

Visitor Guide

Great Sand Dunes
National Park
and Preserve



Great dunes, great mountains...
and great experiences!



Welcome!

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve protects the tallest dunes in North America... and a whole lot more. The park and preserve contain ecosystems ranging from wetlands to forest to tundra—each supporting specially adapted plant, animal and insect life. Make the most of your visit by experiencing this diversity!



Snowy Dunes, March



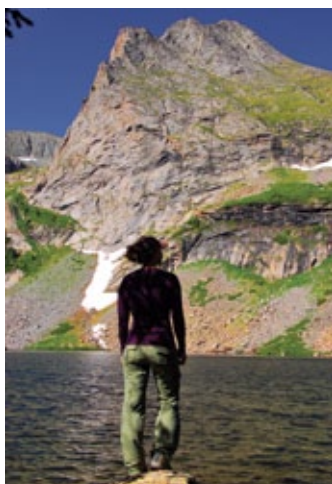
Medano Creek, May

View from Mosca Canyon along the Mosca Creek Trail, October



2-3 Exploring Main Use Area

Trip planning
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the park and
local area such as
lodging, camping,
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programs, entrance
fees

Safety Tips: Protect Yourself and Your Park

Hot Sand In summer months during mid-day, sand temperatures can reach 150 degrees F. Hike during the morning or evening to avoid heat exhaustion and/or burned feet. Wear closed-toe shoes.

Lightning Lightning can occur anytime during the warmer months (especially July – August), when afternoon storms approach the dunes. Avoid fatal lightning strikes by experiencing the dunes and other open areas during morning hours. Remain in a building or vehicle until 30 minutes after the last thunder. If you are in immediate danger, crouch in a low-lying area on top of a pack to prevent a ground charge.

High Winds Winds are possible any time of the year. Especially during the spring season, storm fronts can produce high winds which cause sand to blow. Hike during these conditions at your own risk. If hiking during windy conditions, consider wearing eye protection, long sleeves and pants to avoid getting sand-blasted. If sand gets in your eyes, flush with water or saline solution. Check at the visitor center or on the park website for weather forecasts and conditions.

High Elevation Elevations within the park and preserve range from 8,200 feet to 13,604 feet (2,499m - 4,146m). Visitors new to this elevation should stay hydrated, wear sun protection, and hike slowly. Visitors hiking in the higher-elevation backcountry should pack layers to avoid hypothermia. If you experience shortness of breath, headaches and nausea: rest, hydrate and slowly descend from your elevation.

Wildlife Protect yourself and Great Sand Dunes wildlife by never feeding animals. Store food and scented items in your vehicle or bear-proof containers located in Piñon Flats Campground and Medano Pass Primitive Road. Bear hangs or bear containers are required when camping in the national park backcountry. Adhere to park speed limits to avoid injuring or killing animals and damaging your vehicle. Information sheets about camping and hiking in bear and mountain lion country are available at the visitor center.

Emergency Calls Dial 911 for emergencies or contact the visitor center for assistance. Cell service is not consistently reliable within the boundaries of Great Sand Dunes NPP.

First Aid Items and Medicines Bandages, sun protection, pain reliever, allergy medicine, eye drops and sanitary items can be purchased in the visitor center year round. These items are also available at the store in the campground, and the Oasis store outside park boundaries, during the main spring through fall operating season. Contact a ranger at the visitor center for phone numbers of local pharmacies and clinics.

