10.8 miles of river and lake frontage. The Devils River State Natural Area was acquired through two land transactions. The first parcel, the North Unit (19,988 acres), was purchased in 1988. The second parcel, the South Unit (17,639 acres), was acquired in 2011. South is contiguous with the Devils River arm of Amistad National Recreational Area (AMIS). In fact, AMIS extends upstream along the Devils River to the 1144.3 elevation just downstream of River Mile 32.

## Site Mission and Goals

### Site Purpose

The SNA's purpose is to protect the area's natural and cultural resources, with special emphasis on endangered and threatened species, aquatic life and spring flows and to provide recreational and educational opportunities to the citizens of Texas, and others, that do not compromise resource stewardship objectives.

### Site Significance

DRSNA provides landscape-level conservation for a remarkable suite of natural and cultural resources. Among the most remarkable elements are well-preserved rock art in pictograph form

from Archaic time through European contact together with their associated habitation sites; a rich historic landscape reflecting frontier Texas, and corridors west; and early Anglo agricultural enterprises through modern large scale hunting ranches. Devils River is among the most intact spring-fed stream segments in the American Southwest and offers a superb opportunity for adventure river recreation. DRSNA at the juncture of three natural regions offers a remarkable diversity of terrestrial and aquatic life together with the most pristine water quality in Texas. The SNA functions as the core of a public/private conservation area dedicated to maintaining a relatively natural, undeveloped landscape for present and future generations.

### **Site Mission**

The specific mission of DRSNA is to uphold the mission of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD): To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

### **State Natural Area Guidelines and Classification**

Public use and recreational development will be consistent with the guidelines established in the Texas Administrative Code.

Title 31 - Natural Resources and Conservation

Part 2 - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Chapter 59 - Parks

Subchapter D - Administration of the State Park System

Rule §59.64 Classification and Guidelines

(b) State Natural Areas. State Natural Areas are areas established for the protection and stewardship of outstanding natural attributes of statewide significance, which may be used in a sustainable manner for scientific research, education, aesthetic enjoyment, and appropriate public use not detrimental to the primary purposes.

(1) Selection.

(A) State Natural Areas should encompass examples of natural scenic beauty, natural communities, biological features, sensitive areas, or geological formations of statewide significance, or possess exceptional educational or scientific values.

(B) State Natural Areas should be large enough to protect the integrity of the features being protected, with adequate buffers to provide for public access and resource protection, and where feasible, include sufficient area to provide for a wilderness-type experience.

(C) New acquisitions should be selected on a priority basis determined by statewide significance, natural condition, and the degree to which the resource is threatened.

(D) State Natural Areas which duplicate the primary significance of a site presently preserved in public ownership will receive a lower priority for acquisition than those types of areas currently unrepresented in the public domain.

(2) Development.

(A) Development in State Natural Areas should be low-density in nature and limited to that appropriate for adequate control and sustainability of the resource, and for visitor access.

(B) Recreational development should be provided only where it facilitates additional appreciation of the unique resource and should not be detrimental to the natural environment nor encroach upon, damage or impair the scenic or natural features concerned.

(3) Operation.

(A) State Natural Areas should be operated in an economically efficient manner, emphasizing resource protection over public use and revenue generation.

- (B) Visitor information and interpretation should be emphasized in State Natural Areas to increase the visitor's understanding and appreciation of the resource being preserved.
- (4) Use.
- (A) State Natural Areas should accommodate low impact, resource oriented recreation, not detrimental to the continued preservation and stewardship of the natural and cultural features as outlined in the site management plan.
  - (B) State Natural Areas may provide public hunting opportunity when such use is not detrimental to the primary goals and management of the area and as sound biological management, location, physical conditions, safety and other uses permit.
- (5) Management.
- (A) State Natural Areas should be managed, consistent with the site management plan, to insure the protection and perpetuation of the scenic or outstanding natural features.
  - (B) Habitat management should emphasize maintenance or restoration of natural communities and natural biodiversity, consistent with the primary goals of the area.
  - (C) State Natural Areas should be managed, consistent with the site management plan, to address habitat needs of indigenous flora and fauna including species and communities listed as threatened or endangered or species of special concern as identified by staff.

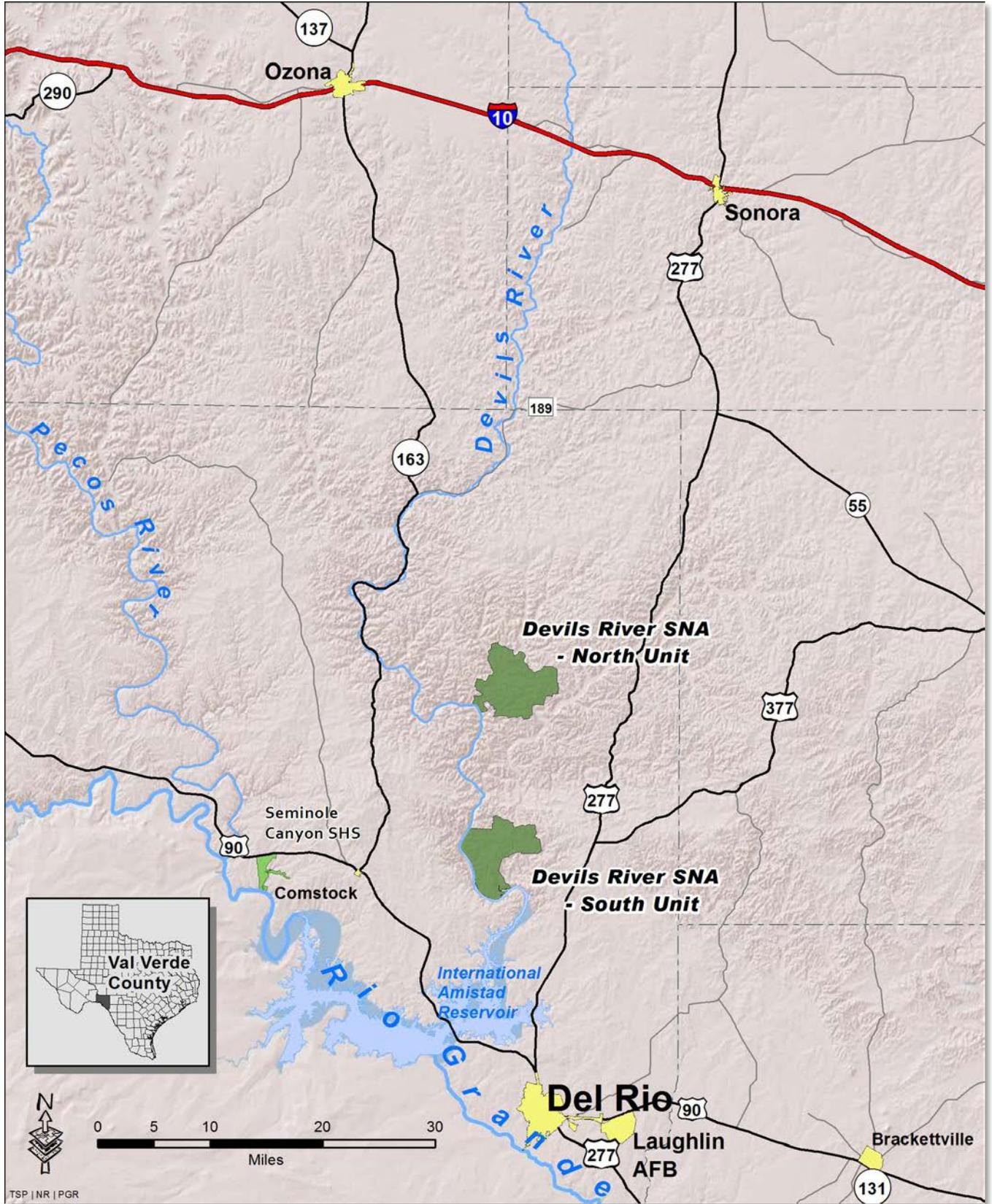


Figure 1 – Devils River State Natural Area – Location Map

## **Present Public Access and Use (2011)**

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### **DRSNA - North Unit**

A few trails and primitive campsites are available for use. Visitors may travel the two-wheel drive dirt road into the site from US Highway 377 and hike a designated trail unescorted. A limited public hunting program was added in 1999.

