

# El Malpaís

National Conservation Area  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management



*"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."*

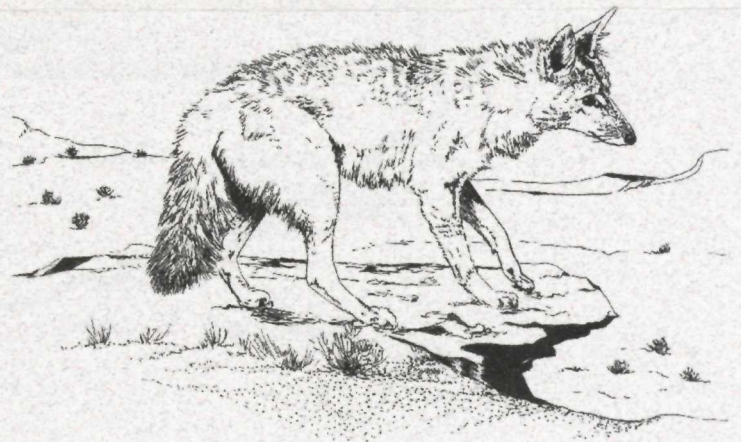
*Wilderness Act of 1964*

## West Malpais Wilderness / Hole-In-The-Wall

The West Malpais Wilderness encompasses grassland, piñon-juniper woodland, ponderosa pine parkland, and basalt lava fields. A myriad of trees, shrubs, mammals, reptiles, grasses, fungi and other creatures make this area their home.

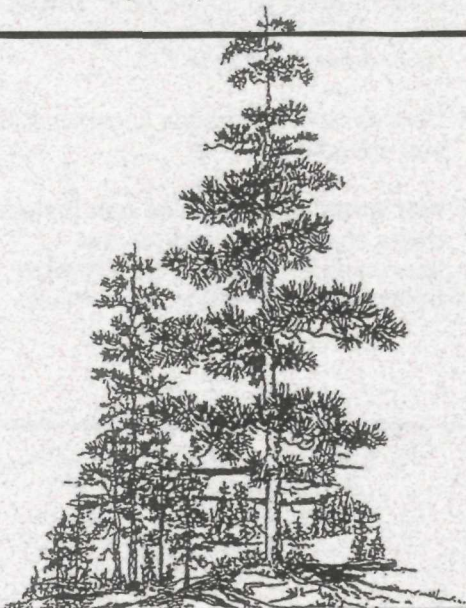
These life forms interact with and influence one another, manifesting the gossamer web of life in this harsh, dry environment. Lichen slowly dissolves rock, drawing sustenance from stone. This process provides new soil and a toehold for new plant growth. Antelope, deer, rabbits, and squirrels forage for these plants and scarce water, and occasionally their struggle for existence is ended by the crush of a coyote's bite or the talons of a redtailed hawk. Lightning-caused wildfires sweep through areas, destroying some plants, while releasing vital nutrients for others and opening up new niches in which life may begin anew.

The presence of humans is in evidence also. The ancestors of today's American Indians and modern day ranchers and homesteaders have influenced and interacted within this ever-changing community of life. It is now time for the major influence to revert back to the other, older members of this ecological family.



**Please practice *Leave No Trace* camping skills and ethics.**

Information regarding *Leave No Trace* is available at the BLM Ranger Station on SR 117.



Within the West Malpais Wilderness is a 6700-acre kipuka called Hole-In-The-Wall. "Kipuka" means "island" of fertile ground, underlain by the 700,000-year-old North Plains lava flows is inhabited by numerous forms of life, surrounded and segregated from their original biotic communities by a sea of broken, jagged basalt.

