Welcome to one of the world’s most diverse national parks! Experience the austere, majestic beauty of the tallest dunes in North America, and explore some of the park and preserve’s grasslands, wetlands, streams, forest, and tundra.

For Your Safety

**Weather**  The weather changes rapidly at Great Sand Dunes; be prepared! Storms and cold temperatures can occur any time of year. If you see a thunderstorm approaching, get off the dunes immediately. Lightning strikes can be fatal. For general weather information, see page 2.

**Hot Sand**  On summer afternoons, the sand surface can reach 140°F (60° C). Bring closed shoes, and be careful with your pets’ feet. Hike the dunes in early morning or evening during summer. Though the sand can become hot, summer daytime highs are typically in the low 80s F (20s C).

**Wildlife**  Never feed wild animals. It is unhealthy for them, and dangerous to you. Drive slowly on park area roads to prevent accidents with crossing animals. Bears and mountain lions may be encountered; pick up the "Wild Ways" handout at the Visitor Center to learn more about these animals. In the campground, always store all items that have any smell in the bear-proof containers at each site. While there are no poisonous snakes or scorpions in this high elevation park, there are rattlesnakes at lower elevations elsewhere in the San Luis Valley. Wear insect repellent to deter mosquitoes and no-see-ums, especially near water.

**Altitude**  Park elevations range from 7515’ to 13,604’ (2291m to 4146m) above sea level. The Visitor Center and campground are at approximately 8200’ (2499m). Altitude sickness may affect a few. Symptoms include shortness of breath, headaches, and nausea. Drink plenty of water, take it slow, and avoid alcoholic drinks. Seek medical attention if your symptoms are severe.

**Emergency**  Contact a ranger or call 911. Telephones are located at the Visitor Center, Dunes parking lot, and at the campground kiosk.
Facilities
The Visitor Center is open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Hours vary the rest of the year; please call for times. Rangers are available to answer questions and provide assistance. The Visitor Center offers an inspiring film presentation, interactive exhibits, bookstore, first aid room, and back porch with viewing scope.

Interpretive Programs
Free programs for groups visiting the park and preserve may also be arranged. Contact the Visitor Center to reserve it.

Interpretive Programs
Great Sand Dunes offers developed car camping, 4WD backcountry camping, and backpacking. The frontcountry car campground, Pinyon Flats, contains 88 sites with picnic tables and fire grates. There are no hook-ups; restrooms include flush toilets and running water. Sites cost $14.00 per night for a maximum of six people and are first-come, first-served.

Campsites vary in size; some sites may not accommodate larger RVs. Three sites for groups of 12 or more may be reserved by calling the Visitor Center at 719–378–6399. Group sites cost $3.00 per person per night.

Weather
Aluminum recycling, trash dumpster, and an air compressor are located at the amphitheater parking lot near the campground.

Firewood gathering is not permitted; firewood is sold at the Visitor Center, campground, or the Oasis store. Please pitch tents within the rock walls. Quiet hours are from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.; generators may run from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Backpacking requires a free permit; ask at the Visitor Center. You may camp on the dunes, one of six designated sites along the Sand Ramp Trail, or off-trail in the national preserve. Backcountry vehicular camping is permitted along the Medano Pass Primitive Road in the national preserve only. This requires a high-clearance 4WD vehicle, and a minimum 5 mile drive on a soft sand road into the preserve. Camping along the road is limited to designated first-come, first-served campsites. For additional guidelines and seasonal closures for this area, check with a ranger.

Camping
Your visit can be more rewarding when you better understand the area you are in. Nature walks, short talks, and evening programs are offered most days during the summer months, and many days in spring and fall. See the weekly schedule of events posted at the Visitor Center, campground bulletin boards, and the Dunes parking area.

Camping
Your visit can be more rewarding when you better understand the area you are in. Nature walks, short talks, and evening programs are offered most days during the summer months, and many days in spring and fall. See the weekly schedule of events posted at the Visitor Center, campground bulletin boards, and the Dunes parking area.

Accessibility
Free programs for groups visiting the park and preserve may also be reserved in advance by calling 719–378–6344. Topics include geology, plants, wildlife, and history.