A permit is required for all persons entering the natural area for day use and/or camping. Permits must be obtained from the SNA headquarters. There are no limits on numbers of day users. For a 12 month period in 2010/2011 there were approximately 1,800 visitors. Camping reservations can be obtained from the Texas State Parks Customer Service Center. Overnight camping numbers are restricted to the number of campsites multiplied by the numbers of campers per campsite allowed.

Current visitor use/facilities/ activities include:

- 9.8 miles of main-access, drivable dirt road
- Recreational activities: hiking, backpacking, and mountain biking on about 6 miles of non-motorized jeep trails and/or other primary park roads (no off-road or off-trail hiking allowed)
- Camping in 7 vehicle accessible primitive campsites. "4 people maximum" limit per site
- River access by floating down the Devils River: canoeing, kayaking (no vehicle access to river)
- 4 river campsites (accessible and usable only by kayak or canoe parties). "4 people maximum" limit per site
- River access by hiking one mile down a road to the river
- River trail: one mile of hiking along river frontage on old ranch road
- River cabin: 7 people occupancy
- Primitive bunkhouse: 10 person occupancy/showers/toilets
- Primitive dining hall/kitchen: in a state of marginal repair
- Fishing on the Devils River
- Birding and nature study
- Stargazing
- Limited hunting for exotic species, by permit

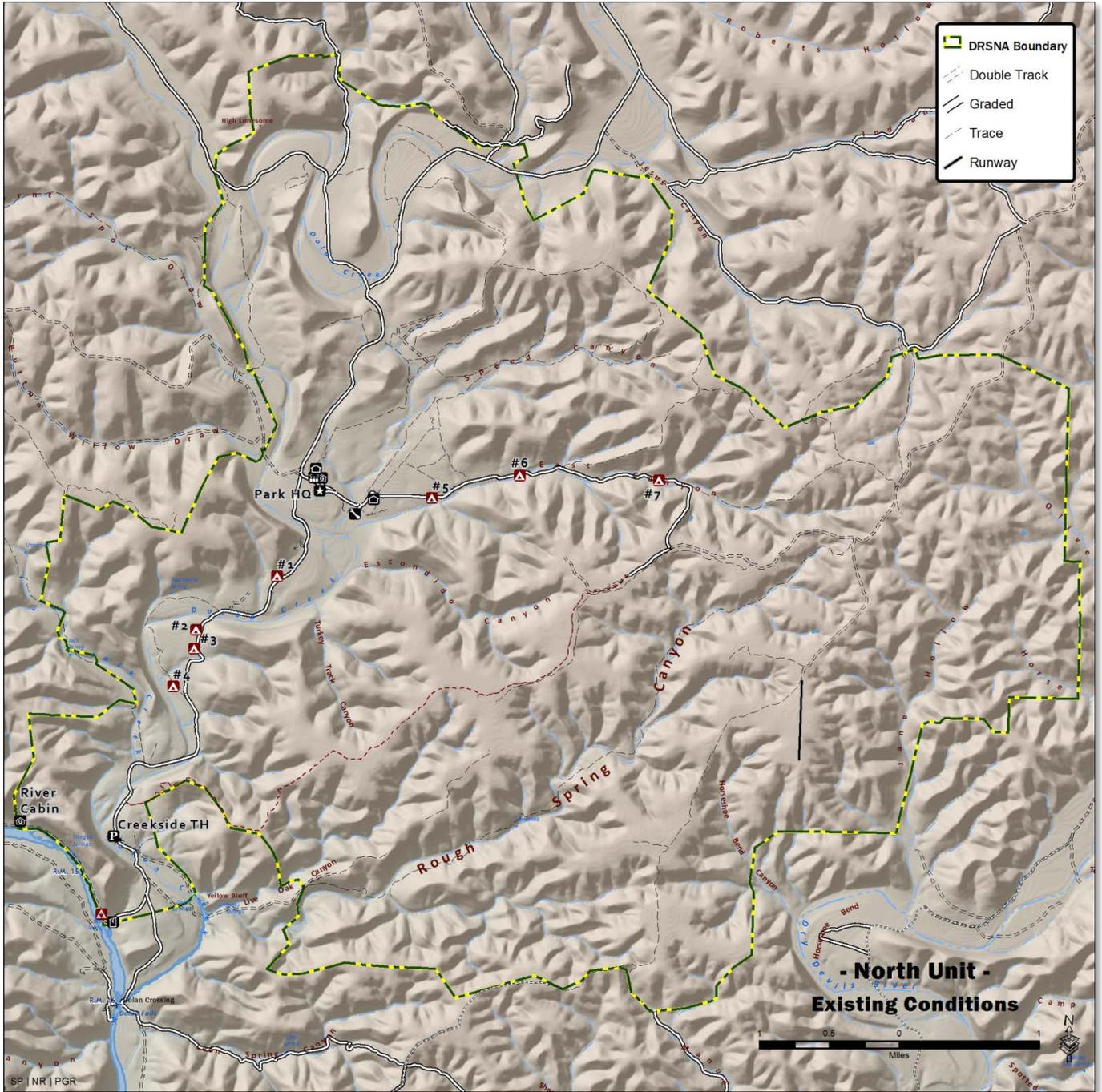


Figure 2 – North Unit – Existing Conditions Map

# DRSNA - South Unit

Currently closed to public use pending adoption of Public Use Plan.

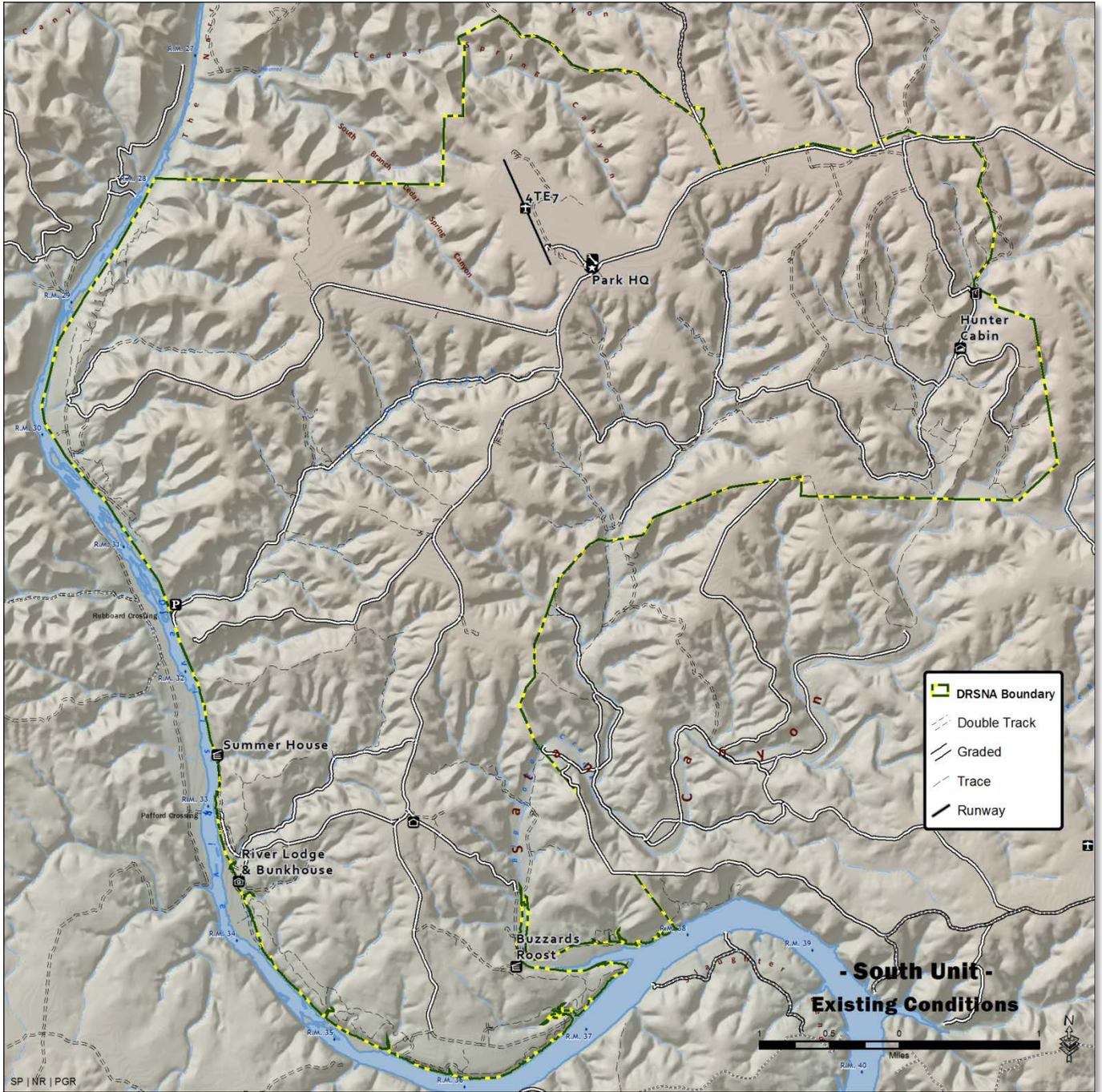


Figure 3 – South Unit – Existing Conditions Map

# **Proposed Public Use - DRSNA**

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## **Orientation Requirements**

To enhance visitor safety and the visitor experience, and to protect natural and cultural resources, all visitors will be required to receive an orientation on the proper use of DRSNA, including advisement of the location of private lands. Orientation materials and requirements will vary depending on the visitor's intended activities and areas of interest at the park. The orientation will introduce the DRSNA landscape, rules, safety, water use, sanitation, vehicle requirements, land ethics, etc.

