

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Sevilleta

*National Wildlife Refuge*



*“...there was so much sky,  
more than at sea, more  
than anywhere else in the  
world. The plain was there,  
under one’s feet, but what  
one saw when one looked  
about was that brilliant  
blue world of stinging air  
and moving cloud.”*

*Willa Cather*

*Background, Los Piños Mountains and grasslands.*





*Fishhook cactus.*

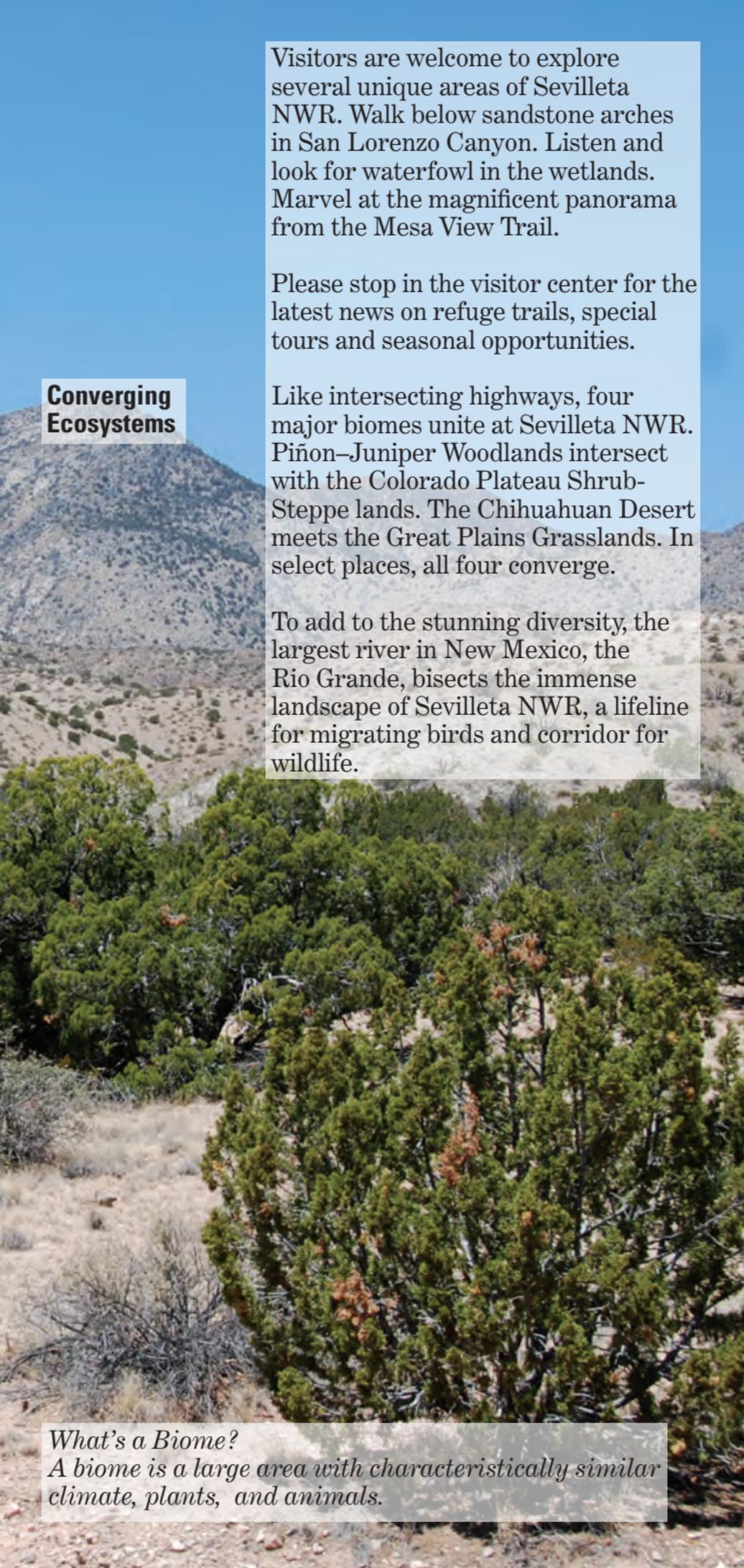
**Welcome:  
Timeless  
Landscapes**

Thunderstorms roll across the mesas of Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). A rainbow sweeps across the vast blue sky to touch down on the banks of the Rio Grande. Bighorn sheep balance on sandstone cliffs above San Lorenzo Canyon, while the voices of hikers below echo through arches, caves, and wind-sculpted towers.

