

Laurence Parent

Amistad—the name means “friendship”—is an international recreation area on the United States-Mexico border. This park offers an excellent setting for water sports and protects some of the world’s best examples of prehistoric American Indian art and artifacts. 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 river extends 74 miles up the Rio Grande, 14 miles

up the Pecos, and 25 miles up the Devils River. 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 several species of bass, sunfish, catfish, gar, and other fish sought by anglers. Catches of 8- to 10-pound bass and 40-pound catfish keep anglers excited. Nine months of warm weather make Amistad a winter haven.

contact in the 16th century. At Seminole Canyon State Historical Park adjacent to Amistad, walking tours to rock art sites are available year-round. At Panther and Parida caves, which are accessible by boat (water levels permitting), visitors can marvel at spectacular rock art panels up to 16 feet in height painted in red, yellow, orange, and black.

Extensive archeological research shows that Indian groups lived in this area continuously for 10,000 years before European

Amistad National Recreation Area is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 360 parks representing our country’s natural and cultural inheritance.

Background photo by Laurence Parent

Amistad Reservoir boasts more than 850 miles of shoreline, 540 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, anglers,

sailboarders, scuba divers, and, somewhat later, swimmers.

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 more than 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 distinctive

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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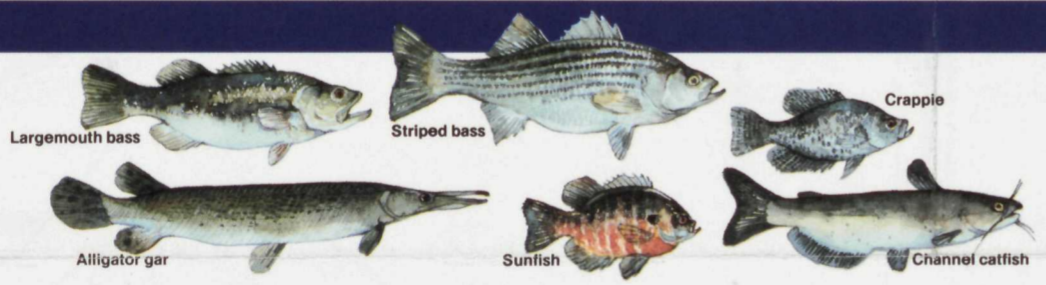
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## Amistad: The Nature of Transitions

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 country—low hills

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



**Fish.** Black bass, stripers, 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 longnose gar, shad, carp, blue and flathead catfish, white bass, and freshwater drum.

**Dangerous plants and animals.** Amistad’s natural communities include animals and plants which may be harmful. Poisonous snakes include the broadbanded and trans-Pecos copperheads; western diamondback, banded rock, and black-tailed rattlesnakes; and Texas coral snake. Poisonous arthropods 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 unfamiliar wild plants. Watch children; many wild fruits are poisonous. Pets must be on leashes at all times in the park.