## **Public Use Permit Requirements/Fees**

Permits will be required for public access and use of the SNA.

Advanced reservations for any required permit may be made from 11 months out up until the "day of" a visit, through the TPWD Customer Service Center (CSC) central reservation system. The use of online internet reservations is being development and is partly available.

"Same-day" use of the SNA and available (non-reserved) campsites or overnight facilities will be on a first come first served basis...based on the availability of permits.

All permits (advanced reservation and 'same day') will be issued at the North Unit and South Unit headquarters.

Daily entrance, camping, and other special user fees will apply.

## **Activities and Uses**

### **River Use**

Kayaking, canoeing, snorkeling, and fishing within the river use corridor are all compatible recreational pursuits conducive to SNA visitor use activities. No special-use permit is required unless overnight camping. All state park policies, rules, and regulations apply.

### **Hiking**

Hiking is encouraged and represents an opportunity to view and experience DRSNA. It is recommended that visitors utilize existing trails for hiking. Cross-country hiking, canyoneering, exploration and river walking is permitted, exclusive of any areas under a close order. Minimal hiking trails will be developed. Existing wildlife and old ranch jeep trails/roads will mostly be utilized.

### **Camping**

Camping is allowed only at designated campsites or under backcountry zone criteria.

### **Mountain Biking (MTB)**

In general, mountain biking will be allowed on all existing trails and roads, including those closed to vehicular traffic. Additionally, TPWD staff may limit access to selected trails where continued use is not consistent with resource management or creates a trail user conflict. Competition-based

or intensive sport trail riding and mountain biking requires a special use permit. Off-trail and off-road cross-country MTB is prohibited.

### **Canyoneering and Bouldering**

Rugged, craggy, highly fractured, relatively soft rock is common at DRSNA. Predominantly, the rock does not offer favorable approaches and most bluffs are unstable. Notwithstanding, non-technical free climbing and canyoneering is allowed. Any and all climbing activities are prohibited in rock shelters or at petroglyphs / pictograph sites. Climbing requiring fixed protection or aided climbing is prohibited. To preserve the beauty of DRSNA and offer the opportunity for visitors to experience solitude, sport, and the challenge of exploring; canyoneering and bouldering is authorized.

### **Equestrian Use**

Horseback riding represents an additional method to view and appreciate DRSNA. Equestrian activities will be allowed in all areas of the SNA unless specifically excluded. Pack and saddle stock is defined as horses, burros or mules. All pack and saddle stock users must obtain a backcountry use permit, whether for day use or overnight. Prerequisite to receiving any permit is a current (12 months or less since testing) Coggins Certificate indicating a negative result on an Equine Infectious Anemia test.

There are no front-country campsites available for stock use at this time in the North Unit. Stock is not allowed at any of the eight designated auto campsites. If future stock use warrants, a stock-friendly designated, auto-accessible campsite may be developed. An equestrian primitive campsite with corrals and water is proposed in the South Unit.

Visitors may camp with stock in the backcountry zones, with a permit. Overnight backcountry camping group sizes are limited to the standard backcountry group size of six individuals, with no more than a total of 9 animals.

Existing windmills and water systems will be evaluated to determine maintenance needs and their viability in support of equestrian use.

To protect park resources and minimize introduction of alien plant species, TPWD requests that all pack and saddle stock be fed pelletized feed or weed-free hay for 48 hours in advance of and for the duration of the trip.

### **Public Hunting**

Public hunting opportunities may be provided at DRSNA. An emphasis will be placed on exotic and feral species with the objective of zero population. Particular emphasis will be placed upon removal of Aoudad consistent with State Parks Division Procedure: SP-PRO-4.B.3, Exotic, Feral and Nuisance Animal Control. Hunting schedules and numbers are set annually. All public hunts must be biologically sound, promote conservation of the resource, adequately address public safety, and be compatible with other priority uses of the natural area. The availability of campsites and Recreational Management Zone use will be coordinated with the Public Hunt schedules for public awareness and safety.

### **Educational/Non-profit Groups**

Texas State Parks may establish guidelines for the use of DRSNA by educational and nonprofit organizations. Use by organizations in these categories will be encouraged. Criteria to evaluate requests for fee waivers will be established based on state park policies.

### **Scientific Research**

Problem-oriented research is encouraged under a vetting and permits system administered by State Parks Natural Resources Program,

### **Special Use Permits**

Texas State Parks will establish guidelines and protocols to deal with requests for special uses of the SNA. All special-use requests must demonstrate that the proposed activities are compatible with SNA's programs and purpose. All special uses will be managed through a permit system and shall not adversely impact resources or displace other user groups. Fees for Special Use Permits will be set to cover the cost associated with the administration of the permit or activity.

### **Other Uses**

A myriad of other outdoor uses are available and include: picnicking; star gazing; birding; photography; geocaching; etc. There are no special permit requirements unless the activity is being conducted as part of an organized group.

## **Commercial Use**

### **Commercial Permits/Commercially Guided Tours**

TPWD recognizes that commercially operated tours can promote public access for those individuals apprehensive of such primitive area adventures or who may be looking for a recreational experience that they are unable to provide themselves. TPWD may issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to provide commercial guide service in Devils River State Natural Area. Potential services may include: equestrian trips, mountain-bike tours, camp outs, rafting, canoeing and kayaking, guided fishing, 4x4 tours, combination trips, nature/birding hikes and art and photography classes.

Any such activities would adhere to the established rules for park use, including overnight use.

## **Public Use DRSNA - North Unit**

Public use is allowed except where specifically restricted. Motorized use is restricted to designated open roads.

### **Day-Use Permits**

All visitors are required to obtain a permit for entry into the natural area for general day use. At present, there are no recommended limits on the number of day users visiting the DRSNA – North Unit. If, in the future, the number of day-use visitors becomes problematic from a resource protection or visitor use conflict perspective, daily use restrictions may be developed.

#### **“Devils River” Special Use Parking Permit**

Five vehicles per day will be allowed to access the river and park in the designated parking sites in proximity (approximately 200 yards away and out of sight of the river) to the Raccoon Point Day Use area near the Devils River. A passenger vehicle is defined as a vehicle designed to carry passengers with a capacity of 12 or less people. These permits may be reserved through the CSC (non-refundable permit) or picked up at the SNA headquarters on a first come first serve basis for those permits not reserved in advance. All other visitors will be required to park at the designated parking area approximately 1 mile from the river.

#### **“Devils River Put-In & Take-Out” Special Use Permit**

Paddlers who have a permit to paddle from Raccoon Point to Devils Back or downstream, may obtain a permit to drive to and “put in” at Raccoon Point.

Paddlers who have a permit (once permits are required) to launch from Bakers Crossing may obtain a permit to “take out” at Raccoon Point.

“Put-in/take-out” Special Use Permits do not allow for parking at the Raccoon Point day-use area or parking sites and are not considered a part of the five vehicles “Special Use Parking” number. Only active launching and/or take-out activities will be allowed by these users.

### **Overnight Permits**

Permits are required for all overnight users. Campsites/facilities may be reserved in advance from 11 months out up until the “day of” a visit, through the TPWD Customer Service Center (CSC) central reservation system. Same-day use of available (non-reserved) campsites or overnight facilities will be on a first come first served basis and the permits may be obtained at the SNA headquarters. The use of online Internet reservations for designated campsites and other permits is pending development and implementation of appropriate online systems.

