

Laurence Parent

Amistad—the name means “friendship”—is an international recreation area on the United States-Mexico border whose Amistad Reservoir offers outstanding watersports. The reservoir was created by the 6-mile-long Amistad Dam on the Rio Grande. The United States and Mexico cooperated in developing a combined recreation area, flood control, water storage, and power generation project. At the center of the dam stand two bronze eagles symbolizing the nations working together. The dam backs water up three major rivers: Rio Grande, 74 miles; Pecos, 14 miles; and Devils, 25 miles. The waters present an

extraordinary blueness because of their great clarity and the area’s limestone character and lack of loose soils. The reservoir offers six species of bass, six of sunfish, five of catfish, four of gar, and nine other fish sought by anglers. Occasional catches of 8- to 10-pound bass and 40-pound catfish keep anglers excited.

The recreation area’s nine months of relatively warm weather make it a mecca for regional recreationists and a winter haven for retired folk from across the United States. Extensive archeological research shows that Indian groups had lived in this

area continuously for 10,000 years before European contact in the 16th century. At Seminole Canyon State Historical Park adjacent to Amistad, twice-daily walking tours to rock art sites are available year round. At Panther and Parida Caves, which are accessible only by boat from the Pecos River, visitors can marvel at spectacular rock art panels up to 16 feet in height painted in red, yellow, orange, and black. Amistad is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 350 parks representing important examples of our country’s natural and cultural inheritance.

Cover photo by Laurence Parent

Amistad Reservoir boasts more than 850 miles of shoreline, 640 of which are in Texas. The Rio Grande is navigable for about 75 miles behind Amistad Dam. Boating, waterskiing, fishing,

camping, and archeological sites are major attractions. The international boundary lies out in the lake, often following the historic bed of the Rio Grande.

Motorboats, sailboats, houseboats, and even kayaks take to Amistad’s waters beginning with the first warm weather, as early as late February. By April the reservoir is dotted with boaters, an-

glers, sailboarders, scuba divers, and, somewhat later, swimmers. Boaters are requested to register at launch ramps provided on the Texas shore.

Amistad lies in what archeologists call the Lower Pecos Region, which contains some of North America’s largest and oldest rock art sites. There are isolated works and huge murals over

100 feet long. First in the region, Paleo-Indians arrived over 10,000 years ago as the Ice Age ended. By about 8,500 years ago drier, warmer climate conditions created a desert-like environment.

Steep-walled limestone canyons in biologically diverse near-desert settings typify the park. Canyon walls along the Pecos, Devils, and Rio Grande arms of the reservoir—some rising over

200 feet—were carved by water over thousands of centuries. Amistad lies in a transition zone where three major biological regions meet: the Balconian, Chihuahuan, and Tamaulipan. Their distinc-

tive plants and animals combine to make the park area an oasis in an otherwise sparsely vegetated wilderness.

Amistad Reservoir’s Mexican shoreline—seen here from the air—is about 350 miles long. Visitors from the United States can cross into Mexico via Spur 349 over the dam to Ciudad Acuña,

sister city of Del Rio, Texas. No passports are needed for U.S. citizens visiting Ciudad Acuña. U.S. currency may be used there.



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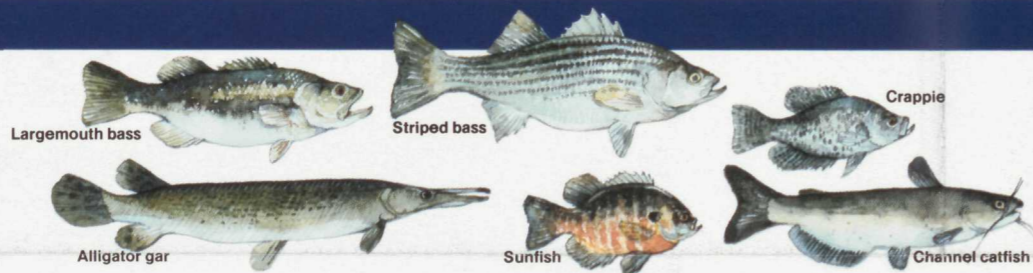
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Amistad: The Nature of Transitions

Transitions characterize Amistad. Here south Texas brushlands converge on the Chihuahuan Desert to the southwest and on the Tamaulipan chaparral country to the southeast. Most park lands are chaparral coun-

try—low hills and valleys near the dam; canyons are primarily upstream. Common plants are uniformly drylands-adapted: catclaw, ocotillo, yucca, cenizo, lechuguilla, sotol, and cactuses. Trees—low-growing and scattered in protected locations—are mesquite, Texas persimmon, huisache, hackberry, and live oak.