This refuge has a special purpose that sets it apart from other national wildlife refuges across the country: To preserve and enhance the integrity and natural character of the ecosystems of the refuge.

Sevilleta NWR, 50 miles south of Albuquerque, offers a rare chance to step back in time. Here, in a refuge that spans 360 square miles, it's easy to imagine Piro Indians etching petroglyphs into rock hundreds of years ago. The geologic story exposed in the rocks gives clues to a volcanic past some 27 to 32 million years ago.

*Background, Piñon–Juniper biome.*



Visitors are welcome to explore several unique areas of Sevilleta NWR. Walk below sandstone arches in San Lorenzo Canyon. Listen and look for waterfowl in the wetlands. Marvel at the magnificent panorama from the Mesa View Trail.

Please stop in the visitor center for the latest news on refuge trails, special tours and seasonal opportunities.

## **Converging Ecosystems**

Like intersecting highways, four major biomes unite at Sevilleta NWR. Piñon–Juniper Woodlands intersect with the Colorado Plateau Shrub-Steppe lands. The Chihuahuan Desert meets the Great Plains Grasslands. In select places, all four converge.

To add to the stunning diversity, the largest river in New Mexico, the Rio Grande, bisects the immense landscape of Sevilleta NWR, a lifeline for migrating birds and corridor for wildlife.

### *What's a Biome?*

*A biome is a large area with characteristically similar climate, plants, and animals.*

## Research on the Refuge

Nature's junctions often buzz with activity, as in high traffic areas, the wildlife and plants interact in fascinating ways. Sevilleta NWR is a mecca for scientific study of these significant meeting points.

Sevilleta NWR is host to the University of New Mexico's Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) program, initiated in 1988 and one of only 26 sites across the country. The Refuge hosts a diverse array of research projects conducted by researchers from around the globe.

## History *Origins of Sevilleta*

The name Sevilleta (pronounced Sev-ee-eta) illustrates the strong Spanish influence in this region. When explorer Juan de Oñate swept northward from Mexico in 1598, he encountered a civilized Rio Grande, with large pueblos by the river. Here, the Piro Indians farmed, hunted, and lived in complex societies.

Oñate called the Piro Pueblo nearest what is now the refuge, "Pueblo Nueva Sevilla," in honor of the Spanish city of Seville. Over the span of 200 years of Spanish rule, the Piros eventually fled south.

At the end of the Spanish Occupation, in 1819, the area became the Sevilleta de La Joya Land Grant. In 1821, it fell under Mexico's authority, then in 1848, it came under the control of the United States. After New Mexico gained statehood, Socorro County bought the land in a public sale in 1928.



*Campbell Ranch  
Legacy*

General Thomas Campbell bought the land in 1936 and for the next 30 years, cattle and sheep grazed across the desert, steppe land and forest. Shortly before his death, the general formed the Campbell Family Foundation in 1966 to assure the land's stewardship.

Within a few years, the foundation took a bold step. Why not protect the land permanently as a place where natural ecosystems thrive?

The Nature Conservancy acquired the land from the foundation in 1973, marking the first New Mexico project for the nonprofit land conservation organization. After conveying the ranch to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the conservancy remains a partner today.

**Restoring Nature**

At first glance, the Sevilleta NWR landscape appears as pristine as it was centuries ago. However, cattle ranching combined with drought and invasive species took their toll on native plants and animals.

