Safety in the Park and Preserve

**Hot Sand** In summer, the sand surface can reach 150°F (66°C) in mid-day. Plan to hike the dunes in early morning or evening to avoid heat exhaustion and burned feet. Wear closed-toe shoes (not sandals) if you must hike in mid-day.

**Blowing Sand** can occur in the windy spring season, or during storms. To protect your eyes and lungs, avoid the dunes when winds occur, or wear eye protection. If you get sand in your eyes, flush with running water or saline eye solution.

**Weather** can change rapidly in the Rocky Mountains! Hypothermia is possible even in summer months, especially at higher elevations of the park and preserve; dress in layers and stay dry to keep warm. **Lightning strikes can be fatal - plan to experience the dunes, meadows, or tundra in morning hours when lightning is much less likely.** If you see or hear a thunderstorm approaching, retreat for shelter. The only completely safe locations are in a building or vehicle. Wait 30 minutes after the last thunder before going out again.

**Wildlife** Never feed wild animals. Adhere to speed limit signs to minimize accidents with crossing animals. Bears and mountain lions may be encountered; pick up an information sheet at the Visitor Center to learn more about these animals. Always store scented items (food, cosmetics, etc.) in your vehicle, a bear–proof container, or hang 10 feet up and 5 feet out from a tree in the backcountry.

**Altitude** Park elevations range from 7,515 feet to 13,604 feet (2,291m to 4,146m) above sea level. The Visitor Center and campground are at approximately 8,200 feet (2,499m). Symptoms of altitude sickness and dehydration include shortness of breath, headaches, and nausea. Drink plenty of water (about one gallon or 3.7 liters per day), take it slow, and avoid alcoholic drinks. Seek medical attention if your symptoms are severe. Sun is intense at high elevations; wear high SPF sunscreen and a hat.

**Emergency** Call 911. Telephones are located at the Visitor Center, Dunes parking lot, and at the campground kiosk. You can contact a ranger at the Visitor Center during business hours.

Keep wildlife wild. Use campsite bear-proof boxes.
Medano Creek (seasonal)
- Flows April through June in an average year
- Peak flow with surges typically occurs late May - early June
- Depth is variable depending on time of season and snowpack
- Follow current and forecast flow: www.nps.gov/grsa

High Dune on First Ridge
- In summer, hike early morning or evening to avoid 150°F (66°C) sand or lightning
- View: entire dunefield
- Round trip hike: 2.5 miles (4 km) - no trails
- Elevation gain: 699 feet (214 m)
- Average Time: 2 hours

from Dunes Parking

from Montville/ Mosca Pass Trailhead

from Piñon Flats Campground, Loop 2

from Point of No Return

Montville Loop Trail
- Forest, small creek, view of first ridge of dunes
- Round trip hike: 0.5 mile (1 km)
- Elevation gain: 200 feet (61 m)
- Average time: 30 minutes

Mosca Pass Trail
- Forest, small creek, meadows, views of forested ridges and meadows; limited views of the dunes
- 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.
Zapata Falls Recreation Area

This 20 foot (7m) high water-fall cascades within a narrow crevasse, and the area includes spectacular views of the entire dunefield. From the Visitor Center, drive 8 miles south to the large Zapata Falls Recreation Area sign. Drive 3 miles up the bumpy gravel road. From the trailhead, hike 1/2 mile (800m) to the creek. You must wade upstream 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.

Nearby Public Lands

San Luis State Park and Wildlife Area
Recreational lake open year round; Wildlife Area wetlands closed Feb. 15 to July 15 for nesting. Located 15 miles west of Visitor Center 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, Monte Vista, and Baca refuges contain hundreds of wetlands. Open year round. 719-589-4021

Area Wetlands
San Luis State Park and Wildlife Area
Recreational lake open year round; Wildlife Area wetlands closed Feb. 15 to July 15 for nesting. Located 15 miles west of Visitor Center on Lane 6N. 719-378-2020.

Visitor Guide
Exploring: Backcountry

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**Point of No Return:** 1 mile (1.6 km) on 2WD dirt road beyond Piñon Flats Campground

**Sand Ramp Trail Access:** from Point of No Return (above), or from Sand Ramp Trailhead, 4 miles (6.4 km) north of Point of No Return on the Medano Pass Primitive Road (high-clearance 4WD only)

**Medano Lake Trailhead:** 1/2 mile (0.8 km) west of Medano Pass (10.5 miles or 17 km from Piñon Flats Campground). High-clearance 4WD access only

**Music Pass Trailhead:** From Visitor Center: Drive 19 miles (30 km) south on CO 150. Turn left (east) on US 160. Drive 20 miles (32 km) to the signed turnoff for Pass Creek Pass (CR 572, located two miles or 3 km west of La Veta Pass). Pass Creek Road is a 2WD dirt road maintained year round. Over 11 miles (17 km), CR 572 turns into CR 570. When you arrive at CR 550 (paved road), turn right, and drive 5 miles (8 km) to CO 69. Turn left, and drive 28 miles (45 km) to the turnoff with the Music Pass sign. At the “T” junction, turn left. 2WD drivers park at Grape Creek Campground (USFS). 4WD drivers may drive another 2.5 miles (4 km) to Music Pass Trailhead. Allow 2 1/2 to 3 hours drive from Visitor Center to Music Pass trailhead.

