



COMPLEX MAP

BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

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VISITOR CENTERS

Barton Warnock Visitor Center (Eastern Entrance)

21800 FM 170, Terlingua, TX 79852
(432) 424-3327

Fort Leaton State Historic Site (Western Entrance)

16952 FM 170 E, Presidio, TX 79845
(432) 229-3613

Sauceda Ranger Station (Interior – For Emergencies Only)

Visitors must obtain permits
prior to entering the park interior.

www.tpwd.texas.gov



Cover Photo: Chase A. Fountain, TPWD

Interior Photos: Gary Nored

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CLOSED CANYON



THE HOODOOS



FORT LEATON STATE HISTORIC SITE



OJITO ADENTRO



THE FLATIRONS OF THE SOLITARIO

WELCOME TO THE BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK COMPLEX – EL DESPOBLADO

El Despoblado means “the uninhabited place.” It is a name used over centuries to describe the northern Chihuahuan Desert – a name that implies a sense of emptiness. Yet Big Bend Ranch State Park is far from empty. The park offers 500 square miles of unrivaled geology, spectacular vistas and night skies, diverse plant and animal life, and evidence of over 10,000 years of human occupation.

GEOLOGY

The geology of Big Bend Ranch State Park reminds us of profound changes over the past 600 million years of Earth’s history – changes born of water and fire. A deep ocean, the Ouachita Basin, covered the Big Bend and much of the southeastern United States some 570 million years ago, long before the age of dinosaurs. One may see remnants of the Ouachita Mountains in parts of Arkansas, Oklahoma and West Texas, including The Solitario at Big Bend Ranch State Park. Erosion and uplift worked together to expose the limestone rock of this ancient sea floor in the Contrabando lowlands and the upended “flatirons” that form the rim of the Solitario.

The Solitario is a feature born of fire. Between 36 and 35 million years ago, magma from deep within the Earth pushed upward to create a blister-like bulge nearly 10 miles in diameter. Following erosion and a complex series of eruptions, the uplifted sedimentary rock and the underlying lava chamber collapsed to form the basin-like feature known today as the Solitario. Volcanism remained at work in the region. As you pass the dark peaks and mesas along FM 170 or the park interior’s Main Park Road, imagine glowing cone-like vents and gaping fissures that once spewed red-hot ash and molten rock. Lava from these eruptions eventually hardened into the rocks (rhyolite and basalt) that form the Bofecillos Mountains. The unique fracturing of the Bofecillos Mountains allows many cracks and fissures to trap groundwater and account for the region’s numerous springs: life-giving oases in the desert.

HUMAN HISTORY

Diverse people have lived among the canyons, mountains and valleys of Big Bend Ranch State Park for centuries, typically near water sources. The materials and structures they left behind tell stories of triumph and hardship in this sometimes hospitable but often relentless land. Hundreds of prehistoric camps, cooking areas, and rock art sites dot Big Bend Ranch. Grinding stones, bedrock mortars, flint tools, and burned rock middens indicate that the hunter-gatherers living here used every natural resource available to survive in the demanding environment. Prehistoric pictographs (rock paintings) and a few petroglyphs (rock etchings or carvings) showcase the amazing diversity of rock art styles preserved in the park.

A handful of traders and freighters such as Ben Leaton and Milton Faver were the first Anglo-Americans to settle the area in the mid-1800s. By the 1870s, small family ranches began to spring up, raising much of their own food and herding sheep and goats. Park visitors today can see remains of the Crawford-Smith, McGuirk, Reza, and Madrid houses among others. Remnants of a wax factory and several camps remain in Fresno and Contrabando Canyons, where thousands of pounds of wax were extracted from candelilla plants and sold as waterproofing for World War I army tents. Nearby, the Whit-Roy Mine produced flasks of mercury from cinnabar ore into the 1960s.

FLORA

Vegetation throughout the park exists in a moisture-dependent mosaic, sometimes lush but more often sparse. Native plants range from arid-adapted cacti to

water-loving cottonwoods. Common species of succulent include varieties of prickly pear and cholla. Ocotillo is a common desert shrub in the region.