Staff and volunteers today work hard to return native plants, natural processes, and wildlife to the refuge. They remove salt cedar and other invasive plants that threaten the survival of native vegetation. They replant native shrubs and grasses, guide water into managed wetlands, and carefully prescribe burns to bring back fire as a natural force.

### *Invasive Species*

Also called tamarisk, the non-native salt cedar monopolizes the water that native plants need in a dry land. It crowds out other shrubs, increases salinity in soil and deprives birds and animals of habitat they need to survive. Removing salt cedar at Seville NWR and replanting native willow and cottonwood is an ongoing habitat restoration activity.



*Salt cedar removal.*

### *Getting a Second Chance*

The Gunnison's prairie dog is a keystone grassland species that historically inhabited the refuge. Due to habitat loss, past extermination attempts, and disease, their numbers have declined by over 90%. Re-establishing a population is another step towards restoring the native biological diversity of refuge grasslands.





*Los Piños Mountains.*

*Mexican Gray  
Wolf Recovery*

The endangered Mexican gray wolf, no larger than a German shepherd, once ranged across the deserts of the southwest until eradicated from the wild in the 1950's. Today, Sevilleta NWR is home to a remote breeding facility designed to foster wild characteristics and behaviors. Please check in with the visitor center staff to learn more about the Mexican wolf's life history and the latest news on recovery.

To experience the timeless beauty of Sevilleta NWR, make the visitor center your first stop. The staff can offer advice on the best ways to explore the open areas of the refuge; San Lorenzo Canyon, as well as the wetlands.

Exhibits in the center feature the cultural history, biological diversity, varied geology, and latest news on scientific studies and findings at the refuge.

Outside the visitor center, stretch your legs on the Mesa View, Nature Loop, and Wildflower Loop trails, where you can observe native plants and wildlife.

Biologists, geologists and other refuge experts lead guided tours throughout the year. Education programs can be scheduled for groups in advance. Please contact the visitor center for more information.

Millions of years of earth's history unfold in San Lorenzo Canyon. Intriguingly sculpted sandstones and redstones give clues to past upheavals. A popular destination for hikers, it's also an offer's outstanding photography opportunity.

San Lorenzo  
Canyon  
Geology Journey



*Background, San  
Lorenzo Canyon.*

*Life Giving  
Waters:  
Sevilleta  
Wetlands*

San Lorenzo brims with Chihuahuan Desert plant and animal life. Lizards and snakes bask in the sunshine on rocks. Cliff swallows nest in the high canyon walls, while roadrunners scramble among four-wing saltbush, sagebrush and cacti. Watch for tracks of mule deer, coyote, bighorn sheep and even bobcat or mountain lion.

Visit Sevilleta's wetlands for a firsthand look at a success story for wildlife. Seasonally flooding these lands near the Rio Grande re-creates wetlands that were once extensive in the river valley.

Look for beaver tracks in the mud. Listen for ducks, geese, herons and sandhill cranes, especially from November to February. In summer, turtles bask on logs in water; roadrunners dart out from tall grasses, and hawks soar overhead.

*Hunting*



The refuge offers limited hunting of dove and waterfowl in the wetlands. Only nontoxic shot is permitted. Please check with the refuge staff for rules and regulations.

*Note that hunting is allowed various times of the year: Contact the refuge visitor center to plan a visit that fits your needs.*

**Enjoy Your Visit**  
*Visitor Center  
and Refuge  
Hours*



Call or check website for refuge hours.

*Climate  
Extremes*

Come prepared for unpredictable weather with hat, sunglasses, water, and layers of clothing.

Summer temperatures can soar to 100 degrees and then cool down considerably at night; you can expect early afternoon monsoon rains from early July into September.

Winter temperatures can be cold and skies are frequently clear; at night, the temperatures can approach the freeze mark. You can expect an occasional skiff of snow.

**Help Us Protect  
the Refuge**

You can do your part to preserve Sevilleta for wildlife and people by obeying the following rules:

Drive only on designated roads.