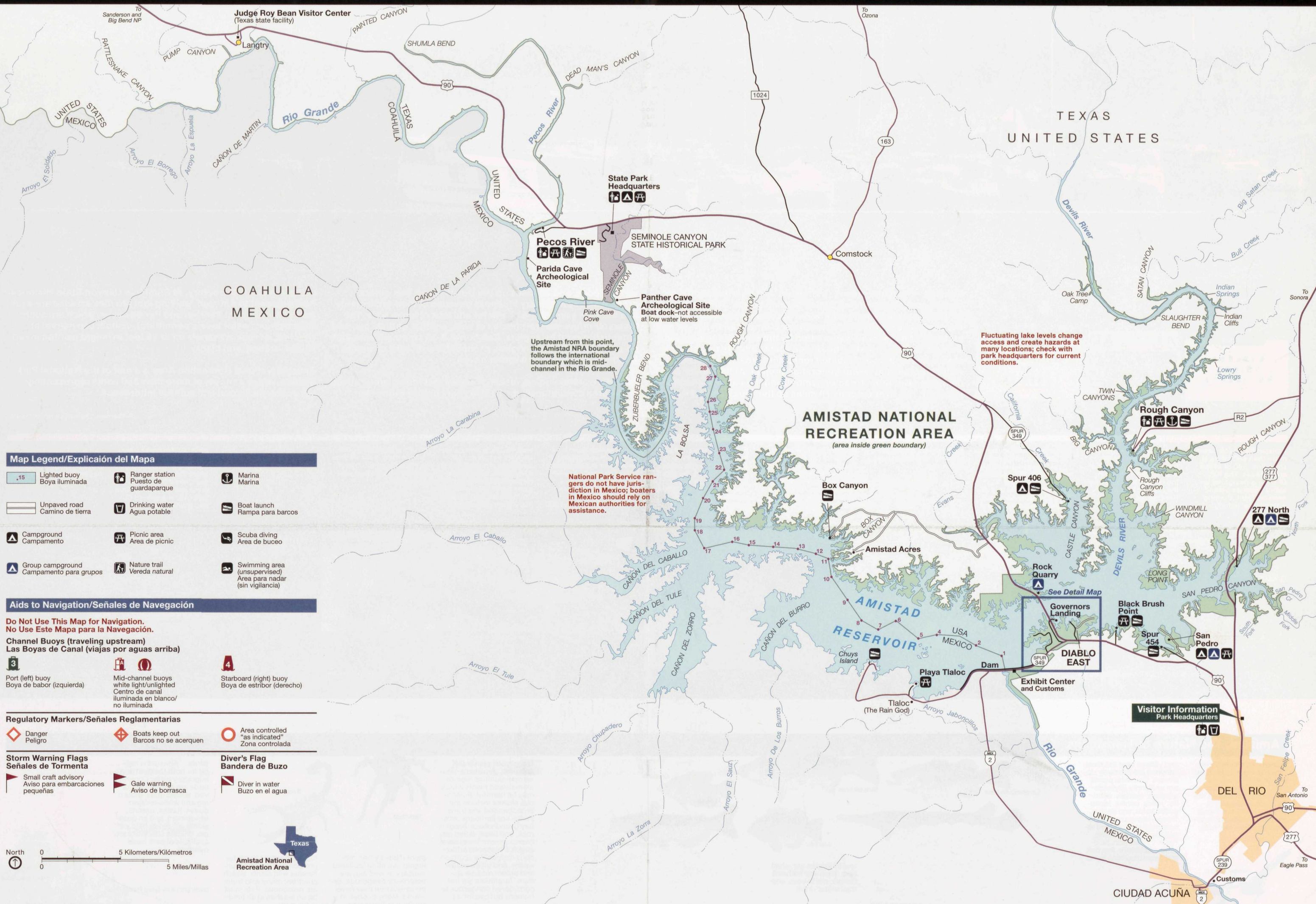
**Birds.** Amistad is habitat for both resident and migratory birds. Common birds are the vulture, raven, scaled quail, mourning and white-winged doves, hawks, herons, sandpipers, and an occasional golden or bald eagle. Wildlife checklists are available at park headquarters.



Illustrations by Greg Harlin



# Visiting Amistad



## Map Legend/Explicación del Mapa

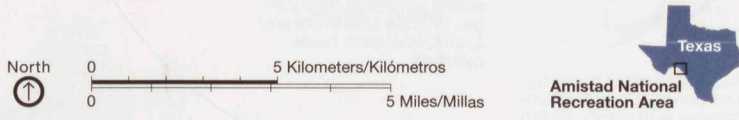
- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Lighted buoy<br>Boya iluminada             | Ranger station<br>Puesto de guardaparque | Marina   |
| Unpaved road<br>Camino de tierra           | Drinking water<br>Agua potable           | Boat launch<br>Rampa para barcos                                 |
| Campground<br>Campamento                   | Picnic area<br>Área de picnic            | Scuba diving<br>Área de buceo                                    |
| Group campground<br>Campamento para grupos | Nature trail<br>Vereda natural           | Swimming area (unsupervised)<br>Área para nadar (sin vigilancia) |

## Aids to Navigation/Señales de Navegación

- Do Not Use This Map for Navigation.  
No Use Este Mapa para la Navegación.**
- Channel Buoys (traveling upstream)  
Las Bojas de Canal (viajes por aguas arriba)**
- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Port (left) buoy<br>Boya de babor (izquierda) | Mid-channel buoys<br>white light/unlighted<br>Centro de canal<br>iluminada en blanco/<br>no iluminada | Starboard (right) buoy<br>Boya de estribor (derecho) |
|---|---|--|