The number of overnight visitors will be restricted to the number of available designated campsites and bunk spaces, along with three backcountry “Zone” backpacking permits.

### **Bunkhouse & Dining Hall**

The bunkhouse and dining hall are rustic, older facilities located in proximity to the North Unit headquarters. Each is currently used by the public to a limited degree. The bunkhouse consists of five bedrooms, each with two single beds, and a modest common room. Restrooms and showers are available. The dining hall is an older facility with a large commercial-type kitchen, dining area, and large living room.

For the purposes of this public use plan, these facilities will maintain their current function.

Reservations are required and must be made through the CSC.

**River Cabin**

This rustic cabin near the Devils River is located approximately 200 feet from the river’s edge and is adjacent to the western boundary of the natural area. It lies approximately one mile upstream from the nearest parking. This older facility sleeps 6-8 in a common sleeping space, and has a bathroom with shower, and a kitchen. Public access to this facility will be limited to non-motorized means, principally paddle and hiking. For non-paddler use, parking will be allowed for two vehicles at the Raccoon Point parking sites. Park staff may utilize the existing access road only as necessary to service the cabin (waste water issues need to be addressed before this facility is reopened to the public).

Reservations are required and must be made through the CSC. There is no planned change in historic use numbers for this facility, including multi-night stay opportunities.

**Designated Campsites**

Campers are required to stay in the reserved or assigned campsites. Occupancy limits are set for each campsite and will be managed by the park superintendent consistent with visitor use needs and resource protection.

There are 8\* designated auto campsites with a 6 person per site limit. Each site may include a defined parking pad, flat cleared areas for tents, picnic table, fire ring and shade structure (ramada). Four of these sites are in the Finegan campground and will have toilet facilities and non-potable water. All other vehicle accessible sites require the use of a self-supplied portable toilet. *\*(This is one additional campsite over the current designated campsite number.)*

There are 4 riverside paddler campsites (no vehicle access) at Raccoon Point with a 4 person per site limit. Only paddlers who have launched from Bakers Crossing can camp at Raccoon Point campsites. There is a one night limit for the paddler campsites. These campsites are supported by an Eloo toilet.

Table 1 – North Unit Campsites

North Unit Campsites			
	Campsite Name	Access	Maximum Site Occupancy
1	A (Finegan Campground)	Vehicle	6
2	B (Finegan Campground)	Vehicle	6
3	C (Finegan Campground)	Vehicle	6
4	D (Finegan Campground)	Vehicle	6
5	E (former #4)	Vehicle	6
6	F (former #5)	Vehicle	6
7	G (former #6)	Vehicle	6
8	Jose Maria	Vehicle	6
9	R1 (Raccoon Campground)	Paddle	4
10	R2 (Raccoon Campground)	Paddle	4

North Unit Campsites			
	Campsite Name	Access	Maximum Site Occupancy
11	R3 ( <i>Raccoon Campground</i> )	Paddle	4
12	R4 ( <i>Raccoon Campground</i> )	Paddle	4

### **Backcountry Zone Camping**

Seven “Backcountry Zones” are established in DRSNA-North Unit for a primitive camping experience. Only one party may camp in any zone at the same time. Permits are required for overnight use. The permit allows undesignated camping anywhere in a specific Zone subject to the campsite selection criteria defined in this document and /or amended by the superintendent of DRSNA. Continuous overnight use in a single Zone may not exceed seven nights. Total overnight use is limited to fourteen consecutive days. Backcountry Zone overnight group size is limited to six (6) persons.

Backcountry zone camping permits will be issued only at the North Unit headquarters.

### **Equestrian Camping**

There are no front-country campsites available for stock use at this time in the North Unit. Stock is not allowed at any of the eight designated auto campsites. If future stock use warrants, a stock friendly designated auto accessible campsite may be developed.

Visitors may camp with stock in the backcountry zones, with a permit. Overnight backcountry camping group sizes are limited to the standard backcountry group size of six individuals, with no more than a total of 9 animals.

Existing windmills and water systems will be evaluated to determine maintenance needs and their viability in support of equestrian use.

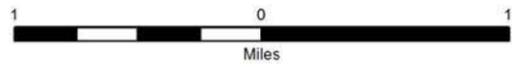
### **Volunteer Camp Host Sites**

Three volunteer host camp sites area proposed for Finegan Campground. Volunteers are an invaluable asset to the operations and visitor experience at parks across the Texas State Park System. The relative size, remoteness and staffing level at DRSNA support the need for volunteers.

# Devils River State Natural Area

- North Unit -

## Public Use Plan




All names contained herein are provisional.



Figure 4 – North Unit Public Use Plan Map

## **Public Use DRSNA - South Unit**

Public use is allowed except where specifically restricted. Motorized use is restricted to designated open roads.

### **Day Use Permits**

All Day-Use visitors are required to obtain a permit for entry into the natural area for general day use. 15 “Day-Use” passenger vehicle permits will be available each day. A passenger vehicle is defined as a vehicle designed to carry passengers with a capacity of 12 or less people. Permits may be reserved in advance from 11 months out up until the “day of” a visit, through the TPWD Customer Service Center (CSC) central reservation system. Same-day use of available (non-reserved) day-use permits will be on a first come first served basis and the permits may be acquired at the South Unit headquarters.

### **River Day-Use Areas**

Vehicle access day-use will primarily occur at Devils Back, Little Satan, Pafford Crossing, South Texas, 37 Mile, and South. These areas will provide river access for most water related activities, including: swimming; fishing; kayaking/canoeing; snorkeling, picnicking; etc. Eloo type toilets will be available at Devils Back and Pafford Crossing. Consideration for Eloo type toilets for the other locations will be dependent on use and need.

### **River Access**

River access for put-in or take-out of kayaks or canoes will be allowed primarily at four locations, (1) Devils Back, (2) Little Satan, (3) Pafford Crossing, (4) and “37 Mile” Launch. Visitors launching or retrieving their canoe/kayaks will be allowed to bring motorized vehicles to a designated put-in/take-out area. Parking duration beyond that necessary to effect the loading/unloading of vehicles is prohibited. All parking must occur in designated locations as identified at each location.

This plan allows for establishing a “Day Use Paddler’s Permit” with restricted numbers if the number of day-use paddlers becomes a resource impact or causes potential visitor use conflict.

### **River Launch Site Configuration**

The identified canoe/kayak launch sites will be managed to have as minimal a resource impact as possible. Launch locations have been chosen based on natural landforms that facilitate the launching of non-motorized vessels. Improvements will be minimal and will consist mostly of vegetation clearing.

### **‘Devils River Put-In & Take-Out’ Special Use Permit**

Paddlers who have a permit to put in at an up river launch site may take out at any of the South Unit take-outs. The vehicle associated with the pickup may travel to the take-out for the purpose of picking up the paddlers and will not be counted as one of the 15 vehicle day-use permits. If the support vehicle occupant(s) want to engage in any recreational activities, they will need to obtain a “Day Use” or overnight use permit. They will need to pay regular entrance fees unless they have a valid permit from the North Unit.

## **Overnight Use/Permits**

Permits are required for all overnight users. Campsites/facilities may be reserved in advance from 11 months out up until the “day of” a visit, through the TPWD Customer Service Center (CSC) central reservation system.

The number of overnight visitors will be restricted to the number of available designated campsites and facility bed spaces, along with three backcountry “Zone” backpacking permits.

## **Cabins and Facilities**

### **Residence/Bunkhouse**

The large family residence and guest bunkhouse located on the river downstream from Pafford Crossing is not conducive to commercial use at this time. Its use will be determined at a future time.

### **Summer House**

This two-story screened structure is an older, rustic facility which needs considerable repair. The water and wastewater systems will need to meet state standards before it is available to the public. The setting is quite pleasant and will provide an opportunity for visitors seeking a higher level of overnight facilities above camping. Visitor capacity is set at 8 persons and a limit of two vehicles. This facility will be rented for public use.

### **Buzzards Roost**

Perched on the rim of Satan Canyon, this one-room structure offers outstanding views to the canyon below and down the Devils River arm of Lake Amistad. This building, topped with a metal roof, is a rock-and-frame construction on a concrete slab with dimensions approximately 12 x 14. The building will be outfitted with a wood-burning stove and two single beds. This structure is defined as a sleeping shelter for public use with a great view. At a future time, sanitary service (non-waterborne) will be provided. Up to that point visitors are required to provide their own means of sanitary disposal for human waste. Visitor capacity is set at 4 persons and a limit of two vehicles. This cabin will be rented for public use.