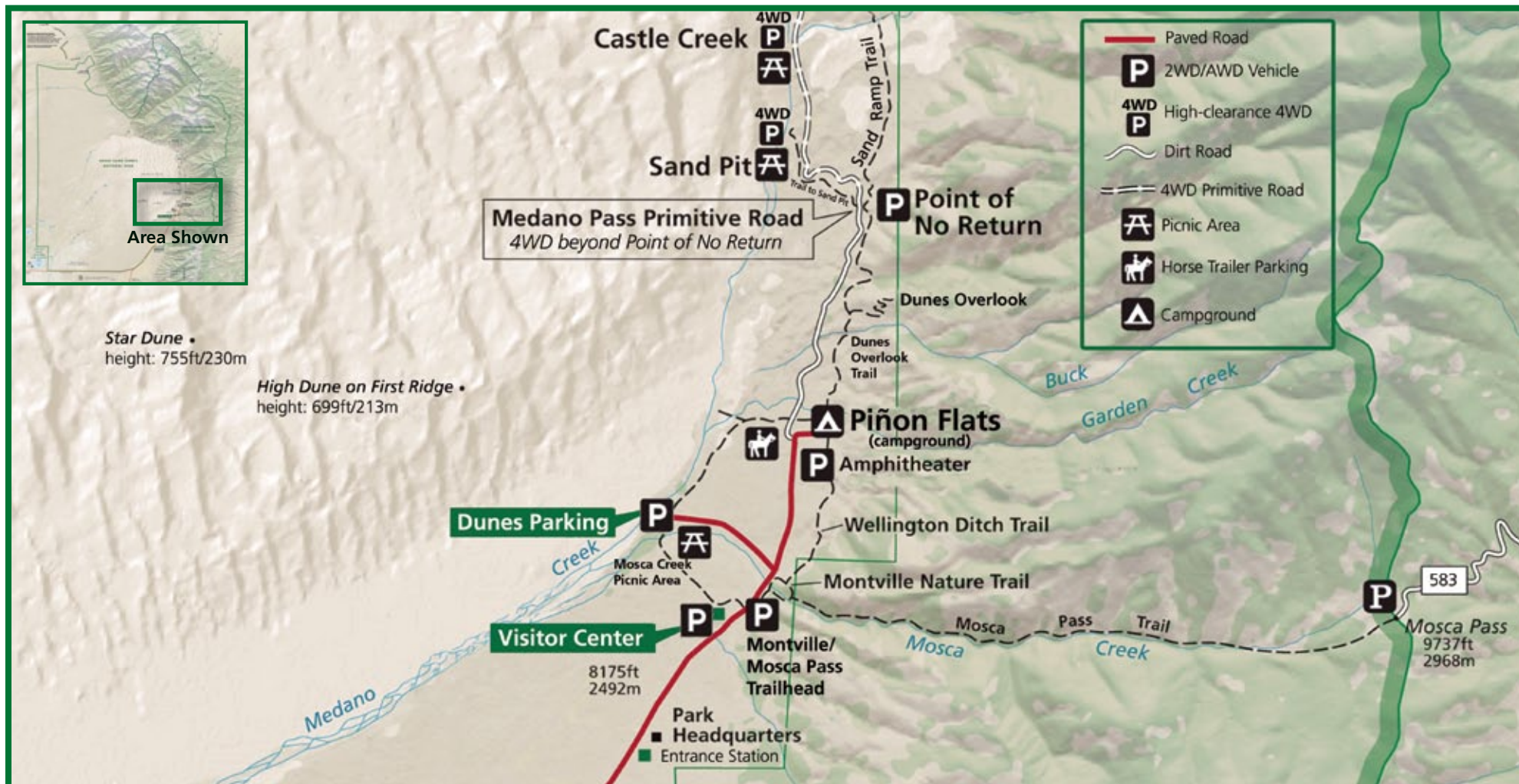
Unmanned Aircraft (Drones) To protect wildlife, emergency operations, and visitor privacy, it is illegal to launch or land an unmanned aircraft within the boundaries of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve or other national park units.

Marijuana Recreational marijuana is legal in the state of Colorado, but the consumption and possession of marijuana is ILLEGAL on federal lands, including national parks in Colorado. Individuals will be cited and fined for illegal activity within Great Sand Dunes.



Keep wildlife wild. Use
campsite bear-proof
boxes.

Exploring: Main Use Area



from Dunes Parking



High Dune on First Ridge

- In summer, hike early morning or evening to avoid 150°F (66°C) sand or lightning
- View of entire dunefield
- Round trip hike: 2.5 miles (4 km) - no trails
- Elevation gain: 699 feet (214 m)
- Average Time: 2 hours
- Hike on tops of ridges for fastest travel
- Best photography opportunities are at sunrise and sunset when shadows form



Medano Creek (seasonal)

- The depth of the creek, and length of time the creek sustains its depth, is dependent on precipitation and snow melt. This will vary each year.
- In an average year, the creek flows April through June at the Dunes Parking Area
- Peak flow with surge waves typically occurs from late May to early June
- The creek is adjacent to the Dunes Parking Area, easily accessible for all. Splash, play and wade in this unique natural beach environment!

from Montville/ Mosca Pass Trailhead



Montville Nature Trail

- Forest, Mosca Creek, and view of first ridge of dunes
- Pick up a trail guide at the visitor center during business hours
- Round trip hike: 0.5 mile (1 km)
- Elevation gain: 200 feet (61 m)
- Average time: 30 minutes

Mosca Pass Trail

- Forest, Mosca Creek, meadows, views of forested ridges
- Round trip hike: 7 miles (11 km)
- Elevation gain: 1400 feet (427 m)
- Average time: 3.5 hours

Wellington Ditch Trail

- From Montville Loop Trail, continue 1 mile (1.6 km) on a sunny, level foothills trail to Piñon Flats Campground.