**Liberty Gate Trailhead**
- From Crestone, drive south 1.5 miles (2.4 km) on Camino Baca Grande
- Turn right on Camino Real; drive 0.5 miles (0.8 km)
- Turn left on Wagon Wheel Road; drive 1 mile (1.6 km) to its end
- Turn left on Camino del Rey; drive 1 mile (1.6 km) to its end
- Turn right on Camino Baca Grande; drive 1.5 miles (2.4 km) on dirt road to trailhead

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

- Large alpine lakes below huge cliffs
- Snowfields present through mid-summer
- Fishing
- Round Trip Hike: 14 miles (23 km) to the lower lake
- Elevation Gain: 2000 feet (610 m) to lower lake
- Tough, steep final ascent with minimal trail
- Fishing

Lower Sand Creek Lake

Medano Pass Primitive Road

- The western entrance to the road is at the Amphitheater parking, just below Piñon Flats Campground, 4WD section begins at Point of No Return
- Views of eastern edge of dunefield, forests, cliffs, Mount Herard
- High-clearance 4WD required to navigate deep sand, rocks, and creek crossings
- When sand is soft and dry, tire pressure may need to be dropped to 20psi. If you do not have your own air compressor, do not continue past sandy sections into Medano Canyon; the rocky roadbed may damage tires with low pressure.
- Free air station available in the Amphitheater parking lot, located at the western entrance of the road
- In late spring, during peak snowmelt, creek crossings can become high. There are 8 total creek crossings between the dunes and Medano Pass. Get out and assess crossings before attempting to drive through. Drive slowly to avoid drowning your engine.
- One way distance to Medano Pass: 11 miles (17 km)
- One way distance to Highway 69: 22 miles (34 km)
- Roadside camping is permitted only in 21 numbered campsites in the national preserve
- Ask for a Medano Pass Primitive Road information sheet and map at the Visitor Center
- Check current Medano Pass Road conditions at the Visitor Center, or on the park website: nps.gov/grsa
- High-clearance is required for sand and creek crossings. Check for current conditions before driving.

Medano Lake

- Forested trail to a small alpine lake with tundra wildlife; home to native Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout (catch and release only)
- 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.

Little Sand Creek Lakes

- Remote, small alpine lakes
- 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 round trip elevation gain much higher
- Tough, steep final ascent with minimal trail
- Fishing

Indian Grove backcountry site

Aspen backcountry site

National Park Backcountry

- Overnight backpacking options include camping in the dunefield backcountry, or primitive sites along the foothills (indicated on map at left). Free permits are first-come, first-served, and must be obtained in person at the Visitor Center, from 30 minutes after opening to 30 minutes before closing. No pets or wood fires.
- The most popular and unique option is camping in the dunelfield, 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).

Backcountry Tips and Precautions

- Park and preserve elevations range from 7,515 feet (2,308 m) to 13,604 feet (4,146 m). Even if you feel good at the dunes elevation, you may still get altitude sickness at alpine elevations. If you are just arriving in Colorado from a low elevation region, take at least two days to acclimate before hiking at high elevations. Drink plenty of water.
- Unless you leave your vehicle in the national park, obtaining a backpacking permit for the national preserve is optional. However, it is always best to leave your specific backcountry travel plans with the Visitor Center and/or friends and relatives who will follow up if you don’t return by your stated time.
- Check with a ranger for current weather, snow conditions and water availability on your route. Weather forecasts for Medano Pass and Sand Creek Lakes are available on the park website. Treat all water used for personal consumption with a filter or tablets.
- Hunting is permitted in the national preserve and nearby national forests during designated seasons, primarily in fall months. Wear brighter colors and be aware of your surroundings.

Visitor Guide 5
Temperatures are relatively cool all year, thanks to our high elevation. Conditions are most often calm, but winds can arise, especially in spring and during storm fronts. Daytime temperatures feel warmer here year round due to intense high-altitude sunlight, and a 150°F (66°C) mid-day summer sand surface. Nights are cool in summer, and frigid in winter.

### 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.

### Entrance Fees

Entrance fees directly provide for improvements to the park and preserve. Visitors are only charged one of the fees below, not a combination. Senior, Access, and Military passes are for US citizens only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fee Combination</th>
<th>Fee Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Commercial Vehicle and Occupants</td>
<td>$15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversized Vehicle, 15+ passengers, age 16+</td>
<td>$7/person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motorcycle and Riders</td>
<td>$10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Sand Dunes Annual Family Pass</td>
<td>$30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interagency Annual Pass (for all federal fee areas)</td>
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<td>Interagency Senior Pass (Lifetime, 62 and older)</td>
<td>$10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interagency Access Pass (lifetime, permanently disabled)</td>
<td>Free</td>
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### 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.