FAUNA

Animals exhibit similar variety, from water-dependent beavers along the river to desert specialists like the black-throated sparrow. The park is home to large mammals, such as black bear, and the Big Bend’s tertiary predator, the mountain lion. Mule deer and non-native aoudad are important components of mountain lion diets. The park is also the eastern-most range boundary for the Mojave rattlesnake, occurring alongside black-tailed, mottled rock, and western diamondback rattlesnakes. Over 400 species of birds have been recorded at Big Bend Ranch State Park.

CLIMATE

Big Bend Ranch State Park is located in the rugged terrain of the northern Chihuahuan Desert. The park receives less than 10 inches of rain per year, mostly occurring as monsoonal summer storms. During monsoon season, dry creek beds (*arroyos*) are prone to severe flash flooding. Desert temperatures can fluctuate by 40 degrees on the same day. Pack and dress accordingly. Summer temperatures often exceed 110 degrees.

SAFETY

Remember where you are. There is very little shade in the desert. Dress accordingly: long sleeves and wide-brimmed hats are recommended in addition to sunscreen and sunglasses.

Cell phone coverage is unreliable or non-existent in the park.

Bring plenty of food and water for long day hikes.

All water from spring sources should be treated or filtered before being consumed.

Big Bend Ranch State Park protects habitat for large mammal species, including black bears and mountain lions. Follow these tips to enjoy wildlife while preventing human-wildlife conflicts:

- Observe wildlife from a safe distance.
- Do not feed or attempt to catch wildlife.
- Do not run if you encounter a bear or mountain lion in the field. Make noise, take action to make yourself look large, and back slowly away from the animal.
- Rattlesnakes are common and can be active year-round in the desert. Be careful where you step and place your hands. Listen for the rattling warning signal.

PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

Permits are required for use of park facilities, including use of hiking trails, park roads, picnic areas, camping areas, river access, or pull-offs along FM 170 (River Road).

Special Use Permits are required for backcountry hiking, backpacking, or bikepacking.

REGULATIONS

- Quiet hours are from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m.
- Dogs are allowed on-leash on two trails in Big Bend Ranch State Park: Hoodoos and Closed Canyon.
- UTVs and ATVs are not allowed within the State Park boundary.
- BBRSP’s 4WD roads require strict four wheel drive high-clearance vehicles. All wheel drive (AWD) vehicles are not considered 4WD capable. “High-clearance vehicles” have at least 8 inches of clearance between the ground and the vehicle’s frame.

LEAVE NO TRACE ETHICS

Please help us maintain a pristine wilderness setting in our park by practicing the:

Leave No Trace Seven Principles

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

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PARK ACTIVITIES

Hiking, Mountain Biking, and Horseback Riding

Big Bend Ranch State Park’s trails showcase the park’s diverse nature, history, and scenery, which are characteristic of *el Despoblado*. Routes and paths accommodate people of all ages, abilities, and interests. Our Multi-Use Trails are open to equestrian, mountain bike, and hiking use. Trails are primitive, marked by rock cairns and few signs, so always use a map for navigating. Please do not rely on app navigation and do not stack extra cairns.

4x4 Touring

Visitors with high-clearance four-wheel-drive vehicles can tackle nearly 70 miles of unmaintained dirt roads in the park. These roads were used for fence building, water line construction, livestock wrangling and mineral prospecting and mining. UTVs and ATVs are prohibited within the park boundary.

