

America’s First National Recreation Area

Lake Mead National Recreation Area is the largest recreation area in the country. Its cool water, amazing vistas, and many miles of trails and designated dirt roads attract millions of visitors who can find solitude and beauty in all seasons.

Begin at Lake Mead Visitor Center, where rangers will help you plan your trip. In the park’s other developed areas, you’ll find marinas, docks, restaurants, lodging, retail stores, and campgrounds.

In the summer heat, Lake Mead and Lake Mohave will beckon you to fish, swim, kayak, and boat. Cooler weather will entice you to picnic, camp, and explore established trails. We invite you to enjoy your favorite land- or water-based recreational activities (*options at right*) in this diverse and colorful desert landscape.



Meander along trails to reach Redstone’s covered picnic areas and sandstone landscapes. Explore the pockets shaped by wind and water.
NPS / ANDREW J. CATTON

Lake Mead and Lake Mohave were formed when Hoover Dam and Davis Dam were completed in 1936 and 1951. The Bureau of Reclamation manages the dams and lake levels, supplying water and electricity to over 25 million people in several states and northern Mexico. In 1936 the National Park Service began to manage land- and water-based recreation and protect the area’s natural and cultural features. In 1964 Congress designated both lakes and the surrounding 1.5 million acres as the first national recreation area.

Eighty-seven percent of the park is in the Mojave Desert, where plants and animals have adapted to thrive with little water. The desert is home to over 900 plant and 500 animal species, including 24 that are rare or threatened.

Land-Based Recreation	Water-Based Recreation
Running Biking Hiking History/Ghost Towns Hunting Art Meditation/Yoga Horseback Riding Ranger-Led Programs	Birding Photography Scenic Drives Volunteering Picnicking Camping Staying at a Lodge Stargazing Watching Sunrise or Sunset
	Motorized Boating Waterskiing Kayaking/Canoeing Stand-Up Paddleboarding Scuba Diving Swimming Fishing Sailing

The view of Lake Mead and FORTIFICATION HILL from Boulder Basin is unparalleled.
NPS / ALEX HARRISON

Life at Lake Mead



The SIDE-BLOTCHED LIZARD (*above*) and COLLARED LIZARD (*far right*) are among 19 lizard species that live in the park. They are active at temperatures above 70°F.
NPS / ANDREW J. CATTON



This COYOTE will likely wait for cooler evening temperatures to look for food. Desert coyotes are about half the size of other coyotes and need less water—an advantage in the desert.
© PETE SUEHR



CREOSOTE plants, which smell like desert rain, cover about 70 percent of the Mojave Desert.
NPS / ANDREW J. CATTON



ROADRUNNERS prefer running to flying. They’ve been clocked at speeds of over 20 mph.
NPS / ANDREW J. CATTON



A GOLDEN EAGLE lifts off as DESERT BIGHORN RAMS clamber into sight. Their concave hooves grip rocks, allowing them to scramble up steep terrain.
© MARC BURMAN



The spines of BUCKHORN CHOLLA offer protection from desert heat and animals seeking food.
NPS / ANDREW J. CATTON

Journey Through Our Geologic Past

This colorful landscape displays a rich geologic history. From the red, iron-rich sandstone to the black basalt lava rock to the gray, fossil-embedded limestone, Lake Mead reveals evidence of nearly every type of geologic process.

Geologists use words like crash, push, deposit, break, and erode to describe the how the landscape developed. Massive blocks of Earth’s crust crashed together, creating mountains. Magma pushed upward, forming volcanoes and lava domes. Ancient seas deposited layers of sediment to make sandstone and limestone. Wind and water eroded soils and rocks above and below the surface, creating caves and canyons.

Fortification Hill (*below*) is a dark volcanic plateau that rises just beyond the eastern shoreline of Boulder Basin. Hike and scramble up 1,400 feet and take in the incredible views.