Accessibility
Two sand wheelchairs are available; inquire at the Visitor Center. Accessible restrooms are located at the Visitor Center, Dunes parking lot, and campground. The Visitor Center, amphitheater, and ranger programs held at these locations are accessible. Two accessible campsites are located in the campground. For a backcountry experience, Sawmill Canyon Backcountry Site offers a graded trail to a tent pad and accessible privy. Contact the Visitor Center to reserve it.

Getting Started
¡Bienvenidos!
¡Bienvenidos al Parque Nacional de las Grandes Dunas! Mientras que usted esté visitando, esperamos que aproveche la oportunidad de explorar algunas de las características únicas del parque. Desde las dunas más altas de Norteamérica hasta algunos de los picos más altos de los Rocky Mountains, este rico ecosistema sorprende continuamente a los visitantes con la estupenda diversidad de vida y paisaje.

Camping
Fuentes populares para hacer:
¡Suba a las dunas! El paseo desde el Centro de Visitantes a la cima de la duna más alta toma como 2 horas para dar vuelta. La elevación y la arena lo hace algo difícil, pero ¡vale la pena! Esté preparado para la temperatura alta de la arena, y lleve protección para el sol y agua para tomar.

Camping
¡Disfrutar el Arroyo del Medano! En primavera y verano, el arroyo corre por la base de las dunas. Los niños de todas las edades gozan en chaplear, jugar, o aunque sea nada más que remojarse en el arroyo.

Pets
Pets are welcome anywhere outdoors in the park and preserve as long as they remain leashed and under control at all times, and you clean up after them. Do not leave your pet in the car. On a sunny summer day, temperatures inside a vehicle can reach 120°F (49°C) in 10 minutes, even if the windows are cracked. In summer months, take your pet on the dunes in early morning or evening when the surface of the sand is cooler. Pets are not permitted in the Visitor Center.

Creature comforts are available; firewood is sold at the Oasis store. Please pitch tents within the rock walls. Quiet hours are from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.; generators may run from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Backpacking requires a free permit; ask at the Visitor Center. You may camp on the dunes, one of six designated sites along the Sand Ramp Trail, or off-trail in the national preserve.

Pets
Pets are welcome anywhere outdoors in the park and preserve as long as they remain leashed and under control at all times, and you clean up after them. Do not leave your pet in the car. On a sunny summer day, temperatures inside a vehicle can reach 120°F (49°C) in 10 minutes, even if the windows are cracked. In summer months, take your pet on the dunes in early morning or evening when the surface of the sand is cooler. Pets are not permitted in the Visitor Center.

¡Bienvenidos!
The Nature Conservancy is an international, non-profit organization that preserves plants, animals, and natural communities representing the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. The Conservancy manages lands within the national park, including a herd of about 1000 bison.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service manages three wildlife refuges in the San Luis Valley.

www.fws.gov/alamosa
As you visit Great Sand Dunes National Park, and drive along State Highway 150 and/or County Lane 6 on the southern border of the park, you are probably following or crossing routes of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, managed by the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Ask at the Visitor Center for a free information sheet on the historic trail, or visit www.nps.gov/olsp
From desert sands to alpine tundra, explore an unusual combination of landscapes all found at this special place. Below are a few suggested treks.

**Dunes Exploration**

Explore any part of the 30 square mile dunefield you wish; there are no designated trails in the sand. A dunes-accessible wheelchair is available for free loan at the Visitor Center. In summer months, plan to hike the dunes in morning or evening to avoid hot sand.

1. **Medano Creek** When there’s water in Medano Creek at the base of the dunes, adults and kids alike love to splash in the stream. Watch for waves in the water, a phenomenon called “surge flow.”

2. **The tallest dunes** The High Dune is neither the highest in elevation nor the tallest, but it looks that way from the main parking lot. It is about 650 feet (198m) high. Cross the flats and zigzag up the ridgelines to reach it. The 360-degree view is inspirational. From High Dune, the skyrising dune you see to the west is the spectacular Star Dune, rising 750 feet (229m). It is the tallest dune in North America. To reach it from High Dune, journey another mile and a half up and down across the dunes to its summit.