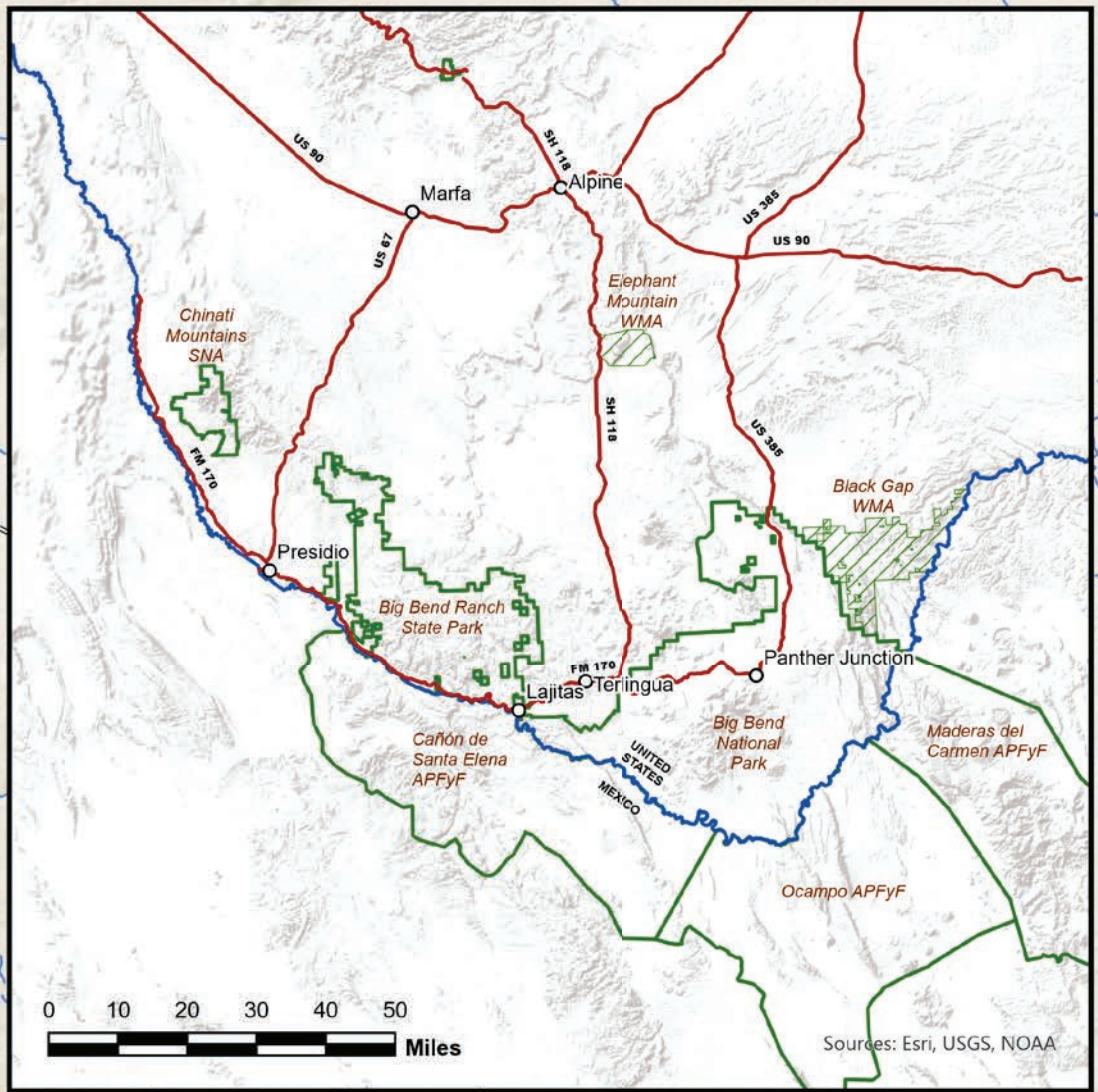
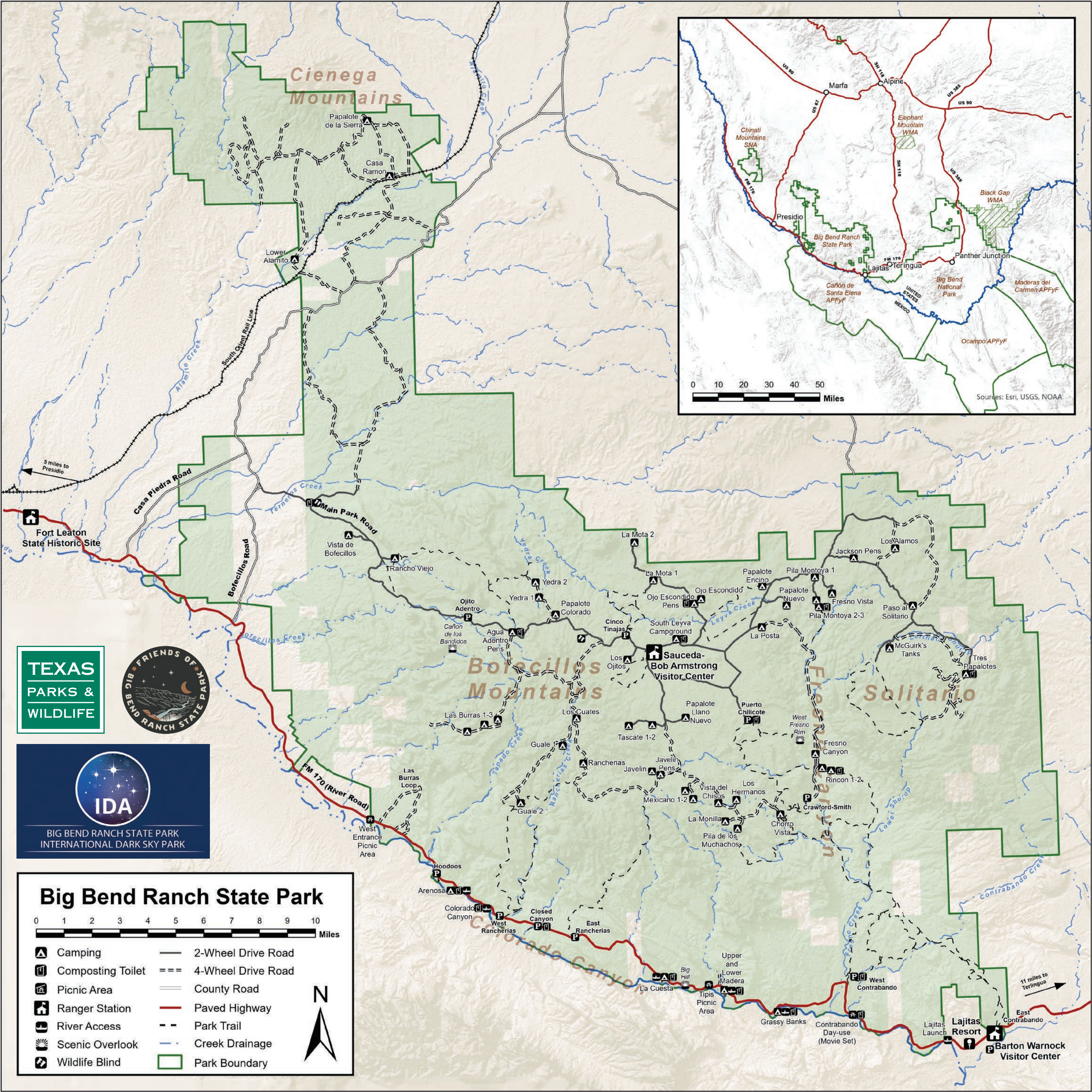
River Access

