



NEWS

U.S. Department of the Interior



A History of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

1807 – Zebulon Pike records the earliest known written description of the Great Sand Dunes as a “sea in a storm, except as to color, not the least sign of vegetation existing.”

1932 – President Herbert Hoover signs a proclamation enabling the Great Sand Dunes National Monument Act, successfully culminating a request initiated by the Ladies PEO Chapter of Monte Vista.

1966 -1972 -- USGS conducts six year hydrologic study of the valley’s water resources. It determined that the valley’s extensive, unconfined groundwater is the principal source of irrigation water for the valley’s agriculture community and remains stable due to recharge from surface water.

1986 – American Water Development Incorporated (AWDI) applies for rights to pump 200,000 acre feet of water per year from the San Luis Valley’s aquifers.

1990’s – Additional valley aquifer research defines the critical link between stream flow and groundwater in the ongoing development of the sand dunes. While the groundwater is key to the stability of the dunes, the surface water remains key to maintaining the groundwater levels under the dunes. Any diversion of either local stream flows or groundwater could lead to elimination of the dunes.

1991 – After a lengthy trial, the court dismisses the 1986 application by AWDI for rights to pump water from the San Luis Valley’s aquifers.

December 1999 - The Colorado Congressional delegation and the local community hold a Summit of the Dunes retreat where the idea of purchasing the Baca Ranch to create a National Park and a Fish and Wildlife Refuge is formed.

May 11 2000 - The Colorado Congressional delegation introduces the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act. On November 22, P.L. 106-530 is signed into law. The Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to designate a new national park upon determining sufficient land having a sufficient diversity of resources had been acquired.

The Act includes the following:

- A NPS Preserve, established upon enactment, consisting of lands transferred from the Rio Grande National Forest
- The purchase of the 97,000 acre Baca Ranch, adjacent to the existing National Monument
- Management of 53,000 acres of Baca Ranch land to be a National Wildlife Refuge
- Management of 31,000 acres of Baca Ranch land to be part of the new National Park
- Management of 13,000 acres of Baca Ranch, including Kit Carson peak, to be part of the Rio Grande National Forest
- Establishment of Great Sand Dunes National Park is effective when notice of the Secretary's designation is published in the Federal Register.

January 2001 – An opinion from the Department of the Interior's Solicitor notes that the legislative history and the bill language provide a strong inference that Congress intended the designation as a national park could not occur until part or all of the Baca Ranch lands have been acquired.

January 2001– The United States signs an initial agreement to acquire the Baca Ranch from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) over an extended period of time if TNC is successful in negotiating its purchase, and are willing to provide the additional funding needed.

December 2001 – TNC enters into an agreement to purchase the Baca Ranch from Cobeza de Vaca Land and Cattle Company, LLC, once legal issues affecting the title are resolved. Yale University, a shareholder in the Land and Cattle Company, subsequently donates its \$1.5 million profit from the future sale of its investment to TNC to be used for future acquisitions complimentary to the purchase of the Baca Ranch.

2001 -2004 - Congress appropriates \$31 million for the purchase of the Baca Ranch; TNC borrows \$3.5 million to cover the remaining amount due so the purchase can occur before September 30, 2004.

January 2002 – At the request of TNC, DOI and TNC execute a new agreement for the U.S. to purchase the Baca Ranch from The Nature Conservancy.

2004 - On September 10, 2004 the joint purchase of the Baca Ranch is completed by the National Park Service and TNC

The acquisition of the Baca Ranch provides the U.S. fee title to 3,816 acres of lands critical to the national park, with the U.S. and TNC holding 89 and 11 percent undivided interests, respectively, in the remainder of the ranch. NPS will immediately commence

management of the portion designated by Congress for the park, while TNC will manage the Refuge and US Forest Service portions until the U.S. purchases TNC's interest.

TNC's interest will be acquired once appropriations are made by Congress, which most likely will occur in FY 05. Once TNC's interest has been purchased, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service will assume sole management of their respective portions of the purchased land.

2004 – On September 13, 2004, Secretary Gale Norton signs the designation to establish The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve (America's 58th national park) and celebrate the new Baca National Wildlife Refuge at a ceremony at the GSD Monument.

Actions to occur at that ceremony include:

- Signing of the designation of the current national monument