from Visitor Center

Sand Sheet Loop Trail

- Short grasslands trail
- Round Trip: 0.25 miles (0.2 km)
- Elevation: 50 feet (15 m)
- Average time: 30 minutes



from Piñon Flats Campground, Loop 2



Dunes Overlook

- View of first ridge of dunes
- Round trip hike: 2.3 miles (3.7 km)
- Elevation gain: 450 feet (137 m)
- Average time: 2 hours

from Point of No Return

Sand Pit Picnic Area

- Gentle slopes above Medano Creek
- Round trip hike to picnic area: 1.5 miles (2.4 km)
- Elevation gain: 400 feet (121 m)
- Average round trip time: 1 hour
- Vault toilet
- Access picnic area directly with high-clearance 4WD



Castle Creek Picnic Area

- 400 foot (121m) dune face rises from creek
- Hike trail to Sand Pit, then walk along Medano Creek to Castle Creek Picnic Area
- Round trip: 3 miles (4.8 km)
- Elevation gain: 400 feet (121 m)
- Average round trip time: 1.5 hours
- Vault toilet
- Access picnic area directly with high-clearance 4WD



Plan Your Visit: Main Use Area



2 hours

- Visit the visitor center for the park film, exhibits, weather forecasts, park store, and helpful rangers
- Explore the dunefield from the main Dunes Parking Area to hike, splash in Medano Creek (seasonal), or sand sled/sandboard. See Page 6 for rental information.
- Drive your 4WD vehicle along the Medano Pass Primitive Road to Sand Pit or Castle Creek picnic areas for a picnic
- Walk your dog (on leash) along Medano Creek from the Dunes Parking Area, Sand Pit Picnic Area, Point of No Return, or Castle Creek picnic area.
- Hike the Montville Nature Trail (page 2)
- Hike the Sand Sheet Loop Trail (page 2)



Mosca Creek provides a shady retreat in afternoon hours when sand temperatures soar to 150 degrees F.

If you have more time:

- Attend an afternoon ranger program at the visitor center during summer weekends
- Attend an evening program at the Amphitheater on summer weekends
- Hike the dunes after dark to experience dark skies and natural sounds
- Hike Mosca Pass to view wildflowers and listen to songbirds (page 2)
- Hike Star Dune, the tallest dune in North America
- Explore the backcountry (pages 5-6) on foot or with 4WD
- Around sunrise or sunset, view elk, pronghorn, or mule deer in grasslands from pullouts along entrance road



Plan at least 5 hours round trip to hike Star Dune, the tallest dune in North America at 755 feet (230m)