Fish and fishing. Black bass, strippers, channel and yellow catfish, crappie, and sunfish are the species that attract most anglers. Largemouth bass and the channel cats were stocked when the reservoir was partially filled. The reservoir also holds alligator and long-nose gar, shad, carp, blue

and flathead catfish, white bass, and freshwater drum. There is no closed season on fishing. Texas and Mexico fishing licenses are required in their respective waters; state fishing regulations apply in U.S. waters. For safety reasons, fish-

ing is prohibited in harbor areas. Commercial fishing is prohibited in U.S. waters. Anglers may fish from the shore, boats, or fishing docks. A list of fishing guides is available at the visitor center or by writing to the superintendent.

Dangerous plants and animals. Amistad’s natural communities include animals and plants to be wary of. Poisonous snakes include the broadbanded and trans-Pecos copperheads; western diamond-back, banded rock, and black-tailed rattlesnakes; and Texas coral snake. Poisonous insects include the scorpion, wasps, and black widow and brown recluse spiders. Tarantulas are not considered dangerous to humans but can inflict

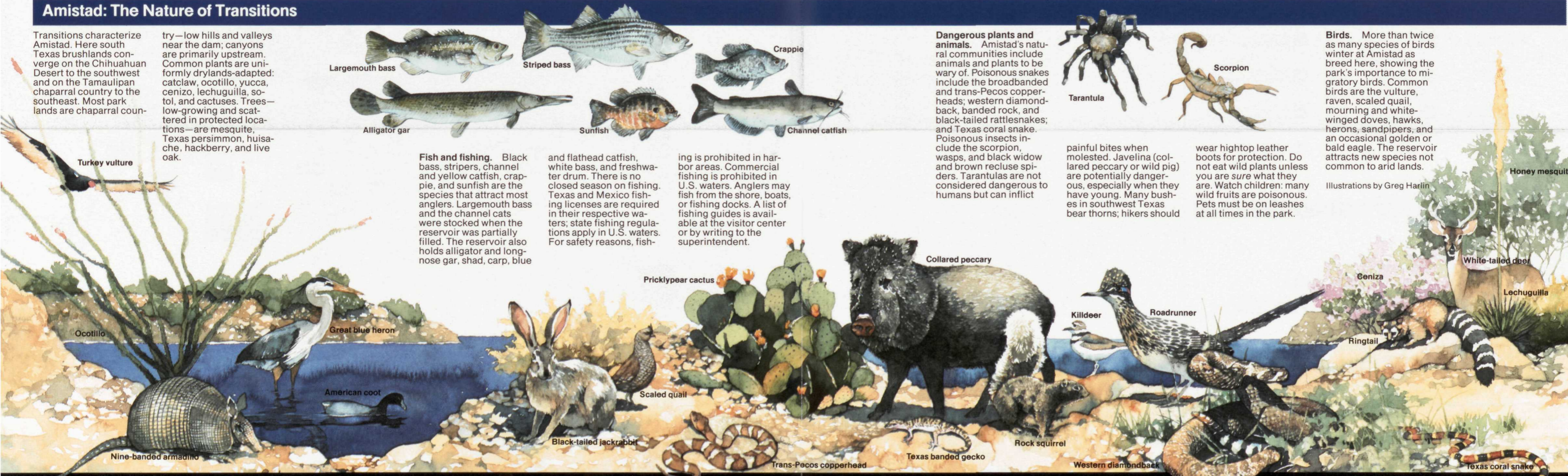


painful bites when molested. Javelina (collared peccary or wild pig) are potentially dangerous, especially when they have young. Many bushes in southwest Texas bear thorns; hikers should

wear hightop leather boots for protection. Do not eat wild plants unless you are sure what they are. Watch children: many wild fruits are poisonous. Pets must be on leashes at all times in the park.