Remain on refuge trails.

Do not disturb or remove wildlife, vegetation, or historic objects.

Keep pets under control at all times.



**Where is it?**

The refuge visitor center is located about 50 miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico, off I-25, exit 169.

**When was it established?**

December 28, 1973.

**How big is it?**

~ 230,000 acres: 31 miles east to west and 14 miles north to south.

**Why is it here?**

To preserve and restore native wildlife and plants, and the systems that support them. To allow natural processes to operate and to encourage and facilitate research. To provide educational opportunities for the public to explore and learn about the refuge.



**Sevilleta NWR  
Fast Facts**

*8th largest NWR in lower 48 states: ~230,000 acres*

*Only refuge to host a Long Term Ecological Research program*

*High diversity of species*

- 1,200 plants
- 251 birds
- 89 mammals
- 58 reptiles
- 15 amphibians

*Left, pronghorn.  
Above, black bear.*

## Volunteer

Sevilleta NWR could use your help! Consider assisting the refuge with maintenance, biological studies, education programs, or office assistance. Contact the refuge volunteer coordinator for details.



*Greater roadrunner.* Bill Howe / USFWS

## Amigos de la Sevilleta



Join the Friends group to support conservation and education programs on the refuge. Members receive a quarterly newsletter, discounts in the refuge gift shop, and members-only special events and tours.

Please contact:

Amigos de la Sevilleta  
P.O. Box 1248  
Socorro, NM 87801

## Refuge signs and what they mean

The signs below apply to the areas behind the signs. They protect sensitive habitat or areas set aside for management activities. Please respect all refuge signs as you travel throughout Sevilleta NWR.



**National Wildlife Refuge.** This sign marks the boundary of the refuge. Consult refuge management for authorized activities.



**Area Closed.** For management purposes, certain areas of the refuge are closed to all visitation. Unauthorized entry beyond this sign is prohibited.



**No Hunting Zone.** This sign marks the boundary of no hunting areas. All hunting is prohibited beyond this sign.



**Public Hunting Area.** This sign marks the boundaries of the refuge hunting areas.



*Mountain lion.*



*Geologic Bread Loaf*

*At San Lorenzo's entry, you'll find a mesa shaped like a tilted, sliced loaf of bread with a cap on top. Geologists call this a textbook example of an angular unconformity. The layers date 7-10 million years ago, long before the mighty Rio Grande cut south through the valley. Tectonic plate activity deep below the surface tilted the layers on the plain to form today's loaf.*



*Claret Cup Cactus.*



*Mule Deer.*

## Wildlife Watching Tips

Dawn and dusk are the best times to see wildlife.

In warmer climates, little is moving on hot summer afternoons or on windy days.

Observe from the sidelines. Leave “abandoned” young animals alone. A parent is probably close by waiting for you to leave. Don’t offer snacks; your lunch could disrupt wild digestive systems.

