



Prominently sited atop the park's highest hill, the refectory's second-level observation tower offers a panoramic view of the area.

WELCOME TO ABILENE STATE PARK, A PLACE STEEPED IN HISTORY AND NATURAL BEAUTY. CAMP IN THE SHADE OF THIS WOODED OASIS IN ARID WEST TEXAS. TAKE A QUIET PADDLE ON LAKE ABILENE AND ENJOY A STUNNING SUNSET OVER THE LAKE. DROP A LINE IN BUFFALO WALLOW AND TRY FOR YOUR NEXT BIG CATCH, OR MAYBE JUST YOUR FIRST! COOL OFF IN THE PARK'S ICONIC SWIMMING POOL. AND MARVEL AT THE REMARKABLE CRAFTSMANSHIP OF THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS WHO BUILT THIS PARK DESPITE THE CHALLENGES THEY ENDURED.



THINGS TO DO AT ABILENE STATE PARK

- Take a hike on a nature trail or around the lake and explore the flora and fauna of the park. Pick up a trail guide at the park office.
- Watch the wildlife that live in the park. Morning and evening are the best times to see white-tailed deer, armadillos, raccoons, and skunks. Please don't feed the wildlife—nature's foods are healthier.
- Go fishing for bass, crappie, catfish, and perch. No fishing license is required if fishing within the state park. Be sure to ask park staff about our tackle loaner program.
- Get your binoculars and look for the over 200 species of birds sighted at Abilene State Park, including herons, raptors, songbirds, and waterfowl.
- Enjoy the grandeur of the night sky from your campsite—no telescope needed!
- Learn to be a good steward of the park by becoming a Junior Ranger at Abilene State Park. Ask at the park office for the Junior Ranger journal.
- Leave no trace! Help our wildlife by disposing of garbage and fishing line, staying on trails, and leaving natural treasures for everyone to enjoy.

For more information about programs or volunteering, contact the park or visit our website and add us on Facebook.

Abilene State Park • 150 Park Road 32, Tuscola, TX 79562
(325) 572-3204 • www.tpwd.texas.gov/abilene/



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INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

ABILENE STATE PARK





A NATURAL SETTING

Abilene State Park lies in a valley surrounded by the low limestone hills of the Callahan Divide. The divide is an area of higher country, rising 200–300 feet above the surrounding plains that separates the watersheds of the Brazos and Colorado rivers. The hills are sparsely wooded with mesquites, stunted Ashe junipers, and mixed grasses. The floodplain of Elm Creek supports shaded woodlands of pecans, live oaks, red oaks, willows, hackberries, and elms. These lowlands sustain an array of plant and animal populations seldom found in this region of Texas. Look for soaring Mississippi kites during the spring and summer, roadrunners dashing across a trail, and elegant white-tailed deer grazing in the evenings.

A natural passageway, or gap, between the low hills of the Callahan Divide was a route for great herds of bison during their seasonal migrations. Native Americans, such as the Tonkawa and Comanche, also used the gap as a travel route while hunting the bison. The richly forested lands along Elm Creek provided an ideal campground for the hunters. Buffalo Gap, an early frontier settlement, is a small town a few miles northeast of the park that lies within the “gap.” Buffalo Gap was later used by cattle drives on the Western or Goodnight-Loving trail.

CREATING A LAKE AND A PARK

By the mid-1880s, at the height of the livestock boom, the area of present-day Abilene State Park and Lake Abilene was occupied by families who had come to the region in the late 1870s. They farmed the bottomlands near Elm Creek and raised sheep and cattle on the uplands.

In the early 1900s, Abilene already held promise as one of the state’s more important metropolitan areas. As the town grew, so did its need for a reliable city water supply, a primary concern for any settlement in semi-arid West Texas. In 1918, citizens approved plans to build a dam on Elm Creek, creating Lake Abilene.

But as with most man-made dams, the impoundment greatly altered the surrounding landscape. Farmsteads and fields were soon abandoned as the precious waters to Elm Creek now filled Lake Abilene. Unfortunately, the lake proved ineffective (even going dry in 1927) and was replaced as the city’s water source in the late 1920s. The public’s increasing interest in outdoor recreation, the construction of a road to the area, and the commitment of city and state officials to the idea of parks, all created an environment that made the dedication of a park on city land a growing possibility.



ANNIE ELLISON, TPWD

AN ENDURING MONUMENT

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to help boost the economy and create jobs. The CCC gave young men the opportunity to gain skills and an education while building parks and protecting resources.

In December 1933, CCC Company 1823V (“V” stood for veterans), a mixed company of 141 white and nine Black World War I veterans, arrived and set up camp. From 1933–1934, the veteran company built the foundation of the park. Using simple hand tools, the men cleared land, built roads and culverts, milled lumber, and quarried local stone.

In October 1934, the company was transferred to Sweetwater, TX to begin construction on a new park. During the transition, Co. 1823V was reorganized into Co. 1823CV (“C” stood for “Colored”) – the only all-Black veteran company in Texas. The newly formed company soon relocated back to Abilene in response to growing racial tensions in Sweetwater.

Upon their return, the men completed several large projects that stand to this day as a testament to their craftsmanship. Using local materials, such as limestone and red Permian sandstone, Co. 1823CV built the stunning red stone concession building (shown below) with its high arches of hand-cut stone, tower, and swimming pool. They also built stone picnic tables and pergolas that are still enjoyed by families today.

Despite enduring systemic racism, the men of CCC Co. 1823CV continued to serve their country and pave a path towards equality. While segregation prevented them from visiting the places they built, they took pride in their work.