### **Hunters Cabin & Group Camp**

Situated in a tributary canyon to South Creek the Hunters Cabin is a modest modular building in a state of disrepair. The structure is approximately 10 x 30 with a covered porch along the front (long side). It has water, electrical and waste water service, all of questionable code compliance and reliability. Visitor capacity is set at 12 persons and a limit of three vehicles. This structure may be repaired and rented as a backcountry cabin.

## **Camping**

Campers traveling by vehicle or vessel are required to stay in assigned campsites. Occupancy limits are set for each campsite and will be managed by the park superintendent consistent with visitor use needs and resource protection. The maximum stay in a vehicle accessible campsite per permit is 14 nights (which may be made more restrictive if necessary); one night in a paddle-only accessible campsite.

## Equestrian Camping

An equestrian primitive campsite with corrals and water is proposed in the South Unit.

Visitors may camp with stock in the backcountry zones, with a permit. Overnight backcountry camping group sizes are limited to the standard backcountry group size of six individuals, with no more than a total of 9 animals.

Existing windmills and water systems will be evaluated to determine maintenance needs and their viability in support of equestrian use.

## Campsites

The following campsites have been designated for the South Unit:

- 2 – Riverside paddler accessible (self-contained sanitation required)
- 1 – Riverside backpacker (self-contained sanitation required)
- 5 – Primitive sites in the Devils Back Campground – Eloo toilets (2)
- 9 – Primitive backcountry road accessible sites – self-contained sanitation required (Eloo type toilet at Equestrian site)

Seventeen specific sites have been designated for vehicle-accessible primitive camping. Campsite selection was based on minimal adverse impacts to natural, cultural resources or sensitive areas. Vehicle accessible sites may include a defined parking pad, a clear area for tents, picnic table, fire ring and ramada. TPWD intends to install Eloo type toilets at the Devils Back Camp ground (2) and the equestrian campsite.

Table 2 – South Unit Campsites

South Unit Campsites			
	Camp Name	Access	Maximum Site Occupancy
1	29 Mile	Paddle	4
2	Signal	Vehicle	6
3	31 Mile	Backpack	6
4	Rubboard	Paddle	4
5	Little Satan 1	Vehicle	6
6	Little Satan 2	Vehicle	6
7	Gage Draw 2	Vehicle	6
8	Gage Draw 3	Vehicle	6
9	Satan Canyon	Vehicle	6
10	Hill Country 1	Vehicle	6
11	Hill Country 2	Vehicle	6
12	New Well ( <i>Equestrian</i> )	Vehicle	12
13	DB1 ( <i>Devils Back Campground</i> )	Vehicle	6
14	DB2 ( <i>Devils Back Campground</i> )	Vehicle	6
15	DB3 ( <i>Devils Back Campground</i> )	Vehicle	6
16	DB4 ( <i>Devils Back Campground</i> )	Vehicle	6
17	DB5 ( <i>Devils Back Campground</i> )	Vehicle	6

## **Backcountry Zone Camping**

Seven “Backcountry Zones” are established in DRSNA- South Unit for backcountry users to camp. Backcountry Zones are limited to one party per zone with a concurrent occupancy of three zones only. Permits are required for overnight use. The permit allows undesignated camping anywhere in a specific Zone subject to the campsite selection criteria defined in this document and /or amended by the superintendent of DRSNA. Continuous overnight use in a single Zone may not exceed seven nights. Total overnight use is limited to fourteen consecutive days. Backcountry Zone overnight group size is limited to six (6) persons. Permits will include the Zone(s) and date(s) of visitation.

Backcountry zone camping permits for the South Unit will only be issued only at the South Unit headquarters.

# Devils River State Natural Area

- South Unit -

## Public Use Plan




All names contained herein are provisional.

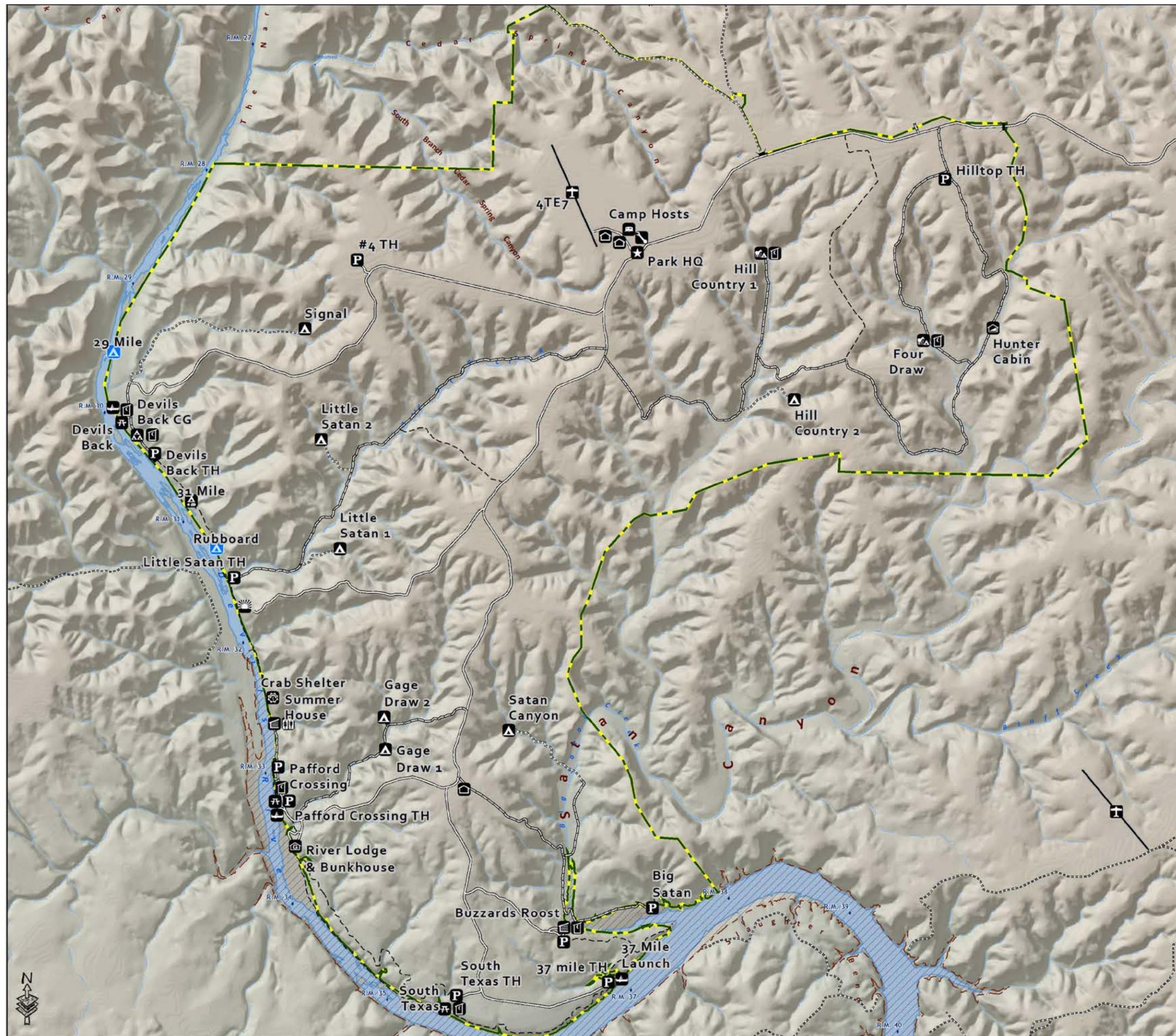


Figure 5 – South Unit Public Use Plan Map

## Recreational Management Zones

Two Recreational Zone types have been established for management and administration purposes. These are; 1) River Corridor; and 2) Backcountry Zone (see Figure X). The Zones are listed in Table 2 below. Visitor management, uses and capacities will be defined in terms of these Zones.

### River Corridor Zone (RCZ)

The River Corridor Zones are defined as those lands within approximately one-quarter mile of the Devils River. Three River Corridor Zones are defined for the DRSNA, 1 @ the North Unit and 2 @ the South Unit. Overnight use in a River Corridor Zone may occur only at designated locations.