For a day trip, visit the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo del Norte corridor to raft, canoe, picnic, and fish. Several river access points lie along FM 170. Colorado Canyon includes Class II and III rapids. River trips can be arranged through local outfitters.

THE DARKEST SKIES IN TEXAS

Big Bend Ranch State Park was designated as an International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) Dark Sky Park in 2017. The Big Bend region is one of the darkest places in the continental U.S. and boasts the darkest skies in Texas. As part of the IDA designation, every year rangers collect Sky Quality Meter (SQM) readings that measure the amount of artificial light in a specific area. Our research shows that Big Hill, Closed Canyon Trailhead, and West Contrabando Trailhead are the darkest areas in the park. No matter where you stargaze in Big Bend Ranch State Park, you will enjoy unparalleled night skies!

You can help preserve the dark skies above Big Bend Ranch State Park! We ask that campers do not use lighting that can “trespass” into other campsites and temporarily contribute to light pollution. Light pollution is harmful to wildlife, disrupting hunting and migration patterns. For more information on how to reduce light pollution, please visit darksky.org/light-pollution or stop by one of our visitor centers.



Big Bend Ranch State Park

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Miles

Camping	2-Wheel Drive Road
Composting Toilet	4-Wheel Drive Road
Picnic Area	County Road
Ranger Station	Paved Highway
River Access	Park Trail
Scenic Overlook	Creek Drainage
Wildlife Blind	Park Boundary

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