Enjoy an Evening Program at the Amphitheater

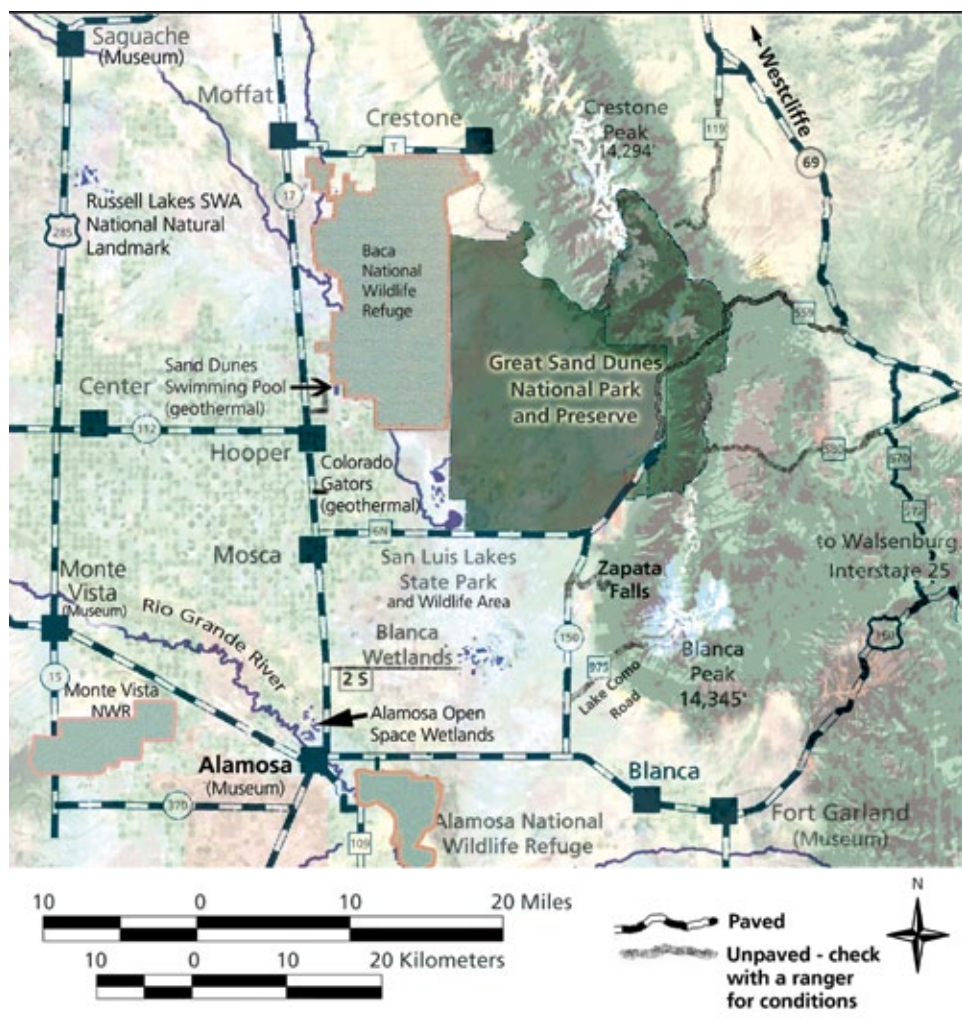


Elk in Grasslands, October

3-5 hours, you can also...

- Hike to the top of the first ridge of dunes (see "High Dune on First Ridge," page 2)
- Visit Zapata Falls Recreation Area for a refreshing waterfall and spectacular view of the dunefield (see below)
- Hike upstream along Medano Creek toward the mountains

Nearby Public Lands



Area Wetlands

San Luis Lakes State Wildlife Area

Main lake open year round; wetlands closed Feb. 15 to July 15 for nesting. Located on Lane 6N. 719-378-2020.



Blanca Wetlands

Located 14 miles SE of Mosca; from Highway 17, take County Road 2S east 7 miles. Closed for nesting Feb. 15 to July 15.

National Wildlife Refuges Alamosa and Monte Vista NWR open year round, 719-589-4021. Baca NWR Visitor Center is open to the public; call 719-256-5527 for hours.

Zapata Falls Recreation Area



This 20 foot (7m) high waterfall cascades within a narrow crevasse, and the area includes spectacular views of the entire dunefield. Drive 8 miles south to the large Zapata Falls Recreation Area sign, then drive 3 miles up the bumpy gravel road. Hike 1/2 mile (800m) to the creek. **You must hike through water into the cave to view the falls.** Watch for falling rocks. Water is cold, and may be swift and deep in early summer. Campground, picnic tables, and mountain biking trails are also available. BLM, 719-852-5941.