3. **Eastern dune ridge** By high clearance 4WD vehicle, drive to Sand Pit or Castle Creek Picnic Areas. Or, with 2WD vehicle, drive to Point of No Return, then hike 1/2 mile (1km) to Sand Pit. Castle Creek offers an impressively tall, steep dune face. Both areas have close access to Medano Creek.

**Grasslands/Wetlands**

Ask at the Visitor Center for a free information sheet on accessing the grasslands and wetlands of the park area.

Experience the surprising diversity of natural landscapes at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, from spacious grasslands to chilly alpine tundra.

**Forest Trails**

1. **Montville Nature Trail** Keep this hike as an option for afternoon as an escape from the heat of the dunes. Walk along a shady mountain trail named for a late 1800s settlement, comprising 20 houses in its heyday. Rest near the trail’s highpoint, where you’ll find outstanding views of Mt. Herard, the dunes and the valley.

2. **Mosca Pass Trail** This trail follows a small creek to the summit of a low pass in the Sangre de Cristo mountains, winding through aspen and evergreen forests. Allow 2-3 hours to reach the pass; the trail is 3 1/2 miles (5.7 km) one-way. Indians and early settlers used this route for travel into the Valley.

3. **Dunes Overlook/Sand Ramp Trail** For a view of the dunes from the foothills, begin hiking the Sand Ramp Trail in Loop 2 of the campground. Scenery abounds in all directions. Although only 2 miles (3.2km) round trip to the overlook, this trek can be extended, as the Sand Ramp trail continues for 11 miles total around the eastern and northern perimeter of the dunes.

4. **Medano Pass 4WD Road** Driving this road requires high clearance 4-wheel drive (not recommended for small sport utility vehicles). A scenic drive any time of the year, it is especially spectacular in fall. Creek crossings can be hazardous in spring, and the road is closed when winter conditions create hazards. For those without a 4WD vehicle, consider taking the Oasis 4-wheel drive tour, offered May through October at the Oasis store near the park boundary.

5. **Upper Sand Creek basin** Hike farther to two alpine lakes, or to any one of the 13,000’ peaks above the basin. “The Essential Guide to Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve” has climbing information for the peaks. Check at the bookstore for a copy. You may also access these lakes and peaks via the Sand Creek Trail, connecting with the Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve’s 4WD road. Beginning at 10,000’ elevation, the trail climbs 2000’ through lush meadows and forests, ending at an alpine lake just above timberline. For advanced hikers, continue on to the summit of 13,297’ Mount Herard for a spectacular aerial view of the dunes.

**Alpine Trails**

1. **Medano Lake/Mount Herard** Access this trailhead from the Medano Pass 4WD road. Beginning at 10,000’ elevation, the trail climbs 2000’ through lush meadows and forests, ending at an alpine lake just above timberline. For advanced hikers, continue on to the summit of 13,297’ Mount Herard for a spectacular aerial view of the dunes.

2. **Music Pass/Sand Creek Lakes/ other alpine peaks** The alpine scenery here is stunning, but requires a long drive and/or a long hike. Check with a ranger for conditions before travel. The eastern trailhead for Music Pass is accessed from Highway 69, 4.5 miles south of Westcliffe. Turn off Highway 69 to the west at the sign for Music Pass and South Colony Lakes Trailhead. At the “T” junction, turn left onto South Colony Road. At the end of the ranch fence on the right, you’ll see another sign for Music Pass. 2WD drivers should park where the Rainbow Trail crosses Music Pass Road. From here, walk 3.5 miles to the pass. 4WD drivers may drive another 2.5 rough miles to the end of the road. From here, it is just a steep one mile hike to the pass. Music Pass is at treeline, with a great view of the Upper Sand Creek basin. From the pass, hike farther to two alpine lakes, or to any one of the 13,000’ peaks above the basin.

