



Foundation Document Overview

Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River

Texas



Contact Information

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Purpose



THE RIO GRANDE WILD AND SCENIC RIVER protects and enhances the free-flowing condition, water quality and quantity, biological, geological, cultural, recreational, and scenic values of the river corridor, which follows the international boundary between the United States and Mexico.



Significance

Significance statements express why Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

1. The spectacular river canyons, hot springs, primitive wilderness character, and international setting of the river provide opportunities for extended recreational experiences, including absolute solitude, self-reliance, and opportunities to observe unique prehistoric, historic, and modern cultures along the US-Mexican border.
2. The Rio Grande / Rio Bravo is an invaluable international resource for the United States and Mexico, providing vital water for diverse uses, sustaining wildlife and riparian ecosystems, and representing the most extensive ecologically intact aquatic and riparian habitat in the Chihuahuan Desert. Its remoteness provides a refuge for aquatic and terrestrial resources. As part of the only major river system in the Chihuahuan Desert, the river serves as the lifeblood for numerous threatened fish, mussels, reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals, and insects.
3. The designated section of the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River is free-flowing and, as such, characteristically exhibits wide variations in water flow and volume. The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, fed largely by the Rio Conchos in Chihuahua, Mexico, local aquifers, and Boquillas and Lower Canyons spring complexes, supports a largely groundwater-dependent ecosystem and associated riparian habitats.
4. The Rio Grande is highly unusual in the region because it flows through portions of two major geologic provinces—the Basin and Range and the Edwards Plateau—providing a rare opportunity to see textbook examples of many active geologic processes and features, including dramatic faulting, folding, igneous sills, canyons, basins, and fossils.
5. The Rio Grande and its tributaries are set in one of the most dramatic and storied landscapes in the West—from stunning narrow and deep canyons, verdant riparian vegetation, and striking cliffs, to wide open basins and long, unobstructed views.
6. The riparian corridor provides a moist ribbon through the desert that has sustained human presence for 13,500 years. In the park, the highest density of prehistoric and historic sites and the greatest diversity of human uses are concentrated here. Many of the most significant cultural resources of the park are associated with the Rio Grande corridor.
7. The Rio Grande / Rio Bravo del Norte constitutes an essential element in the continuity and corridor connection between the US and Mexican protected areas. The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River protects 196 river miles, and the Rio Grande's sister park, Monumento Natural Río Bravo del Norte, protects an additional 133 river miles of this same stretch of river on the Mexican side. The river and its values are managed by US and Mexican agencies, landowners, and partners, creating binational protection for the whole river system.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Free-Flow and Water Quality and Quantity**
- **Biological Values**
- **Cultural Values**
- **Geological Values**
- **Recreational Values**
- **Scenic Values**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The Rio Grande's ecosystem supports an extraordinary richness of plants and animals.
 - The Rio Grande and adjacent shores provide valuable habitat for communities of plant and animal species, including several endangered and threatened species. The river's protected status helps in the preservation, study, and recovery of many of these species.
 - Surface and groundwater is highly important to a desert ecosystem. Nowhere does the Chihuahuan Desert exhibit more biodiversity than along a waterway such as the Rio Grande. The springs of the Lower Canyons are significant in protecting the groundwater-dependent ecosystem along these segments.
- One hundred million years of geologic history is exposed along the river; this allows visitors, students, and scientists to study and learn about the geologic processes that formed the current landscape.
- An important part of the NPS mission is to preserve or restore natural resources, including natural soundscapes. Intrusive sounds are also a matter of concern to visitors. The Rio Grande is relatively free of intrusive or unnatural sounds, and management strives to preserve this value.
- Nonnative plants and animals are extremely disruptive to river-related ecosystems. Natural resource managers work with riverside landowners and river users to detect, monitor, remove, and prevent the spread of nonnative species.
- Water constitutes the most important resource in the Chihuahuan Desert.
- Maderas del Carmen and Cañon de Santa Elena are two Mexican federally protected areas adjacent to the Rio Grande. Together with Big Bend National Park, these areas preserve more than 2 million acres of important wildlife habitat and migration corridors. The areas offer unique opportunities for the United States and Mexico to work together toward common resource preservation goals.

Description

The Rio Grande (or El Rio Bravo del Norte in Spanish) stretches from the mountains of southern Colorado to the Gulf of Mexico, a distance of approximately 1,885 miles (mi). Along the way, the Rio Grande forms part of the international boundary between the United States and Mexico. In 1978, Congress designated a 196-mile portion of the Rio Grande in southwestern Texas as part of the national wild and scenic rivers system. The designated stretch of the Rio Grande begins in Big Bend National Park, opposite the boundary between the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Coahuila. It then flows through Mariscal and Boquillas Canyons in the national park. Downstream from the park, it extends along the state-managed Black Gap Wildlife Management Area and several parcels of private land in the Lower Canyons. The wild and scenic river segment ends at the county line between Terrell and Val Verde Counties, Texas.

This component of the national wild and scenic river system is unique in that only half of the river is designated. The southern half of the river could not be included in the

designation because it is owned by Mexico. However, in 2009 the government of Mexico protected over 300 miles of the river with the Monumento Natural Rio Bravo del Norte, which begins 18 miles (30 kilometers [km]) east of Ojinaga, Mexico, and terminates near the mouth of the Pecos River and the start of Amistad Reservoir.

Rugged canyons, verdant riparian areas, scenic rapids, and unspoiled views contribute to the scenic allure and outstanding visual quality of this area. The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River corridor represents an exceptional example of Chihuahuan Desert fauna in association with species that depend on the rare aquatic and riparian habitats of the river. It is an isolated outpost of rapidly dwindling and irreplaceable natural resources such as several fauna in association with species, including threatened and endangered species that depend on the rare aquatic and riparian habitats of the river. A number of wildlife species (especially birds) use the Rio Grande as a travel corridor. Many species of animals depend on the riverine habitat for survival.

Near its upstream end, the Rio Grande has sliced through the surrounding rocks to form steep-walled, sometimes narrow, canyons. Downstream from Boquillas Canyon, the river flows across a relatively broad and open floodplain. Near Reagan Canyon, the floodplain narrows abruptly, and the river flows in a continuous deeply cut canyon for almost 40 miles. In the Lower Canyons portion of this segment, the river and its tributaries lie 500 to 1,500 feet below the surrounding plateaus. Spectacular river canyons, occasional rapids, the primitive character of the river, and its international flavor create a stimulating environment for a high-quality recreational experience. The river can be enjoyed from canyon rims, along the shore, or in a boat. The designated segment is long enough to offer several varied and meaningful recreational experiences, lasting from a few hours to several days.