South Zapata Lake

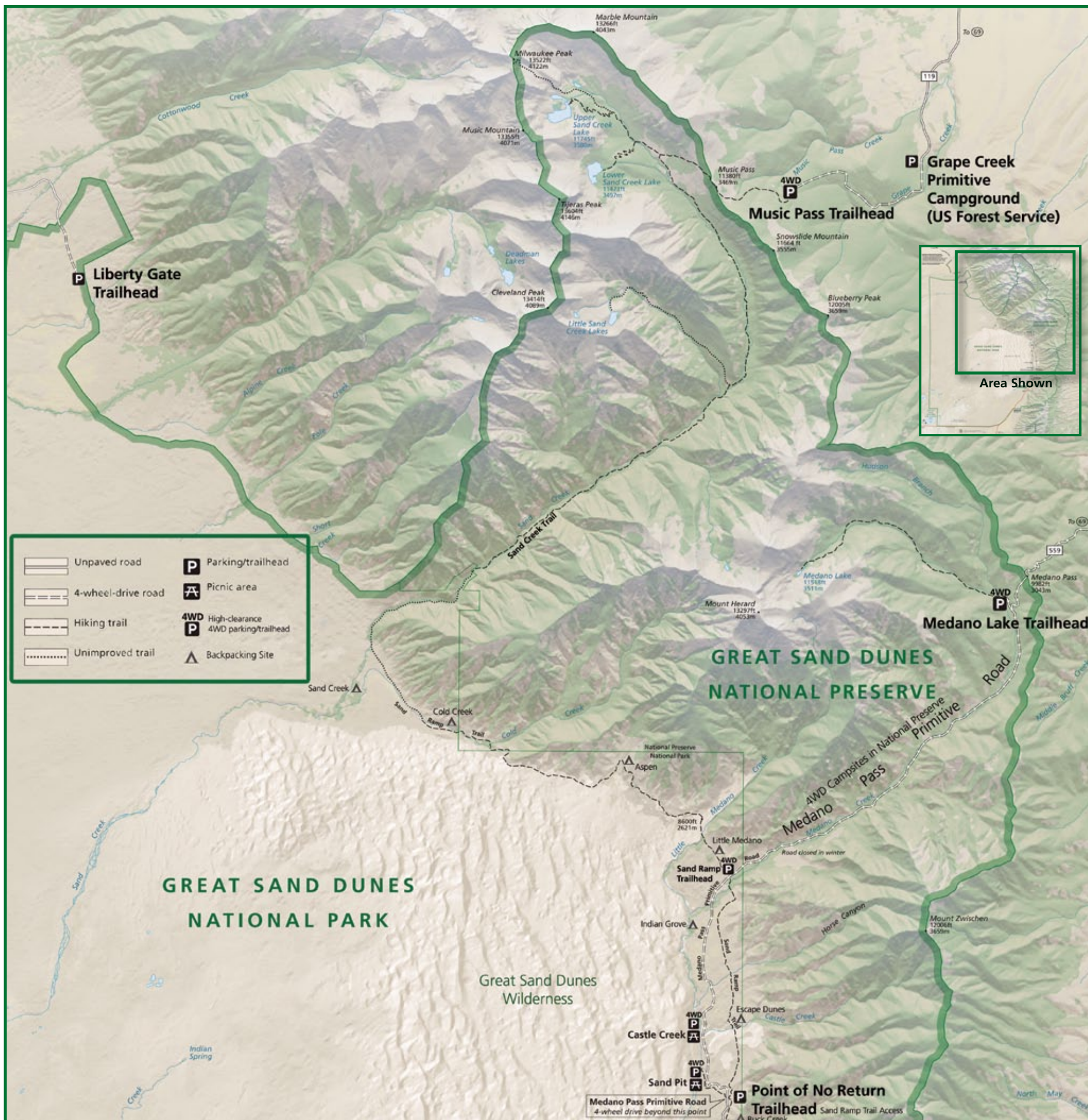
Rio Grande National Forest

South Zapata Lake

From Zapata Falls Recreation Area, hike 10 miles (16km) round trip to an alpine lake below Ellingwood Peak (14,042 feet/4,280m).

Blanca Peak is the fourth highest peak in Colorado at 14,345 feet (4,372m). 16 mile round trip hike to its summit from trailhead; shorter hike with high-clearance 4WD on very rough Lake Como Road.

Backcountry



Directions to Backcountry Trailheads and Parking Areas

- **Point of No Return:** 1 mile (1.6km) on Medano Pass Primitive Road, beyond Piñon Flats Campground. This parking area provides access to national park backcountry sites along the Sand Ramp Trail.
- **Sand Ramp Trail Access:** 5 miles (8km) on Medano Pass Primitive Road, beyond Piñon Flats Campground. This small parking area is accessible by high-clearance 4WD vehicles only, providing access to national park backcountry sites along the Sand Ramp Trail.
- **Medano Lake Trailhead:** Follow sign after driving 10.5 miles (17km) along Medano Pass Primitive Road, beyond Piñon Flats Campground. This trailhead is accessible by high-clearance 4WD vehicles only, providing access to Medano Lake.
- **Music Pass Trailhead:** This trailhead is accessible via Pass Creek Road, CR 572, located 2 miles (3km) west of La Veta Pass on US 160. The turnoff is 39 miles from the visitor center or 28 miles west of I25. Drive 11 miles on CR 572 (unpaved) until the road turns into CR 570. Take a right on CR 550 (paved road) and drive 5 miles (8km) to CO 69. Turn left and drive another 28 miles (45 km) until you see the "Music Pass" sign. Continue to follow the signs on several gravel or dirt roads. 2WD or AWD vehicles should park and hike from the USFS Grape Creek Campground. 4WD vehicles can continue for an additional 2.5 miles (4km) to the trailhead. This trailhead provides access to Music Pass, Sand Creek Lakes, and Little Sand Creek Lakes, as well as other areas in Great Sand Dunes National Preserve.
- **Liberty Gate Trailhead** (*this access is via public roads in a residential subdivision; please respect private property*) From Crestone, drive 1.5 miles (2.4 km) south on Camino Baca Grande, turn right on Camino Real and drive 0.5 mile (0.8 km). Take a left on Wagon Wheel Road until it ends. Take a left on Camino del Rey until it ends. Take a right on Camino Baca Grande, drive 1.5 miles (2.4 km) on a dirt road. This trailhead and parking area provides access to grasslands, Rio Grande National Forest, as well as distant access to Sand Creek and the north side of the dunefield (14 mile/23km round trip hike from the trailhead).



Map of route to Music Pass Trailhead via Pass Creek Pass
Courtesy Google Maps

Trip Planning: Backcountry



Backcountry Regulations and Safety Tips

Backcountry Regulations

- Backcountry permits are NOT required for campsites along the Medano Pass Primitive Road or within Great Sand Dunes National Preserve, unless you park within the national park, or your trip includes some days in the national park.
- A free backcountry permit is required for camping in one of seven designated national park backcountry sites, and camping in the Great Sand Dunes Wilderness.
- Permits must be obtained by a ranger at the visitor center, between 30 minutes after opening and 30 minutes before closing. Call or check website for visitor center operating hours.
- Permits are first-come, first-served for groups of no more than 6 people in the national park, and 15 in the national preserve.
- Pets are not permitted in the national park backcountry, but are permitted in the national preserve. Pick up a pet map at the visitor center for details.
- Campfires are only permitted in designated fire rings along the Medano Pass Primitive Road, and at Sand Creek backcountry site, but not in any other backcountry location.
- All vehicles being registered with the permit must obtain a free parking pass with their permit, since a limited number of parking areas within Great Sand Dunes allow for overnight parking.
- Distances to the seven national park backcountry sites will vary depending on available overnight parking options.