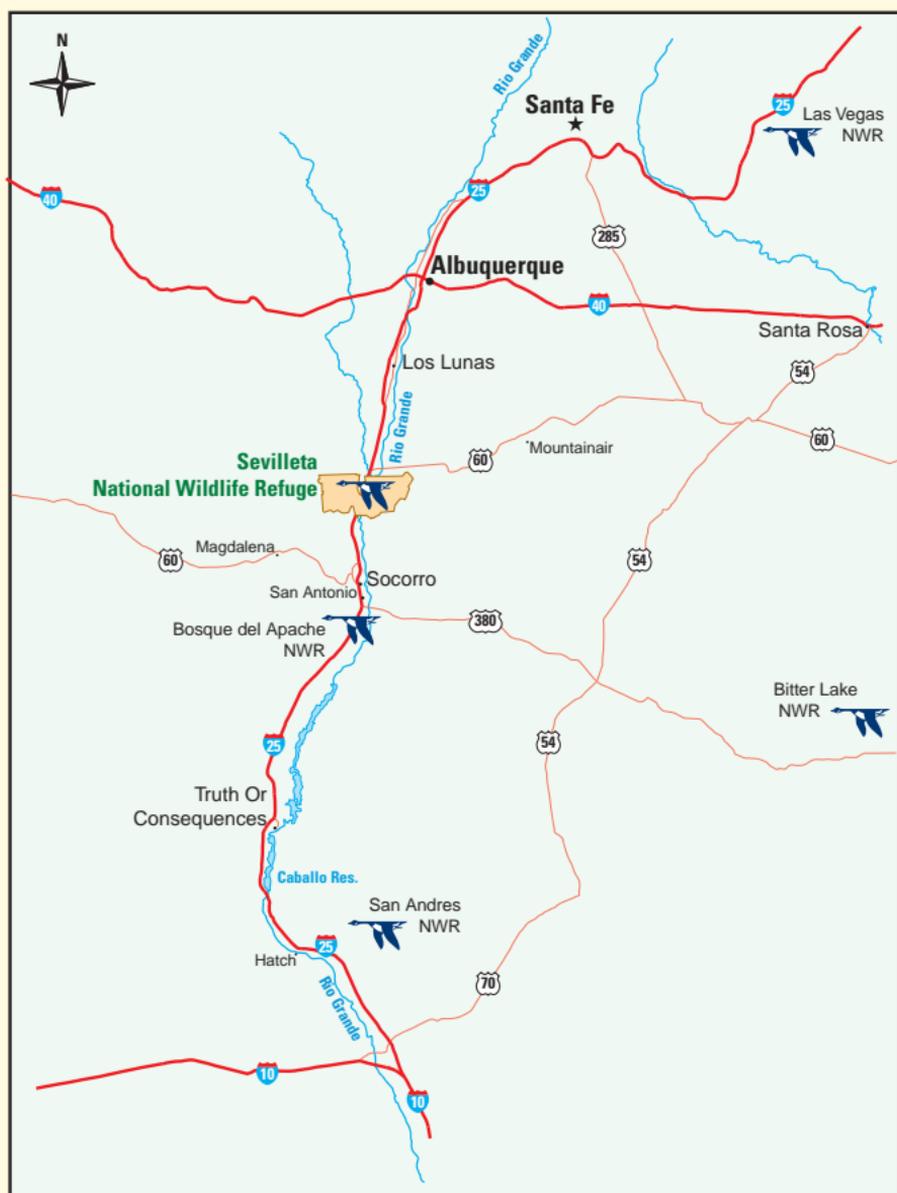
Cars make good observation blinds. Drive slowly and stop to scan places wildlife might hide. Use binoculars or a long lens for a closer look.

Try sitting quietly in one good location. Let wildlife get used to your presence. Many hidden animals will reappear once they think you are gone. Walk quietly in designated areas. Be aware of sounds and smells. Often you will hear more than you will see.

Teach children quiet observation. Other wildlife watchers will appreciate your consideration.

Look for animal signs. Tracks, scat, feathers, and nests left behind often tell interesting stories.





## How to get to Sevilleta NWR

The refuge is located off Interstate 25, between Los Lunas and Socorro.

From Albuquerque (50 miles): Drive south on I-25 to exit 169 and head west approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile to the Refuge visitor center.

From Las Cruces (184 miles): Drive north on I-25 to exit 169 and head west approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile to the Refuge visitor center.



*Pronghorn roam across Sevilleta NWR.*



*Ladrone Peak.*

**Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge**  
**P.O. Box 1248**  
**Socorro, New Mexico 87801**  
**505/864-4021**  
**505/864-7761 FAX**  
**[www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/newmex/sevilleta](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/newmex/sevilleta)**

**Visit us on our social media websites**  
**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**  
**[www.fws.gov/southwest/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/)**

**For Refuge Information**  
**1 800/344-9453 (WILD)**

**For relay service, please dial 711**

*Gunnison's prairie dog.* © Sharyn Davidson  
All photographs USFWS, unless noted.

**September 2011**

