



# Devils River State Natural Area

## General Management Plan - Executive Summary

A General Management Plan (GMP) for the Devils River State Natural Area (DRSNA) is in the final stages of completion. The GMP is intended to provide direction and guidance to the State Parks Division for developing and managing public access, recreational use, natural and cultural resource management and protection for both the old and the newly acquired units of the DRSNA. It is the intention of state parks to manage the two units as a complex, with a single superintendent over both units. The actual naming of the two units will be a part of the public forum/public comment process. For the purpose of this document, the original 1988 SNA acquisition will be called the Devils River SNA - 'North Unit', while the newly acquired lower unit will be called 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, 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. The plan is consistent with and approved by the Nature Conservancy as holders of the 'Conservation Easements' on the two properties.

This GMP is intended to be a dynamic document which will be subject to modification as more knowledge of visitor use patterns is acquired and/or possible negative impacts occur to SNA resources. The proposed GMP will be vetted with the citizens of Texas at five public meetings held statewide in March or April, 2012. Additionally, the plan has been reviewed with special interest groups, the National Park Service (Amistad National Recreation Area), and adjacent landowners throughout development of the plan.

### **Site Description – Mission and Goals**

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 of the Devils River and Lake Amistad.

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 that do not compromise resource stewardship objectives. The Devils River is among the most intact spring-fed stream segments in the American Southwest and offers a superb opportunity for adventure river recreation.

The Plan calls for the SNA to support public paddler/angler access and use of the River from Bakers Crossing to Lake Amistad through the use of permitted public put-ins and take-outs within the SNA. User education and orientation concerning river etiquette and private property will be paramount.

## **Public Access and Use – Current**

**North Unit** – Visitors are limited to traveling the 8 miles from the park entrance to within one mile of the river and to the various campsites. At that point they must walk or ride a bike down a dirt road in order to access the river. Once at the river, there is one mile of river front to hike on.

There are 7 primitive campsites in the open desert with no shade. Travel is not allowed off road or off the 6 miles of old jeep road that makes up the trail system. There are four campsites and one rustic cabin on the river, which are available to river users only. About 1800 visitors came to the Unit in 2011.

**South Unit** – Closed at the present time.

## **Public Access and Use – Proposed**

**North Unit** – At this time no day-use limits are being established for access to the general SNA, in anticipation of limited visitation to the North Unit. Five vehicles a day will be allowed access to the river by permit for day-use. All areas of the park will be available for hiking and equestrian use. Individuals will be able to drive to the river to pick-up paddlers coming from up-river and to launch paddlers for trips that are taking-out down-river. Four campsites will be relocated to a large tree shaded area which will have a rest room and showers (restoring old existing restroom). Three volunteer campsites with hook ups will be developed in the same campground to provide support to SNA operations.

### **South Unit** –

- 30 vehicles a day will be allowed into the SNA on a reservation and first come first served basis for day-use activities. This does not include overnight users or people picking up paddlers from the river take-out points. Day-use permit reservations will be made through the state park reservation center. Same-day users can call the SNA office to see if a permit is available for that day.
- 17 primitive campsites (table, fire ring, tent pad, no water) – 15 are motor vehicle accessible, two of which are equestrian group sites with toilets
- Roads – Approximately 40 miles of dirt roads will be available for public motor vehicle use. Roads will remain dirt/gravel. Road improvements will be limited to good maintenance and ‘hardening’ of some of the steeper hills (short sections) that are problematic for uphill travel and erosion.
- Trails – Approximately 15 miles of trails will be established using existing old ranch roads or grown over trails, including a trail the entire length of and parallel to the river. Cross country travel will be permissible for hikers and equestrians.
- Day-use areas – Three designated areas with picnic tables, shade shelters, and toilets.
- Put-in/take-outs – Three sites will be designated for paddlers to be able to put-in/take-out
- Summer house – this screened-in porch structure on the river will be restored and made available to the public for rent.
- Buzzards Roost – this small one room cabin perched on a hill top overlooking Big Satan Canyon and Lake Amistad, will be restored and made available to the public for rent.
- Lodge and Bunkhouse – Public use will be determined at a later date
- Foreman’s house – will be turned into the SNA HQ and the South Unit Visitors Center.
- New construction – two residences will be constructed near the HQ area, using donated funds. Three trailer pads/hook-ups for volunteers will be developed in the same area.
- Airstrip – will be maintained for future potential use.