Weathering, erosion, and deposition can be seen along the Bluffs Trail, where chunks of land slough off along the Las Vegas Wash, and sediment is deposited in the channel’s twists and turns. Rocks of every type—carried by water and other geologic processes from the surrounding mountains—are also scattered along the trail.

Trilobites (*below*) thrived in ancient, shallow seas. The tiny fossils can be seen in limestone deposits along the Wetlands Trail. Please don’t carve them out of the surrounding rock or pick them up. Leave all rocks, plants, and artifacts in place so that others may enjoy them.

Wind and rain carved unique shapes into the soft redstone. See these shapes while meandering along a paved, accessible trail.

The distant mountains you can see from Lake Mead came from faults scraping against each other. The Las Vegas Valley still has several active fault lines that produce an occasional earthquake.



FORTIFICATION HILL dominates views from Boulder Basin. Behind, Wilson Ridge rises to 5,455 feet. The “bathtub ring” marks the historic high-water level in 1983.
NPS / ANDREW J. CATTON



TRILOBITES lived in the ancient ocean that covered some of this area. They became extinct more than 250 million years ago.
NPS

INDIGENOUS HOMELANDS

Lake Mead National Recreation Area includes the ancestral homelands of several Native Tribes. Since time immemorial, Numic- and Yuman-speaking peoples have farmed, collected mesquite beans and prickly pear cactus fruit, and made baskets, shoes, ropes, and dwellings from local resources.

NEW PEOPLE By the 1700s, European Americans began to build small towns along the Colorado, Virgin, and Muddy Rivers. In 1849 Mormon pioneers arrived. In 1867 a rush for gold and silver created more growth. Seasonal flooding along the Colorado River led to the proposal for a dam to regulate river

flow, generate power, and provide water for drinking and irrigation. Boulder Dam was completed in 1936 and later renamed Hoover Dam. By 1941 Lake Mead reached full water pool (1,219 feet in elevation), and in 1951 Lake Mohave was formed from Davis Dam. A new generation of tourists and locals from the Las



Find this red-on-buff pottery bowl and other Indigenous artifacts on the collections page of the park website.
NPS / ANDREW J. CATTON

COLORADO RIVER

HIDDEN RIVER From its snowy beginnings in the Rockies, the Colorado River runs more than 800 miles before it flows out of the Grand Canyon into Lake Mead and Lake Mohave. The lakes rise hundreds of feet above the old riverbed, which still forms the border between Arizona and Nevada. Davis Dam, at the park’s southern edge, releases the river to flow south toward Mexico.

CHANGES Today the river is bringing less water into the park than in the past. Less snow is falling in the mountains of Wyoming, Utah, and Colorado, which means less water flowing into the streams and rivers that feed the Colorado River.

LIVING HERE

HOW PLANTS SURVIVE The Joshua tree is a yucca that lives in the higher elevations of the Mojave Desert. Pollinated only by the yucca moth, it blooms after a wet winter with freezing temperatures. The creosote bush dominates the lowlands. Its tiny leaves are coated with resin to hold in water. Wind, water, and wildlife transport wildflower seeds, which rest in the soil until the next rainy season.

HOW ANIMALS SURVIVE During hot weather, desert tortoises burrow under the ground to stay cool. They emerge after a rain to drink. In dry periods tortoises get water from plants they eat. Jackrabbits stay cool by circulating blood through their big ears.



Black-tailed jackrabbit
© NED HARRIS



Desert tortoise
© DARIN CHADWICK



Joshua tree
© BRIAN WOLF

Vegas Valley embraced recreation at Lake Mead and Lake Mohave, and a recreational “boom” began.

EMERGING HISTORY By 2000 climate change began to cause record-setting droughts in the Desert Southwest. The water supply has steadily decreased, and lake

levels have dropped, revealing historic settlements like St. Thomas and artifacts from beer cans to Native American objects. The emerging items provide information that allows archeologists to study what would have otherwise been lost. The power a sacred site holds for Native Americans is undiminished by having

been submersed for many years. Leave all historic objects in place, and take only pictures to allow others to experience and research this history.