### Backcountry Zone (BCZ)

Backcountry at DRSNA is defined as lands approximately one-quarter mile and further from the Devils River. Fifteen Backcountry Zones (8 @ North Unit, 7 @ South Unit) have been defined for DRSNA using ranch-heritage fence lines, geographic features (escarpments and drainages) and existing roads for visible boundary delineations. Each zone has been named for a prominent geographic feature or a vernacular legacy name. Backcountry Zones provide opportunities for near wilderness experiences beyond vehicle camping. Overnight use is encouraged in each BCZ, subject to defined restrictions and as limited by available permits. Visitors are encouraged, though not required, to use designated trails and routes until they are knowledgeable and confident in their familiarity with DRSNA to travel cross-country. Open ground fires are prohibited in any non-designated campsite.

### Backcountry Camping

Backcountry or undesignated site camping will be allowed in backcountry zones in DRSNA. Backcountry camping allows the overnight visitor to select their own campsite, based upon certain required conditions. These requirements for campsite selection are listed below. If necessary to manage backcountry use, designated sites may be developed in the various Backcountry Zones accompanied by changes in the prescribed public use in these zones. Backcountry overnight permits will be issued for specific zones. Visitor travel plans that include multiple zones must include all involved zones on the permit.

In frequently used backcountry campsites, human waste is not only an aesthetic issue, but also can result in unacceptable resource impacts and public health problems. Under the present scope of this plan backcountry campers may dispose of solid human waste in a 'cathole.' Used toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, diapers, or any other solid waste product must be carried out of the park in a sanitary manner, such as self-sealing plastic bags. Burning toilet paper is prohibited due to high potential for wildfire.

### Backcountry Camping Stipulations

- Permit required, one permit per group
- Up to 4-person group size
- Two-vehicle limit per permit @ Trailheads
- Maximum length of stay is seven consecutive days in any one zone, total limit of fourteen consecutive days of overnight use
- Pack-out all trash

- ❑ No open ground fires

**Backcountry Campsite Selection Criteria**

- ❑ Independent campsites may be no closer than ¼ mile to any other existing campsite
- ❑ 300 feet from live water sources, including seeps, potholes, springs, and streams
- ❑ 300 feet away from all prehistoric or historic cultural sites, including alcoves, pictographs & petroglyphs, identifiable surface scatters of lithics or ceramics, partial or complete structures or ruins
- ❑ At least ¼ mile from trailheads or roads
- ❑ Within the zone for which the permit was issued
- ❑ Left with the least possible evidence of use and the least possible environmental degradation
- ❑ Accessed by the least impacting route, i.e., visitors should use game trails, arroyo's, or unvegetated areas to reach campsites
- ❑ Selected on previously disturbed areas, surfaces without microbiotic soil crusts, and in visually non-prominent locations

### Backcountry Overnight Capacities

Backcountry Zone capacities were established to protect the park visitor’s sense of solitude and remoteness. 2.5 people per 1000 acres has been established as the desired peak overnight visitor density. For each Backcountry Zone (BCZ) the maximum number of individuals was calculated. This value was then divided by the established maximum backcountry group size of 4 individuals to establish the number of backcountry permits per zone. In all instances the resultant value was rounded.

#### Example Backcountry Permit Calculation: XXX BCZ @ ##### acres

$20,158 - 11,223 = 8,935$	BCZ acres minus the Acres in a ¼ mile road buffer on roads crossing that particular BCZ
$8,935 / 1000 = 8.93$	BCZ acres divided (normalized) by 1000 as a first step to calculate maximum overnight visitors
$8.93 \times 2.5 = 22.325$	Result of first calculation multiplied by concentration per 1000 acres = total overnight visitors in BCZ
$22.325 / 4 = 5.58$	Result of second calculation (total overnight visitors in BCZ) divided by group size of 4 to determine number of BCZ permits
= 6 Permits	Total permits defined for BCZ after rounding

The permits address overnight backcountry use only. Day visitors or overnight visitors occupying Designated Campsites are not subject to this permit system.

Table 3 – Backcountry Zones

Backcountry Zones			
Zone Name	Zone Acres	Acres Beyond ¼ mile Road Buffer	Permit Number
Dolan Springs	566	175	0
Jack	1351	677	0
Gage Draw	1514	440	0
Hinds	1545	452	0
Horseshoe Bend	1705	1706	1
Goldwire	1812	1100	1
Devils Back	1868	1000	1
Escondido	2245	1720	1
Satan Canyon	2402	996	1
High Lonesome	2549	1166	1
Little Satan	3126	921	1
Speed	3449	2442	2
Jane	3526	3526	2
Rough	4202	3984	2
Hill Country	4519	2085	1

## **Backcountry Caches**

Extended backcountry trips in DRSNA may be facilitated by caching food and water supplies. Backcountry users are encouraged to carry or cache sufficient food and water to ensure successful completion of their trip. Caches must be secured in a manner that does not damage natural or cultural resources.

Caching of food and water requires written permission of the park superintendent. Cache permits, along with Backcountry Use Permits, may be obtained at the Headquarters of either DRSNA unit.

The owner's name and address and the date the cache is to be retrieved by the owner must be clearly visible on the cache. Animal resistant food containers are required to store food caches. Caches not retrieved within 30 days of the date posted on the cache may be picked up and disposed of by park staff without notice to the owner. The owner may be billed for cleanup of the cache and is subject to citation for abandoning property within the park.

### **Animal Resistant Food Container Definition**

- ❑ An animal resistant food container is a securable container constructed of a solid non-pliable material capable of withstanding a minimum of 150 foot-pounds of energy.
- ❑ When secured and under stress, the container will not have any cracks, openings, or hinges that would allow an animal to gain entry by biting or pulling with its claws.
- ❑ Wood containers are not considered animal resistant unless they are reinforced with metal.
- ❑ Ice chests and/or coolers are not considered to be an animal resistant food container.