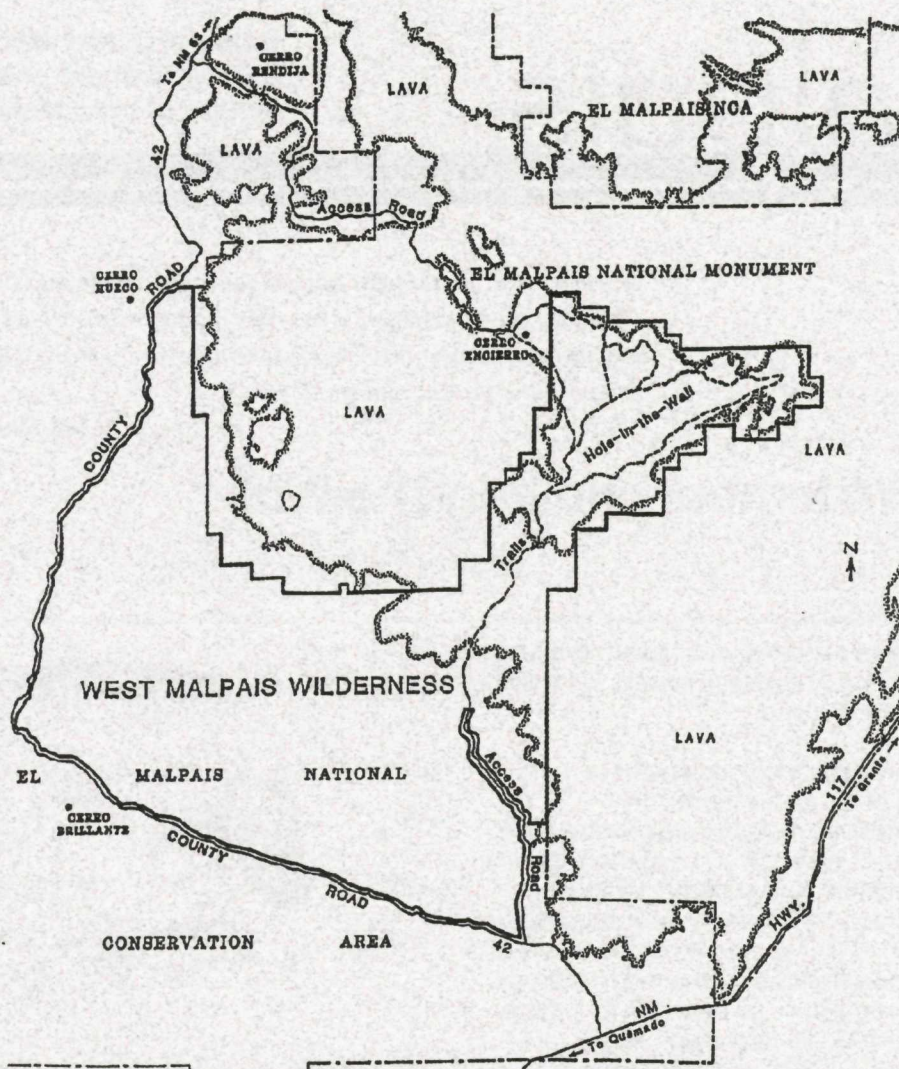
Many species have adapted to the unique conditions here, and in some cases, varieties prosper that have not lived in adjacent areas for a very long time. This tract is an isolated pocket of ponderosa pine forest with some open areas of rangeland. The area is bounded by the Hoya de Cibola lava

flow to the west, the Bandera lava flow to the north, and the McCarty's lava flow to the east.

You can explore above and below ground lava features, photograph a newborn antelope taking its first wobbly steps, or backpack down a trail that may have been used by people in a previous century.

The West Malpais Wilderness and Hole-In-The-Wall are places for you to savor solitude, encounter some of the Earth's primeval past, and experience the solace and satisfaction that comes from living at its elemental edge.





**ACCESS:**

The easier driving route to access the West Malpais Wilderness and Hole-In-The-Wall is from the south end of the NCA off NM 117. From NM 117, proceed northwest on CR 42 for approximately 2.1 miles. Take the right fork to the north and go approximately 5 miles up the "cherry stem" road to the West Malpais Wilderness trail-head.

Hole-In-The-Wall and the interior of the West Malpais Wilderness are accessed from the north by turning south from NM 53 onto CR 42 and proceeding approximately 5.8 miles. Then turn left (east) on the road that skirts the south side of Cerro Rendija. (Be forewarned, this is one of the roughest

roads in the NCA!) Proceed on that road approximately 2.1 miles, take the left fork, proceed an additional .7 miles, and take the right fork. (The left fork at this junction will take you to the Big Tubes area.) In an additional 1.2 miles, at the stock pond, bear left again. In .5 miles you will see a sign for Little Hole-In-The-Wall. Continue straight in for an additional 9 miles. At the single fencepost, bear right and continue straight in on the main road (such as it is) for another 3.9 miles to the Cerro Encierro Trail-head.

**POINTERS & PRECAUTIONS:**

- Water is a scarce and precious resource in this arid country. You **must** carry with you all the water you need.

- No mechanized vehicles (mountain bikes included) may be driven past the posted wilderness boundary into the wilderness.
- Obtain a backcountry permit from the El Malpais Information Center in Grants or the BLM El Malpais Ranger Station on New Mexico Highway 117.
- It's safer to let someone know where you are going.
- **Wet weather conditions can make all these roads treacherous and impassable. Check with a Ranger before you attempt to drive them.**

**For More Information Contact:**

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