Backcountry Safety Tips

- Check the weather forecast before your trip and plan accordingly. Plan for unexpected weather if you are traveling in higher elevations within the Great Sand Dunes National Preserve. Weather forecasts are available on the park website or at the park visitor center during operating hours.
- Don't consume water from creeks or streams unless it is filtered.
- Leave your travel plans with friends and/or relatives and follow up with them when you return.
- Wear bright colors during hunting season in Great Sand Dunes National Preserve.

Medano Pass Primitive Road



- 4WD is required to drive across sand, rocky terrain and creek crossings after Point of No Return parking area.
- One-way distance to Medano Pass from Horse Trailer Parking Lot: 11 miles (17km) or 1.5 hours.
- One-way distance to Hwy. 69 (beyond Medano Pass) from Horse Trailer Parking Lot: 22 miles (34 km) or 2.5 to 3 hours.
- Vehicles must be highway-legal in Colorado.
- Camping is permitted in 21 sites along the road in the Great Sand Dunes National Preserve.
- During summer days when the sand is soft, 4WD vehicles may have to reduce tire pressure to drive over sand. A free tire pressure station is available at the Amphitheater.
- The road closes when creek crossings are high, when snow and ice are present, or when damage to the road may cause damage to vehicles. Check the park website for road closures and road conditions.
- A Medano Pass Primitive Road Guide is available on the park website or at the visitor center during operating hours.



4WD campsites along Medano Pass Primitive Road are shaded, and each site has a bear locker and fire ring. Tents must be located within 40 feet of the front of the bear box at each site. Gather dead and down firewood 4" or less diameter. Put campfires out completely with water.

National Park Backcountry



Tent in dunes backcountry

- Backpacking options include camping in the dunes backcountry, or primitive sites along the foothills (indicated on map at left).
- The most popular and unique option is camping in the dunefield, with wide-open views of the night sky. Minimum hike: 1.5 miles (2.4 km) over the first dune ridge to get beyond day use area. Check weather forecast to avoid nights with high winds or thunderstorms.
- Seven foothills sites are also available along the Sand Ramp Trail, from 0.5 miles (0.8 km) to 11 miles (18 km).

from Medano Lake Trailhead



Medano Lake

- This hike makes for a good day hike or overnight trip to forested areas and a small alpine lake, home to native Rio Grande cutthroat trout (catch and release only).
- Trailhead accessible by 4WD vehicles via the Medano Pass Primitive Road
- Round trip hike: 7.4 miles (12.4 km)
- Elevation gain: 2000 feet (610 m)
- Continue on 1.5 steep miles to the summit of Mount Herard (13,297 feet) for a spectacular view of the entire dunefield.

from Music Pass Trailhead



Lower Sand Creek Lake



Upper Sand Creek Lake

Upper and Lower Sand Creek Lakes

- This hike makes for a good day hike or overnight trip to large alpine lakes below some of the highest peaks in Great Sand Dunes National Preserve
- Snowfields may be present into the summer months
- Fishing
- Round Trip Hike: 8 miles (13 km)
- Elevation Gain: 2000 feet (610 m)



Little Sand Creek Lakes

- This strenuous hike takes you to more remote and smaller alpine lakes. There are parts of the hike where you will use route finding skills.
- Round trip hike: 14 miles (23 km) to the lower lake
- Net elevation gain: 2000 feet (610 m) to lower lake, but significant up and down on trail makes elevation gain much higher

General Information

Please also visit our website
www.nps.gov/grsa



Weather Information

Great Sand Dunes experiences four seasons. No matter what season you are visiting, visitors should plan according to daytime and nighttime highs and lows, possible precipitation and wind speeds. Check the weather on the park website or at the visitor center during operating hours. Temperatures are relatively cool all year due to high elevations, but dry, thin air makes daytime temperatures feel warmer year round. Daytime highs in the 80s during summer will create 150 degree sand temperatures. Wear close-toed shoes to avoid the heat.



Season	Highs (F)	Lows (F)
Winter	20s - 30s	-20 - 10
Spring	50s - 70s	20s - 40s
Summer	70s - 80s	40s
Fall	50s - 70s	20s - 40s

Entrance Fees

Visitors will be charged only one of the following fees. Fees are charged only when the entrance station is open; the visitor center doesn't collect fees. Fees can be paid by check, credit card, or cash.