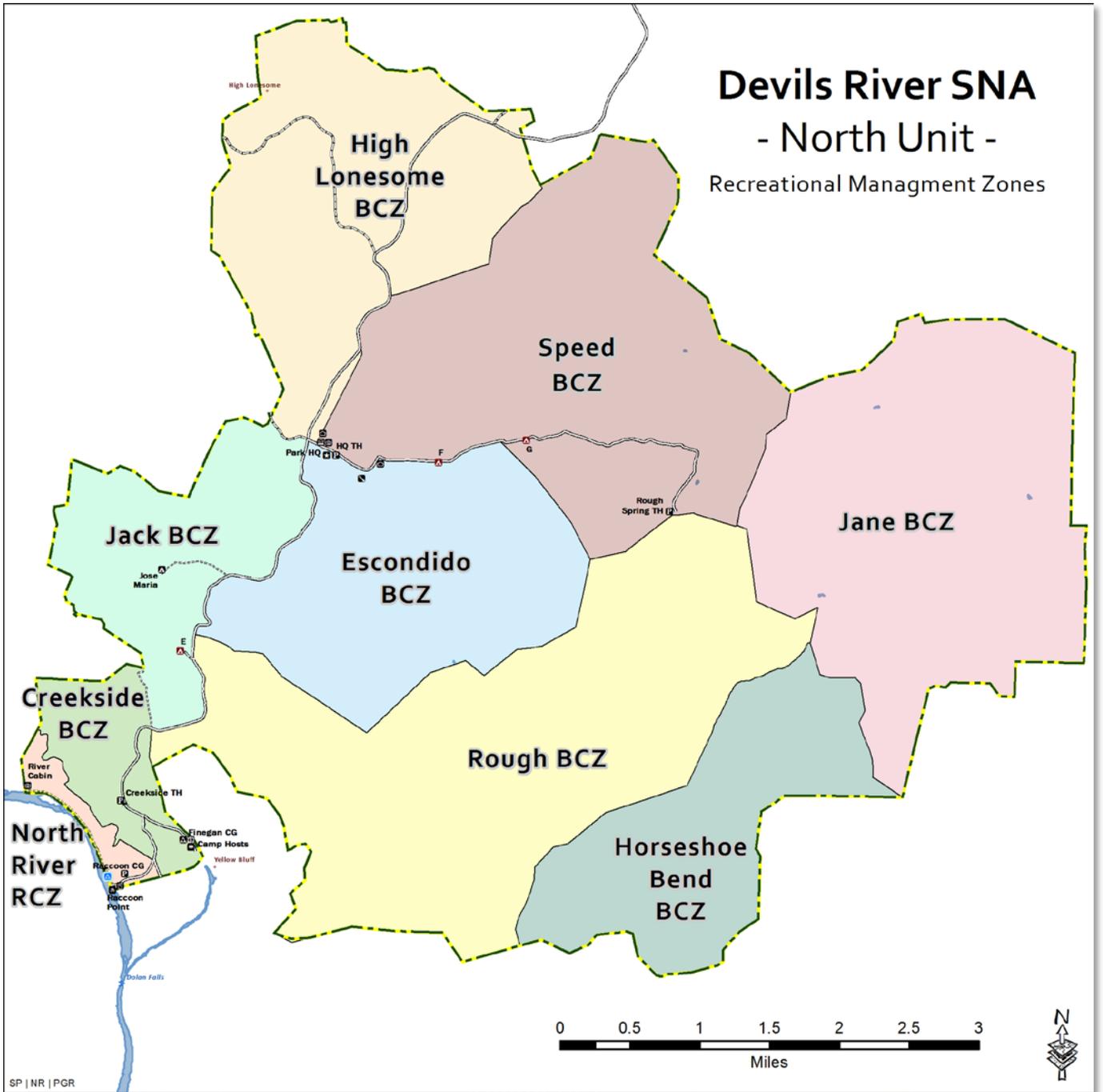


Figure 6 – North Unit Recreational Management

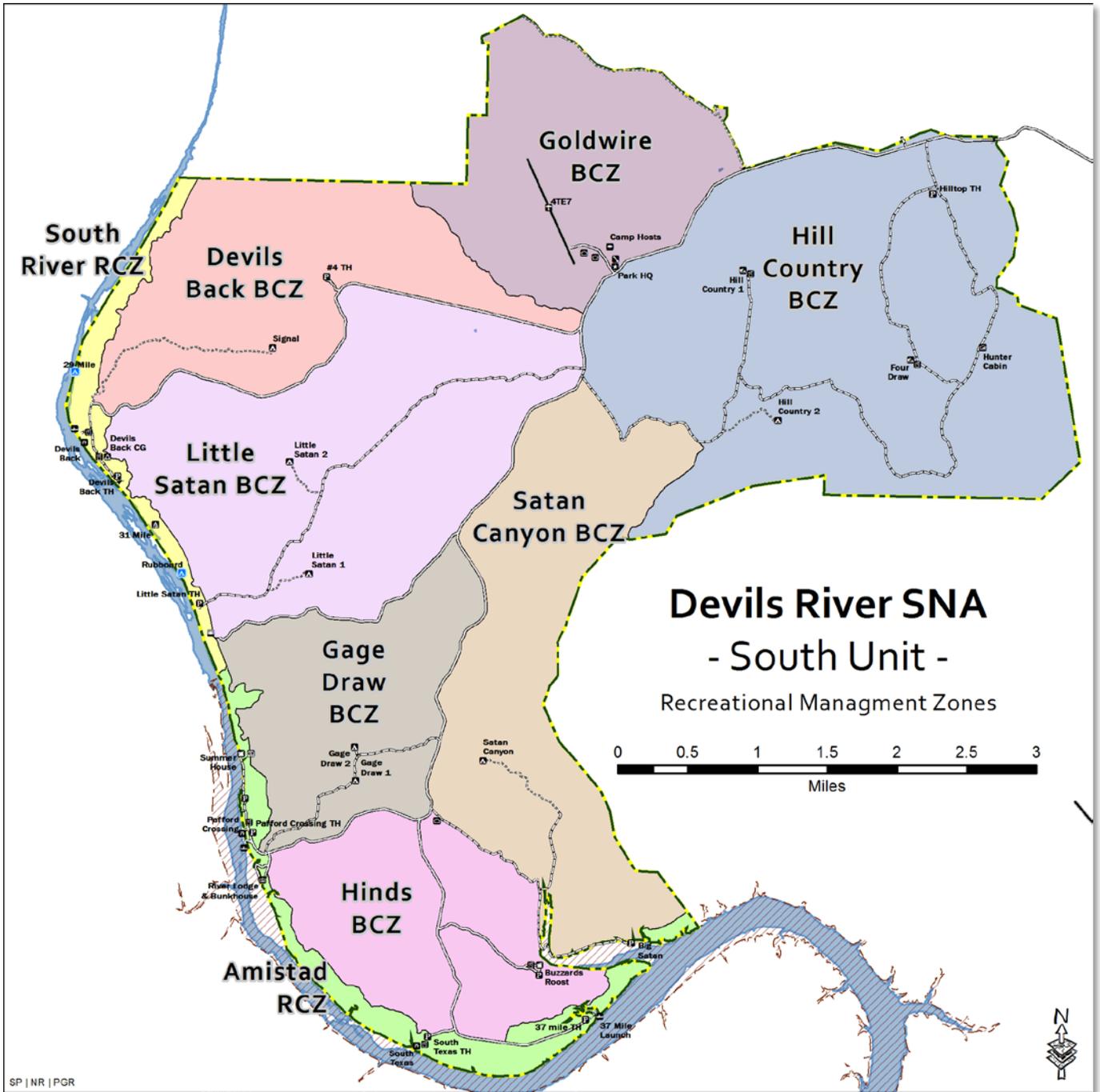


Figure 7 – South Unit Recreational Management

# Trail System

## Trails and Cross-country Hiking

The proposed trail system at DRSNA is a mixture of existing graded and double-track roads combined with former ranch Jeep routes along shelf rock playing along the interface of land and water. It encompasses the current existing trails and extends that system out across a large expanse of the park. In the instance of the South Unit, it capitalizes on not only canyon double-track routes but base rock along the bank of the Devils River. A goal of this proposed trail system is to provide trails and routes that capture the spirit of the land and are challenging, educational, and scenic. The intent of the trail system is to establish and maintain trails that provide a broad range of recreational opportunity and challenge, interpretive, educational, and enjoyable opportunities to the broadest practicable spectrum of visitors who have chosen to leave paved sidewalks and roads behind. The trails here offer varying levels of accessibility and challenge to persons of all ages and abilities. Cross-country hiking and exploration will be allowed in all Recreational Management Zones. However, TPWD may restrict off trail hiking and canyoneering to protect sensitive resources.

Trails and walks often provide the only means of accessing many areas within a state park or natural area. However, trails are not simply avenues for getting from one place to another. Trails offer visitors a more intimate rapport with the outdoors and the opportunity to participate in numerous recreational activities. Trail users have special interests and desires to pursue specific trail related activities. These pursuits may range from observing scenic views, to socializing with others sharing a common interest, to nature study and outdoor education, to personal solitude and reflection. The primary goal of a quality trail is providing opportunities and enjoyable access to a variety of areas while protecting the resource. Ideally, a trail should reflect the mood and atmosphere of the area it traverses without compromising the adjacent resources.

The current trail system comprised of one trail totals just over 6 miles. The plan identifies and designates a DRSNA trail system which will consist of approximately 36.65 miles of presently existing trails and routes. All additions to the designated trail system will undergo a thorough review for compatibility with the intent of the planning document currently in effect, and natural and cultural resource impacts.

Table 4 – Trail System

Designated Trails			
Trail Number	Name	Unit	Miles
1	Buzzard Run	South Unit	0.62
2	Drop In	South Unit	0.94
3	Hill Country	South Unit	1.94
4	River	South Unit	3.87
5	South Bluff	South Unit	4.24
6	South Texas	South Unit	0.55
7	Well Ridge	South Unit	2.1
<b>South Unit - Subtotal</b>			<b>14.26</b>

Designated Trails			
Trail Number	Name	Unit	Miles
8	12 mile Loop	North Unit	6.17
9	Backdoor	North Unit	2.43
10	Rough Spring	North Unit	8.5
11	Speed Run	North Unit	5.29
<b>North Unit - Subtotal</b>			<b>22.39</b>
<b>Trail System Total</b>			<b>36.65</b>

## Environment

### Noise

DRSNA is a State Natural Area. A central premise to the site is the opportunity to experience nature and solitude. Sound travels great distances in this sparse landscape setting. Noise generated by camp activities shall at no time disturb other visitors. Quiet hours are from 6 P.M. to 8 A.M. local time. **Operation of generators is strictly prohibited anytime.**

### Light and Night Sky

The canyons of DRSNA are removed from the glow of urban lights. The night sky is a resource like any other aspect of the park. Park visitors are requested to help preserve the night sky for all visitors. All campsite lighting should be limited to the degree necessary to navigate the immediate local campsite. As required by State Law (lighting acquired via State funding) all light sources should be shielded to only allow light projection below the horizontal, i.e. downward and not level or upward. TPWD recognizes the value in actively modeling proper lighting. DRSNA is a dark, sky-compliant SNA.