### Recycling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aluminum cans</td>
<td>Campground, Dunes Lot, Visitor Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark glass</td>
<td>Campground, Dunes Lot, Visitor Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light colored glass</td>
<td>Campground, Dunes Lot, Visitor Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 - #7 plastics</td>
<td>Campground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steel Cans, Propane Cans</td>
<td>Campground</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General Information

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

Visitor Center

The Visitor Center is open daily year round, except for federal winter holidays. You'll find ranger assistance, park film, exhibits, restrooms, vending machines, lost and found, mail box, passport book stamps, and park store. Phone: 719-378-6395.

Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day: 8:30-6:00
Labor Day until Memorial Day weekend: 9:00-4:30

Experience the Night

Nighttime at Great Sand Dunes can include dunes exploration under a full moon, stargazing on a moonless night, listening for owls, viewing migrating frogs and salamanders on a wet night, and attending a ranger program about nocturnal ecology and night skies.

Become a Junior Ranger!

Get a free booklet at the Visitor Center for fun learning. Kids 3 and up complete required sections to become Junior Rangers. All ages earn a badge or patch. Visit the park store in the Visitor Center to purchase Junior Ranger items such as vests, hats, and other memorabilia.

Programs and Events

Free Ranger-Led Programs
Interactive ranger programs are offered late May through September. Programs provide an opportunity for visitors of all ages to learn more about Great Sand Dunes. Visitors might touch an artifact, sing a funny song, or view the stars at one of the many programs offered at the Visitor Center or Amphitheater. Weekly schedules are posted at the Visitor Center, Piñon Flats Campground, Dunes Parking Lot, or on the park website at www.nps.gov/grsa.

Junior Ranger Day
Visit on the first Saturday of June for a morning of fun learning. Kids of all ages participate in a variety of activities to earn fun prizes. This annual event is sponsored by the Friends of the Dunes. Plan to reserve camping ahead and arrive early; camping, lodging, and parking fill quickly in and near the park on early summer weekends.

Great Sand Dunes National Preserve: A Unique Protected Area

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve was established in 2004 to protect the entire natural system of the Great Sand Dunes and their high elevation watersheds. Great Sand Dunes National Preserve is approximately 41,000 acres of the total 149,000 acres within Great Sand Dunes boundaries, and contains ecosystems ranging from mixed conifer forests to alpine tundra, up to 13,000 feet in elevation. Within these magnificent ecosystems, visitors can experience pristine alpine lakes, the headwaters of Sand Creek and Medano Creek and enjoy a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities including hiking, backpacking, fishing and hunting.

The lands within the Preserve have allowed park managers to protect and manage an entire watershed while permitting outdoor recreational opportunities restricted in the National Park such as hunting and fishing. Licensed hunters may hunt large and small game within the Preserve boundaries during designated hunting seasons according to state regulations.

Fishing in high alpine lakes and within tributaries of Medano and Sand Creek is also permitted with a current fishing license. Great Sand Dunes invites visitors to hike, horseback ride, or drive into the national preserve to experience how unique, diverse, and important these lands are in the protection of Great Sand Dunes. For more information about how to experience the preserve, visit the Great Sand Dunes website at www.nps.gov/grsa or call the Visitor Center at 719-378-6395.

Rent a specially designed sand-board or sand sled to slide on the dunes: Oasis Store (outside park boundary by the entrance sign) 719-378-2222, or Kristi Mountain Sports (Alamosa) 719-589-9759. Snow sleds, cardboard, saucers, and plastic items don’t slide on dry sand.
The National Park Service was established as a federal agency on August 25, 1916 to protect and preserve the nation’s treasures. Many visionary leaders helped establish and expand the agency, which now includes over 400 historic, cultural, and natural sites in every state. In 2016, Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve will be joining national park units across the country in a celebration of the establishment of the National Park Service by hosting events, promoting nationwide social media campaigns and developing special programming.

The National Park Service has created multiple ways to get visitors excited about enjoying their national parks. The Find Your Park campaign was launched in April, 2015 to encourage visitors to share stories and images through social media and the Find Your Park website. This campaign focuses on the idea that everyone finds their park in a different place and in a different way. To learn more about this campaign and how to get involved, visit www.findyourpark.org.

The NPS Every Kid in a Park campaign is a new initiative to get all 4th graders and their families to personally experience the places that are home to our country’s treasures, rich history, and vibrant culture FREE OF CHARGE. The immediate goal is to provide an opportunity for every 4th grade student across the country to experience their public lands in person throughout the 2015-2016 school years starting September 1, 2015. This special pass will give 4th graders and their families free access to national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges, and more. To learn more about this exciting opportunity, visit www.nationalparks.org/look/every-kid-in-a-park

As we pause to commemorate 100 years and look towards the future, we invite you to join us in the celebration. Like us on Facebook to get updated information on events or visit the park’s website, www.nps.gov/grsa. We hope that you can help us celebrate this milestone in the agency’s history by taking the time to explore, experience and appreciate YOUR National Parks.