Visitor Guide 2007-2008
### Hiking Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>One-way Distance (miles, km)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Location of Trailhead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medano Creek (or dry creekbed)</td>
<td>variable</td>
<td>Stroll up or down stream, relatively flat</td>
<td>Dunes Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Pit</td>
<td>.5 (.8)</td>
<td>Medano Creek usually found year-round here</td>
<td>Point of No Return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montville Nature Trail</td>
<td>.5 (.8) loop</td>
<td>Trail guide may be purchased at Visitor Center</td>
<td>Top of hill just north of Visitor Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campground Trail</td>
<td>.5 (.8)</td>
<td>Trail from campground to dunes</td>
<td>Campground, near Site 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape Dunes and Ghost Forest</td>
<td>.75 (1.2)</td>
<td>Follow Medano Creek upstream to low dunes.</td>
<td>Dunes Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medano Wetlands (seasonal)</td>
<td>1.3 (2)</td>
<td>Downstream to end of trees (ask ranger for locations and status)</td>
<td>Dunes Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castle Creek</td>
<td>2.5 (4)</td>
<td>Follow creek upstream</td>
<td>Dunes Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunes Overlook</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
<td>Views from foothills</td>
<td>Campground, near site 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington Ditch Trail</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
<td>Relatively flat with views from foothills</td>
<td>Montville Parking Lot or Loop 3 of the campground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Dune</td>
<td>1.15 (1.9)</td>
<td>Follow the ridgelines until you reach the top</td>
<td>Dunes Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosca Pass</td>
<td>3.5 (5.6)</td>
<td>Forests, small stream</td>
<td>Montville Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Ramp Trail</td>
<td>variable, up to 11 (17.8)</td>
<td>Eastern and northern perimeter of dunes</td>
<td>Sand Ramp Trail near site 62 in campground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Dune</td>
<td>3.8 (6.1)</td>
<td>Hike down Medano Creekbed to its base, then ascend ridge</td>
<td>Dunes Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Difficult Hikes - Check with rangers first!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Distance (miles, km)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Location of Trailhead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medano Lake</td>
<td>3.5 (5.6)</td>
<td>1,900-foot (579 m) elevation gain</td>
<td>Medano LakeTH (high-clearance 4WD needed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Pass</td>
<td>4.6 (7.4-9.7)</td>
<td>Beautiful high alpine environment</td>
<td>4WD parking on Music Pass Road (4WD required to go further)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbonate Peak</td>
<td>3 miles (4.8 km)</td>
<td>Bushwhack along crest in heavy timber</td>
<td>Mosca Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Creek Lakes</td>
<td>Lower - 3.0 (5.0)</td>
<td>Alpine lakes and majestic mountains</td>
<td>Music Pass 4WD TH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Herard</td>
<td>5.2 (8.8)</td>
<td>Hike to 12,500' (3,800 m) saddle to west, then on to summit</td>
<td>Medano LakeTH - (high-clearance 4WD needed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Top:** Backpacking into Upper Sand Creek Basin in the national preserve offers a wilderness experience dramatically different from the park's frontcountry.

**Middle:** A booklet on the Montville Nature Trail, describing some of its natural and cultural history, is available for 75 cents at the Visitor Center.

**Bottom:** Horseback riding is permitted in most parts of the park and preserve. Please obtain "Horse Use Guidelines" from the Visitor Center before riding.
Zapata Falls This 30 foot (9 m) high waterfall cascades within a narrow chasm about 10 miles south of the dunes. It is especially refreshing on a summer afternoon. Drive south on Highway 150 to the Zapata Falls Recreation Area sign. Drive 3 miles (4.8km) up the gravel road, then hike 1/2 mile (0.8 km) to the creek. Wade upstream into the narrow cave to see the falls. Watch for falling rocks. Water is swift and deep in early summer. Bureau of Land Management, 719–589–5941.

South Zapata Lake is nestled at the base of 14,043’ (4280 m) Ellingwood Peak. This is the most easily accessible alpine lake trailhead in the Great Sand Dunes area, but it is a strenuous day hike. From Zapata Falls (at left), hike 4 miles (6.5 km) farther along a trail to the lake (2300’ or 700m elev. gain). Marmots and pikas are often seen here. ‘Twin Peaks, 13,580’ (4139 m) may be climbed by ascending the steep tundra west of the lake. US Forest Service, Rio Grande National Forest, 719–589–5941.