*“I have long thought that anyone who does not regularly--or ever-- gaze up and see the wonder and glory of a dark night sky filled with countless stars loses a sense of their fundamental connectedness to the universe.”*

*- Dr. Brian Green*

### Water Use

Water resources are scarce in this environment, yet vital to all forms of life. The following regulations for human use of water help to protect the water sources for all:

- ❑ Immersion/wading/soaking is permitted only at designated locations.
- ❑ The use of soap/detergents is prohibited in springs, natural pools, or flowing waterways.
- ❑ Rinsing dishes or other equipment directly into natural water sources is prohibited.
- ❑ Only biodegradable soaps may be used, and they must be used at least 100 feet away from water sources.
- ❑ All campsites, unless designated by the TPWD, must be at least 300 feet away from water sources (including seeps, potholes, springs, and streams).
- ❑ Saddle and pack stock must be staked at least 300 feet from water sources.

- ❑ Saddle and pack stock are not permitted to enter springs and seeps. Water must be brought to them.
- ❑ A water source may not be emptied or depleted for human use.
- ❑ All water sources, on DRSNA whether natural or man-made should be considered non-potable.

### **Designated Water Use Areas**

- ❑ All man-made, above ground, pilas and tanks with safe ingress/egress
- ❑ The Devils River

## **Fires**

### **Designated Campsites**

Fires are permitted at designated campsites only. The collection of wood for any purpose is specifically prohibited. Firewood in a semi-arid environment is sparse and is critical to local ecology. The use of charcoal or wood cooking fires is allowed at designated campsites only and must be built in the provided fire ring at the campsite. The park superintendent may limit or suspend the authorization to have fires based on fire hazard or impact to resources.

### **Backcountry**

No open fires are permitted in undesignated backcountry campsites. Fires are permitted at designated campsites only. Use of containerized fuel stoves is permitted. Backcountry users must pack-out any empty fuel bottles, cans, or cells used to store fuel.

## **Backcountry and Campsite Sanitation**

Campers are required to use self-supplied portable toilet facilities in campsites where a restroom facility has not been provided.

In frequently used backcountry campsites, human waste is not only an aesthetic issue, but also can result in unacceptable resource impacts and public health problems. Under the present scope of this plan backcountry campers may dispose of solid human waste in a “cathole.” Used toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, diapers, or any other solid waste product must be carried out of the park in a sanitary manner, such as self-sealing plastic bags. Burning toilet paper is prohibited due to high potential for wildfire.

A *cathole*, by definition, should be a small hole excavated 6 to 8 inches deep and at least 300 feet from water sources (included seeps, potholes, springs, streams) or potential water sources (arroyos or dry washes) that is covered after use.

## **Trash**

All backcountry visitors to DRSNA are required to pack out all trash and garbage (including toilet paper). Garbage receptacles will be available for visitor use at each headquarters, campground and river access point.

## **Pets**

All pets are prohibited in the backcountry of DRSNA. Pets may accompany their owner in designated campsites and must adhere to the applicable State Parks Rules and Regulations. Pets

may not be left unattended. Sanitary concerns and aesthetics dictate that pet owners remove pet excrement from the park. Pet droppings should be handled in like manner as human waste collected in the self-supplied portable toilet facilities. Guide or service dogs accompanying a person with disabilities are not considered pets and are not prohibited.

## **Signage**

Signage design consistent with TPWD standards will be installed. Signage will be kept to the minimal number of signs required to direct and inform the general public.

## **Location & Information**

Each designated facility or location shall be identified with appropriate signage. Trailhead signage will be appropriate to the site.

## **Boundary**

Standard TPWD boundary markers will be installed on existing fencing where the fencing corresponds to property boundaries. Boundary information signs shall be placed in locations where cross-country travel is anticipated and errant trespass might occur without other visual landmarks. These locations are most likely associated with drainage ways extending up remote canyons, along established fence lines, and at double-track road intersections.

## Road Development and Definitions

Presently ±177 miles of mostly old ranch roads in various drivable states exist in the natural area. This plan specifies the continued use of just over 57 miles of road for public access. The main roads are maintained as a two-lane graded gravel/dirt road passable by most vehicles. The remaining roads are in various states of accessibility. While passable by standard sedans traveling most of these roads, high-clearance and/or four-wheel-drive vehicles are recommended. Four-wheel drive roads will remain mostly unimproved with minimum maintenance. DRSNA visitors should be mindful of rough road conditions, knowledgeable of their vehicles limitations and capabilities, and the likely impact to the vehicles appearance and mechanical components. Although these are designated roads, the DRSNA is considered a primitive state natural area with a road system reflecting that nature. The use of motorized vehicles is limited to designated roads. Only street legal and licensed vehicles as authorized by a state motor vehicle law may be operated on any park road.

### Motorized Vehicle Restrictions

The motorized use of roads classified as (1) 2-wheel-drive high clearance or (2) 4-wheel-drive, is restricted to street-legal and licensed vehicles as authorized by a state motor vehicle law and must have four or more functional wheels.

### Definitions

**Two-Wheel Drive (2WD)** – Graded, unpaved road passable by standard street legal vehicles when driven responsibly. Main park road and selected campsite and road spurs.

**Two-Wheel Drive High Clearance (2WDHC)** – Unpaved road or route normally passable by standard street legal vehicles with high ground clearance. Clearance necessitated by typical road or route conditions (obstacles, steep dips, etc.)

**Four-Wheel Drive (4WD, also includes All Wheel Drive)** – Primitive roads or routes similar to 2WDHC but requiring extra traction to accommodate the presence of steep, loose or soft substrates. Passage requires low-range gears occasionally. Jacks, shovels and multiple spare tires advised.

**Four-Wheel Drive High Clearance (4WDHC)** – Primitive roads or routes harsher than 4WD. Passage requires vehicles with extra traction, rigid suspension and high clearance. Four-wheel-drive required, usually in low range. Jacks, shovels and multiple spare tires advised.

**High Clearance** – “High Clearance” for the purposes of this document is considered a minimum of 8 inches with a firm suspension. Firm suspension is strongly recommended to preclude “bottoming out” through the suspension’s range of motion.

### Road Closures

Existing roads/double-track routes not identified as part of the road system will be closed to public motorized vehicular traffic. Many of these may be incorporated into the trail system. In general, closed roads shall be managed towards conversion to a single-track trail. Roads not authorized for public motorized vehicle traffic will be clearly designated. Selected routes may be retained for administrative vehicular access.

# **Administrative Infrastructure**

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## **Existing**

Existing infrastructure not previously addressed in the public use section of this document include the former ranch foreman's residence, out buildings, a barn and associated corrals, paved air strip, Hinds Ranch rock house, water wells, water tanks, and pipelines ... all in various states of usability, many needing significant repair.

### **Foreman's Residence**

This structure is proposed to be used as the DRSNA South Unit headquarters and visitor center. The incoming road will be redirected to have all traffic come to the ranger station for check-in. Visitors coming into the SNA will receive their orientation and permits at this location. Power lines will be undergrounded in the immediate area of the headquarters and the area will be landscaped with native vegetation. The nearby out-buildings and barn will be used for operational purposes, including equipment storage and maintenance.

### **Sheds near air strip**

These structures will be evaluated for adaptive use in support of SNA operations. Any which are not conducive to support SNA operations will be maintained. If not, they will be removed.

### **Air strip**

The 4,200-foot paved runway is in need of maintenance, including runway repair, vegetation removal, and fence maintenance. The immediate plan for use of this facility is to maintain it in a minimum state of repair so that it can be safely used as necessary. Final determination as to its use will be made at a later date.

### **Hinds Ranch Rock house**

This one-bedroom historic structure was in a state of total disrepair. The building is being restored to a useable standard and it will be used by park staff as a residence.

### **Water wells, pipelines, water storage tanks**

There are numerous water wells, pipelines, and water storage tanks around the SNA, most not in useable condition. These facilities are being evaluated as to need to support public use activities or other needs. One well and tank will be maintained at the equestrian campsite for support of that campsite and equestrian use. Land documents call for shared access and maintenance of several water wells.

## **New**

There is very limited new infrastructure being proposed to be constructed in the SNA. Some park operations and administration support structures are needed. The following structures are being proposed to be constructed: (does not include the Eloos as noted in the public use section)

### **Park Residences**

One small three bedroom and one two bedroom residence is proposed to be constructed at the SNA South headquarters. They will be located to the north and behind the headquarters building. These residences would be lived in by the park superintendent and one staff member in order to provide on-site security and emergency response.