THE QUEST TO REACH THE WATER Crisscrossing, unapproved roads were created when people tried to

reach the lakes’ new shorelines. Vehicles that use these roads can damage historic sites, plants, and animals and become trapped in soft or water-saturated silt. To preserve the area’s historical and cultural features and for your safety, drive only on approved roads.

Exploring Lake Mead National Recreation Area



BLUFFS TRAIL On this trail, you can see erosion and deposition. Bring binoculars to view birds in the Las Vegas Wash.

ST. THOMAS Hike a two-mile trail to see the remnants of a Mormon settlement abandoned in the 1930s.

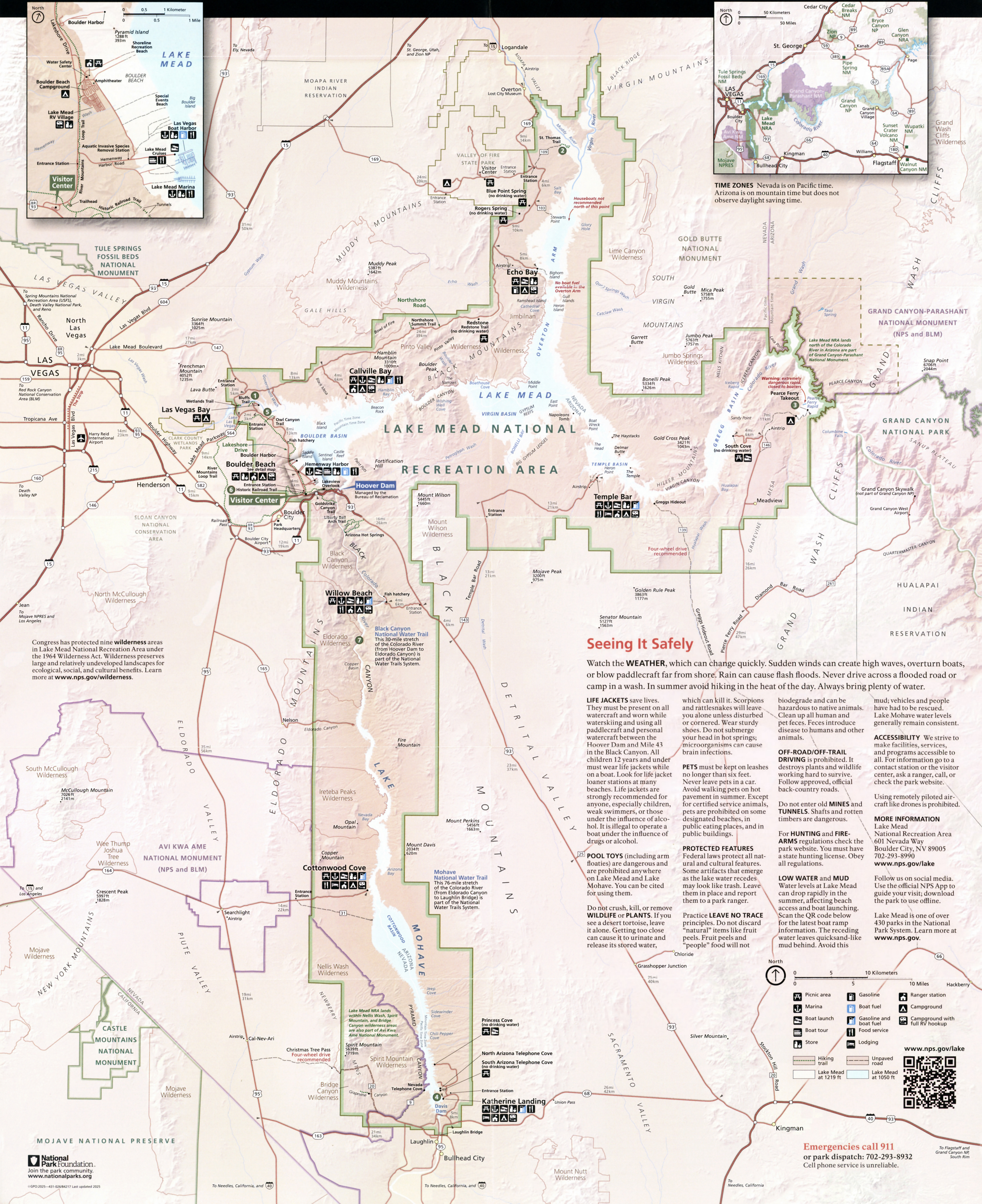
PEARCE FERRY Explore the spot where the muddy Colorado River pours out of the Grand Canyon into Lake Mead.