## Regulatory Markers/Señales Reglamentarias

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Danger<br>Peligro   | Boats keep out<br>Barcos no se acercan | Area controlled<br>"as indicated"<br>Zona controlada |
| Storm Warning Flags<br>Señales de Tormenta                | Gale warning<br>Aviso de borrasca      | Diver's Flag<br>Bandera de Buzo                      |
| Small craft advisory<br>Aviso para embarcaciones pequeñas |  | Diver in water<br>Buzo en el agua                    |



## General Information

Amistad National Recreation Area lies in south-west Texas—west of San Antonio between Del Rio and Langtry, downstream from Big Bend National Park. It is reached via U.S. 90 from the east and west and U.S. 277/377 from the north and south. Near the customs station on the dam is the Amistad National Recreation Area Exhibit Center, open daily.

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 reservoir. Information is available at park headquarters in Del Rio, open daily, or at the ranger stations at Pecos River, Rough Canyon, or Diablo East.

For more information, write: **Superintendent, Amistad National Recreation Area, HCR-3, Box 5J, Del Rio, TX 78840-9350; 830-775-7491; www.nps.gov/amis.** Visit the National Park Service website at [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

**Accommodations** Food, lodgings, service stations, and travel-trailer parks are available at Del Rio and on U.S. 90.

**Facilities in Mexico** A swimming beach with picnic ramadas and launch ramp is near the west end of the dam. Boaters who land on the Mexican side of Lake Amistad are required to pass through U.S. customs upon return to the United States. National Park Service rangers do not have jurisdiction in Mexico; boaters in Mexico should rely on Mexican authorities for assistance.

**Electricity provided**—are available at designated park sites. Backcountry 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 year. Commercial campgrounds with electrical and water hookups are available in the surrounding area.

**Swimming** Do not swim from an unanchored boat. Swimming is permitted along the shoreline except in harbor areas. The park's designated swim beach does not have lifeguards.

**Archeological resources** All archeological sites within Amistad NRA are protected by federal and state laws. Removal or disturbance of archeological features or artifacts is strictly prohibited.

**Private land** Most of the land surrounding the lake is privately owned. Please respect owners' rights.

**Hunting** During the season, 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. A Texas hunting license is required.

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

**Fishing** Texas and Mexico fishing licenses are required in their respective waters; state fishing regulations apply in United States waters. Commercial fishing is prohibited in U.S. waters. For safety reasons, fishing is prohibited in harbor and swimming areas. Anglers may fish from the shore, boats, or fishing docks. A list of fishing guides is available at park headquarters.

There are three major boat ramps: **Diablo East ramp** is 10 miles from Del Rio. Boat and slip rentals are available, and supplies are sold. **Rough Canyon ramp**, 23 miles from Del Rio, has similar facilities. **Pecos River ramp** is 44 miles from Del Rio. You may launch boats only from designated sites.

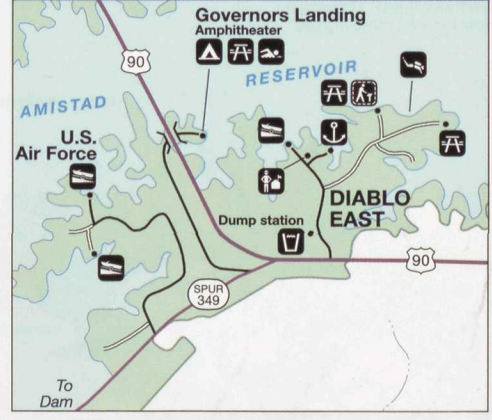
**Boating safety** Strong winds can make boating extremely hazardous in a short time. Get to shore as soon as possible. If your boat is disabled, stay with it as long as it will float. Always tell someone

where you are going and when you expect to return. Be sure you have enough fuel. Fluctuating lake levels change access and create hazards at many locations; check with park headquarters for current conditions.

**Regulations** Copies of boating rules and regulations are available at all park facilities. • It is unlawful to operate vessels recklessly, negligently, or under the influence of intoxicants or narcotics. • Vessels must maintain a flat wake within designated harbors. • Boat operators are responsible for damage caused by their wake. • Vessels must stay 100 feet from swimmers, down waterskiers, and divers' flags; vessels must stay 500 feet from designated swimming beaches. • In case of an accident, the operator shall render such assistance as is practical and necessary for the injured. Report accidents to a park ranger and state authorities within 24 hours.

**Fees** Boating and camping fees are now in effect; check locally for information.

## Diablo East Detail Map



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