Blanca Peak As the fourth highest in Colorado, this is the most popular “14er” to climb near the Great Sand Dunes. However, it is a long hike: around 15 miles round trip, or a bit shorter if you have 4WD. The trail passes by four alpine lakes. Please use Leave No Trace guidelines. Ask at the Visitor Center for an information sheet on Blanca Peak access and hiking. Rio Grande National Forest, US Forest Service, 719–589–5941.

Willow Lake This is an especially spectacular hike in mid-summer, when wildflowers are abundant in wet years. An 80 foot (24 m) high waterfall graces a cliff above the lake. This area also serves as a base camp to climb Kit Carson Mountain, 14,165’ (4318 m). Please use Leave No Trace guidelines, camping at least 300’ from water. Access Willow Lake from the trailhead just beyond the town of Crestone. The hike is 4 miles (6.5 km) one way, 2760’ (801 m) elev. gain. Rio Grande National Forest, US Forest Service, 719–589–5941.

National Wildlife Refuges Alamosa NWR protects wetlands and cottonwood groves along the Rio Grande, 5 miles southeast of Alamosa. Monte Vista NWR, located 10 miles south of Monte Vista, is a complex of irrigated and agricultural wetlands, a haven for sandhill cranes during spring and fall migrations. Both refuges harbor a wide variety of birds. Look for official brown signs for both refuges along Highway 160. Baca NWR, adjacent to Great Sand Dunes NP, was designated in 2004 and is not open to the public at this time. US Fish and Wildlife Service, 719–589–4021.

San Luis Lakes State Park and Wildlife Area The large lake, and the lush wetlands in the wildlife area (closed during nesting), are especially good for birdwatching. 719–378–2020


Pike’s Stockade A replica stockade near where Zebulon Pike and his men wintered after entering the San Luis Valley. Take US 285 south from Alamosa to La Jara. At La Jara, turn left (east) onto Colorado Road 136. Follow Colorado Road 136 to County Road 20. Turn left (north). Travel 2 miles to County Road Y. Turn right (east) onto County Road Y. Travel 4 miles to the entrance of Pike’s Stockade. Turn right into the stockade grounds (over a cattle guard—which is actually County Road 24). Travel on County Road 24 for approximately 1 mile to the stockade.

Pike’s Stockade A replica stockade near where Zebulon Pike and his men wintered after entering the San Luis Valley. Take US 285 south from Alamosa to La Jara. At La Jara, turn left (east) onto Colorado Road 136. Follow Colorado Road 136 to County Road 20. Turn left (north). Travel 2 miles to County Road Y. Turn right (east) onto County Road Y. Travel 4 miles to the entrance of Pike’s Stockade. Turn right into the stockade grounds (over a cattle guard—which is actually County Road 24). Travel on County Road 24 for approximately 1 mile to the stockade.

Colorado Gator Farm Located just north of the town of Mosca, this is a combination fish and alligator farm, popular with kids. 719–378–2612.

Fort Garland Restored to its historic appearance in the nearby town of Fort Garland, this fort historically protected settlers. Many multi-cultural dances and other events take place through the summer months. Colorado Historical Society, 719–379–3512.

Colorado Gator Farm Located just north of the town of Mosca, this is a combination fish and alligator farm, popular with kids. 719–378–2612.
If you are a teacher or trip leader, consider scheduling an education program with Great Sand Dunes staff. Education programs are age-appropriate, correlated with Colorado Content Standards, and incorporate active learning in the park’s magnificent outdoor classroom. Hands-on field and classroom learning experiences can bring wildlife, plants, history, geology, and other subjects alive for learners of all styles.

- Reserve use of the Discovery Room at the Visitor Center
- Schedule a ranger to visit San Luis Valley classrooms or educational events
- Bring your group to the park for a ranger-led education program (reserve in advance)

Online resources provide students who live far away with an engaging opportunity to learn about geology, hydrology, ecology, and cultural history.

“The entire website is very user friendly. With the range of activities you have it is easy to find an activity suitable for the learning style and ability of any student.”
- A 5th grade teacher

To learn more about educational opportunities at the Dunes or schedule a program, please contact Education Specialist Melanie Rawlins at 719-378-6344, or email melanie.rawlins@nps.gov