Birds. More than twice as many species of birds winter at Amistad as breed here, showing the park’s importance to migratory birds. Common birds are the vulture, raven, scaled quail, mourning and white-winged doves, hawks, herons, sandpipers, and an occasional golden or bald eagle. The reservoir attracts new species not common to arid lands.

Illustrations by Greg Hartin



Logistics and Information

Amistad National Recreation Area lies in southwest Texas—west of San Antonio between Del Rio and Langtry, downstream from Big Bend National Park. It is reached via U.S. Highway 90 from the east and west and U.S. Routes 277/377 from the north and south. Near the customs station on the dam, the International Boundary and Water Commission (I.B.W.C.) Visitor Center is open and operated in summer by the National Park Service.

The visitor center houses a model of the dam and other displays. The National Park Service is responsible for the recreation facilities, interpretive programs, and protection of cultural, natural, and historical resources on the U.S. side of this international reservoir. For schedules of programs, ask at park headquarters in Del Rio Monday through Friday or, in summer, at the visitor center atop Amistad dam, or at ranger stations at Pecos, Rough Canyon, or Diablo East.

For more information write or call the **Superintendent, Amistad National Recreation Area, P.O. Box 420367, Del Rio, TX 78842-0367; (512) 775-7491.**

Accommodations. Food, lodgings, travel trailer parks, and service stations are in Del Rio and on U.S. 90.

Facilities in Mexico. A swimming beach with picnic ramadas and launch ramp are near the west end of the dam.

Activities

Camping. Primitive camping facilities—no electricity or water is provided—are available in the park at designated sites. Camping from boats is permitted on the shore below the 1,144-foot contour except in restricted areas—near marinas, designated swimming beaches, and developed areas. The camping limit is 14 days per visit. Permanent living on a boat in the park is prohibited.

Commercial campgrounds with electrical and water hook-ups are available near the Diablo East, Rough Canyon, and Pecos River facilities.

Swimming. Do not swim from an unanchored boat. Swimming is permitted along the shoreline except in harbor areas. The park's three designated swim beach areas are not supervised.

Hunting. Small game, birds, and waterfowl may be hunted with shotgun only in the park's five designated hunting areas. Game animals may be hunted only with bow and arrow. Check at park headquarters for seasons and bag limits. Texas hunting license required.

Boating

Waterskiing. Waterskiing is permitted only during daylight hours and with both an operator and competent observer in the towing vessel. Waterskiers must wear a U.S.C.G.-approved life-saving device. Skiing is not permitted in channels, within 500 feet of harbors, swimming beaches, or mooring areas, or within 100 feet of any person in the water.

There are three major boat ramps: **Diablo East ramp** is 10 miles from Del Rio via surfaced road from U.S. 90. A concessioner provides boat and slip rentals, and sells fuel, bait, ice, snacks, and beverages. **Rough Canyon ramp**, 23 miles from Del Rio on Recreation Road No. 2 off U.S. 277/377, has similar concession facilities. **Pecos ramp** is 44 miles from Del Rio. Gasoline and picnic supplies are available 2 miles from the boat ramp on U.S. Highway 90.

Driving to the reservoir's edge is permitted only at designated sites; only from these sites may you launch a boat. Boat registration at launch ramps is requested.

Boating warnings. Strong winds can make boating extremely hazardous in a short time. Do not try to buck the weather. Get to shore as soon as possible. If your boat becomes disabled, stay with it as long as it will float. Always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to

return. Be sure you have enough fuel for your trip. All boaters and overnight campers in boats are asked to fill out a float plan, available at all boat ramps.

Rules of the road. Know and observe the statutory rules of the road. Copies of boating rules and regulations are available at all park facilities.

Regulations. Operating vessels recklessly, negligently, or under the influence of intoxicants or narcotics is illegal. Vessels must maintain a flat wake in designated harbors. Vessels must stay 100 feet from swimmers, down waterskiers, and diver's flags and 500 feet from designated swimming beaches. Boat operators are responsible for damage caused by their wake. In case of accidents, operators shall render such assistance

as is practical and necessary for the injured. Accidents must be reported to a park ranger within 24 hours.

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