



THE SANDHILLS OF MONAHANS ARE MADE UP OF BITS OF ANCIENT MOUNTAINS CHIPPED AWAY BY EROSION AND BLOWN HERE BY STRONG WINDS 5,000 TO 7,000 YEARS AGO. EVENTUALLY PLANTS AND ANIMALS MADE A HOME IN THESE DUNES. HUMANS DISCOVERED THE BOUNTY AND REFUGE OF THESE DUNES LONG AGO, RELYING ON NATURAL WATER SEEPS, PLANTS AND WILDLIFE. MANY STILL SEEK REFUGE IN MONAHANS SANDHILLS TO CAMP, ROAM, PLAY IN THE SAND AND EXPERIENCE NATURE.



Monahans Sandhills State Park hosts thousands of visitors each year who enjoy camping, playing in the sand, picnicking and exploring nature. The park is full of history and unique plants and wildlife, some of which, like the Sand Dune Sagebrush Lizard are found in only a few places in the world.

We encourage you to tread lightly and help protect this unique and sensitive environment.

- ♦ **Keep Wildlife Wild** – Please don't feed or harass wildlife.
- ♦ **Trash Your Trash** – It's ugly and can make wildlife sick.
- ♦ **Take Only Memories and Pictures** – Leave all plants, wildlife, rocks and artifacts for future visitors to enjoy and so that park staff can study them.
- ♦ **Be Safe** – In case of emergency, know where you are if you need to call for help.
- ♦ **Protect Your Pets** – They must be on a leash no more than six feet in length and cleaned up after.
- ♦ **Be Kind to Other Visitors** – Yield to visitors on horse and observe quiet hours.

Monahans Sandhills State Park
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INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

MONAHANS SANDHILLS STATE PARK



SHIFTING SANDS, MOVING MOUNTAINS

The shifting sands of Monahans tell the story of moving mountains, bit by bit. The dune field that Monahans Sandhills is in stretches 150 miles north to New Mexico and is 22 miles wide. The state park boundaries protect 3,840 acres of sand dunes for plants, wildlife habitat and people to enjoy. Thousands of years ago during an arid post-glacial period, tiny bits of eroded Southern Rocky Mountains that were deposited in streams dried up. Big winds blew the sand southeast where they were trapped against the Texas High Plains, known as the Llano Estacado. The sands built up large active dunes that the wind still shifts and moves around to this day. Other dunes are stabilized by unique plant species adapted to life in the sandhills. Beneath the dunes hides caliche, a mostly impermeable layer that traps water, forming a perched water table where seeps of water are available for plants, animals, and in the past, were used by humans.

IT'S NOT JUST SAND!

Many plants manage to eke out survival in this harsh dune environment. Grasses such as the sand bluestem and sand reeds help stabilize the soil. In the spring and summer, the park is a kaleidoscope of blooming flowers such as yellow sandhill sunflowers, pink penstemons, bright white heliotropes, sweet-smelling yucca flowers and so much more. A few types of trees can be found in the stable dunes including desert willow and honey mesquite which rely on deep taproots for water. The front of the park is covered with the amazing Havard shin oak that survives on a large network of interweaving root systems. While the shin oaks may be short, averaging 2-3 feet tall, they are mighty, covering an area comprising the largest oak forest in North America! The oaks also provide important acorns and habitat for wildlife. Unique wildlife has adapted to life in the dunes too. Some examples are Jerusalem crickets, javelina, mule deer, the sand dune sagebrush lizard, ground squirrels, mule deer, kangaroo rats and many species of birds.

Ord's Kangaroo Rat



PEOPLE IN THE DUNES

Archeologists found evidence that people have been using the dunes for thousands of years. The sand dunes may not look very hospitable to some, but the natural water seeps and interdunal ponds gave Native Americans a good place to camp. Wildlife was also drawn to the water so people could hunt for mule deer, desert cottontails and other wildlife for food. Other things people found to eat in the dunes are acorns of the Havard shin oak from which they could make a flour, earth oven-baked yucca roots and honey-mesquite beanpods. Desert willow bark was also used as medicine. Low-lying areas in the dunes also made for a great place to escape from enemies. The railroad, that is still just outside the park, was established in 1880 and brought more people to live and work in the region. An old pump jack in the park shows that oil and gas production in the Permian Basin is still a major industry in the area. Now that the park is protected public land, visitors can enjoy camping, exploring nature and playing in the sand for generations to come.

People have used the Monahans Sandhills for thousands of years.

NOLA DAVIS, TPWD