7-Day Pass	
Non-Commercial Vehicle and Occupants	\$20
Oversized Vehicle, 15+ passengers, age 16+	\$10/person
Motorcycle and Riders	\$15

Annual Pass	
Great Sand Dunes Annual Pass	\$40
Interagency Annual Pass (for all federal fee areas)	\$80
Interagency Senior Annual Pass (62 and older, US citizen)	\$20
Active Duty Military Annual Pass	Free

Lifetime Pass	
Interagency Senior Lifetime Pass (62 and older, US citizen)	\$80
Interagency Access Pass (permanently disabled)	Free

Accessibility



Adult and child sand wheelchairs are available upon reservation at 719-378-6395 or in person at the Visitor Center. These special chairs can be used at the Dunes Parking Lot which has an accessible mat to the creek as well a viewing platform. Accessible restrooms are available at the Visitor Center, campground, and Dunes parking lot. Sites # 10, #14, and #63 in the campground are accessible.

Pets

Leashed pets are allowed in day use areas of the national park (including the play area of the dunefield and campground) and in the national preserve, but not in backcountry areas of the national park. Protect your pet from 150° sand temperatures by avoiding the dunes mid-day during summer. Take plenty of water for your pet. It is unlawful to leave your pet unattended for any amount of time in your vehicle or in public spaces. Clean up after your pet to ensure the national park and preserve is a welcoming place to visit.



Piñon (Pinyon) Flats Campground

- The campground is open April 1 to November 1
- Reservations can be made by visiting www.recreation.gov. Individual sites are \$20/night for a maximum of 8 people and 2 vehicles. Group site prices range from \$65-\$80. Visitors with senior pass or access pass pay \$10/night.
- Check out time is 1 pm. Quiet hours are from 10 pm to 6 am. Generators may run sparingly between 7 am and 8 pm.
- Campsites can be reserved from 6 months up to 4 days in advance of your arrival day. Sites that aren't reserved will be made available as first-come, first-served.
- Sites in Loops 1 and 2 are suited for tents or RVs.
- Three group sites in Loop 3 can be reserved 12 months in advance. Group sites are for tents only.
- There is a fill station and a dump station, but no hookups for RVs.
- Flush toilets and sinks are available in each loop.
- All camping equipment must fit within established tent pad and campsite to minimize ground disturbance and impacts to vegetation and wildlife habitat.
- A camp store is located between Loop 1 and 2 for the sale of firewood and other amenities. Firewood collection is strictly prohibited.



Nearby Camping and Lodging

Great Sand Dunes Oasis (near park entrance)

- Tent camping and RV sites with hook-ups, camp store, gas station, sand sled and sandboard rentals, restaurant (open May - September), and duplex motel are open April - October. 719-378-2222 or visit www.greatdunes.com

Great Sand Dunes Lodge (near park entrance)

- Modern motel with indoor pool, open mid-March through October. Located up the hill above the Oasis Store. 719-378-2900 or visit www.gsdllodge.com

Zapata Falls Campground (11 miles south of park entrance)

- Primitive BLM campground; no water or hookups; compost toilets. Bumpy gravel access road. Open year round, but access road is not plowed in winter. No reservations. \$11 per night. 719-852-5941 (BLM office in Monte Vista open Mon.-Fri.; no phone at campground)

San Luis Lakes State Wildlife Area (15 miles west of entrance)

- Tent camping and RV sites with electric hook-ups, no potable water. Colorado Wildlife Annual Permit is required for entry. Visit <http://cpw.state.co.us/placestogo/parks/SanLuis>

Recycling

Recycling helps keep parks clean and wildlife safe. Please recycle!

#1, #2 plastic	Campground, Dunes Lot, Visitor Center
Aluminum cans	Campground, Dunes Lot, Visitor Center
Dark glass	Campground, Dunes Lot, Visitor Center
Light colored glass	Campground, Dunes Lot, Visitor Center
#3 - #7 plastics	Campground



Sand Sledding and Sandboarding

Great Sand Dunes does not rent sand sled or sandboard equipment. Contact the following retail outlets for rental prices and equipment:

- Oasis Store (outside park entrance) rents equipment from spring to early fall, 719-378-2222
- Kristi Mountain Sports in Alamosa (35 miles from the park on US 160 West) is open year round, 719-589-9759
- Sand Dunes Swimming Pool near Hooper (35 miles from the park on CO 17 North) is open year round, 719-378-2807.



Sand Sled Sandboard

Contact each retail outlet for pricing and equipment rental policies, including restrictions for renting sleds and sandboards during the winter season when snow and ice accumulate on the dunes.

Visitor Center

The visitor center is open daily year round except for winter federal holidays. Hours from Labor Day weekend to Memorial Day weekend are 9 am to 4:30 pm. Call 719-378-6395 for summer hours. The visitor center offers ranger assistance, passport stamps, lost and found, vending machine, park film, exhibits, restrooms, backcountry permit office, and park store.