KATHERINE LANDING At Lake Mohave, Katherine Landing has beaches, boat launches, and other amenities.

33 HOLE Picnic with a view at 33 Hole and then hike into the Owl Canyon Trail's narrow slots.

HISTORIC RAILROAD TRAIL Follow the train route that hauled supplies to build Hoover Dam. The universally accessible trail is open to bikes.

BLACK CANYON Bring your paddlecraft, snacks, drinking water, and life jackets to explore hidden gems. Life jackets must be worn between the dam and Mile 43.



Seeing It Safely

Watch the **WEATHER**, which can change quickly. Sudden winds can create high waves, overturn boats, or blow paddlecraft far from shore. Rain can cause flash floods. Never drive across a flooded road or camp in a wash. In summer avoid hiking in the heat of the day. Always bring plenty of water.

- LIFE JACKETS** save lives. They must be present on all watercraft and worn while waterskiing and using all paddlecraft and personal watercraft between the Hoover Dam and Mile 43 in the Black Canyon. All children 12 years and under must wear life jackets while on a boat. Look for life jacket loaner stations at many beaches. Life jackets are strongly recommended for anyone, especially children, weak swimmers, or those under the influence of alcohol. It is illegal to operate a boat under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- which can kill it. Scorpions and rattlesnakes will leave you alone unless disturbed or cornered. Wear sturdy shoes. Do not submerge your head in hot springs; microorganisms can cause brain infections.
- PETS** must be kept on leashes no longer than six feet. Never leave pets in a car. Avoid walking pets on hot pavement in summer. Except for certified service animals, pets are prohibited on some designated beaches, in public eating places, and in public buildings.
- PROTECTED FEATURES** Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features. Some artifacts that emerge as the lake water recedes may look like trash. Leave them in place and report them to a park ranger.
- Do not crush, kill, or remove **WILDLIFE** or **PLANTS**. If you see a desert tortoise, leave it alone. Getting too close can cause it to urinate and release its stored water, which can be hazardous to native animals. Clean up all human and pet feces. Feces introduce disease to humans and other animals.
- OFF-ROAD/OFF-TRAIL DRIVING** is prohibited. It destroys plants and wildlife working hard to survive. Follow approved, official back-country roads.
- Do not enter old **MINES** and **TUNNELS**. Shafts and rotten timbers are dangerous.
- For **HUNTING** and **FIRE-ARMS** regulations check the park website. You must have a state hunting license. Obey all regulations.
- LOW WATER** and **MUD** Water levels at Lake Mead can drop rapidly in the summer, affecting beach access and boat launching. Scan the QR code below for the latest boat ramp information. The receding water leaves quicksand-like mud behind. Avoid this mud; vehicles and people have had to be rescued. Lake Mohave water levels generally remain consistent.
- ACCESSIBILITY** We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a contact station or the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.
- Using remotely piloted aircraft like drones is prohibited.
- MORE INFORMATION** Lake Mead National Recreation Area 601 Nevada Way Boulder City, NV 89005 702-293-8990 www.nps.gov/lake
- Follow us on social media. Use the official NPS App to guide your visit; download the park to use offline.
- Lake Mead is one of over 430 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

Emergencies call 911 or park dispatch: 702-293-8932 Cell phone service is unreliable.