Video Microscope

Junior Ranger Program

Kids starting at age 3 and older can pick up a free activity booklet to earn a badge or patch. The activity booklet can be completed in 30 minutes to 1 hour. For families with more time, kids can participate in the Junior Ranger Explorer Program by checking out a backpack full of supplies to complete in one day or overnight. Kids of any age can earn a wooden badge after recording field observations using scientific tools. The Park store has Junior Ranger items such as vests, hats, and other memorabilia.



Programs and Events

Free Ranger-Led Programs

Free ranger-led programs are offered during the summer and fall at the visitor center and amphitheater. Check the park website, visitor center, or bulletin boards at the Piñon Flats Campground for a list of programs.

Free Events

Free workshops, demonstrations, book signings and lectures are offered during spring, summer and fall season. The park's annual Junior Ranger Day is held the first Saturday in August, sponsored by the Friends of the Dunes. To learn more about the park's event schedule, visit, www.nps.gov/grsa or follow the park's Facebook or Instagram pages for more frequent posts and updates of the calendar.



Junior Ranger Day

Experience the Night



Nighttime at Great Sand Dunes can include dunes exploration under a full moon; stargazing (best with no moon); listening for owls; observing migrating frogs and salamanders on a wet night; and attending a ranger program about nocturnal ecology and night skies. The park store has star charts, nocturnal wildlife books, interactive kits and models, and red LED flashlights to protect your night vision.





Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

11500 Highway 150
Mosca, Colorado 81146
General information (recorded, 24 hours)
719-378-6300
Visitor Center and Park Store
719-378-6395

www.nps.gov/grsa

email: grsa_interpretation@nps.gov

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Park Partners



Friends of the Dunes is a non-profit citizen's support group for Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. In cooperation with the National Park Service, the Friends provide a forum for citizen involvement in planning decisions, focus public interest on issues and need, and provide volunteer and financial aid for projects beyond the scope of the park's budget. Learn more and support the Friends by becoming a member. For more information visit www.friendsofgreatsanddunes.org

Western National Parks Association

In partnership with the National Park Service since 1938, WNPA advances education, interpretation, research, and community engagement to ensure national parks are increasingly valued by all. As a nonprofit education partner of the National Park Service, WNPA supports 71 national park partners across the West, developing products, services, and programs that enrich the visitor experience. www.wnpa.org

The Wild is Calling...at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

by Katherine Faz, Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services



Hiker at Cottonwood Pass in Great Sand Dunes National Preserve, part of the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness.

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is well-known for its tallest dunes in North America, reaching heights over 750 feet, with a dunefield covering 30 square miles. A lesser-known but equally unique and important area within these boundaries is the Great Sand Dunes National Preserve; 41,686 acres of pinyon-juniper forests extending to high elevation alpine tundra, with areas rising to 13,000' peaks. Visitors can experience a sense of solitude and natural quiet or enjoy primitive recreation and wildlife viewing due to the fact that 87% of the land within Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is protected and managed as designated or proposed Wilderness Areas.

The Wilderness Act signed in 1964 established a national Wilderness System that provides the public with an opportunity to experience quiet, solitude, isolation, and allows for non-motorized public access, while also protecting remote natural and cultural areas. Great Sand Dunes encourages visitors to go wild and explore these wilderness areas and join the National Park Service in protecting these areas so future generations can appreciate the same values. Few of us live near wilderness areas, yet most of us are connected to them every day – clean water sources, dark skies, and natural quiet. The Wilderness Area designations at Great Sand Dunes offer visitors an opportunity to explore two different areas within a short distance from parking areas or trailheads: Great Sand Dunes Wilderness Area and the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Area, where you can experience a haven from the pressures of our fast-paced society.

The Great Sand Dunes Wilderness Area, established in 1976, is 35,955 acres within the active dunefield. Visitors can easily access this wilderness area from one of multiple access points, including the Dunes Parking Area, or from 4WD access points at Sand Pit and Castle Creek picnic areas. This wilderness offers visitors an opportunity for primitive, non-motorized recreation.

The Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Area, jointly managed with the US Forest Service, comprises 39,686 acres within Great Sand Dunes National Preserve. This area is valuable habitat for a variety of wildlife including black bear, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, mountain lion and elk. The high elevation lakes and creeks fed by spring runoff allow fish populations to thrive and offer anglers a scenic location to cast their line for Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout or Rio Grande Sucker. This mountainous wilderness area can be accessed from multiple locations along the Sangre de Cristo mountain range, including only a ½ mile hike from the Mosca Pass/Montville Nature trailhead or from the Medano Pass primitive road.

To learn more about the Wilderness Preservation System, visit www.nps.gov/wilderness and www.wilderness.net.