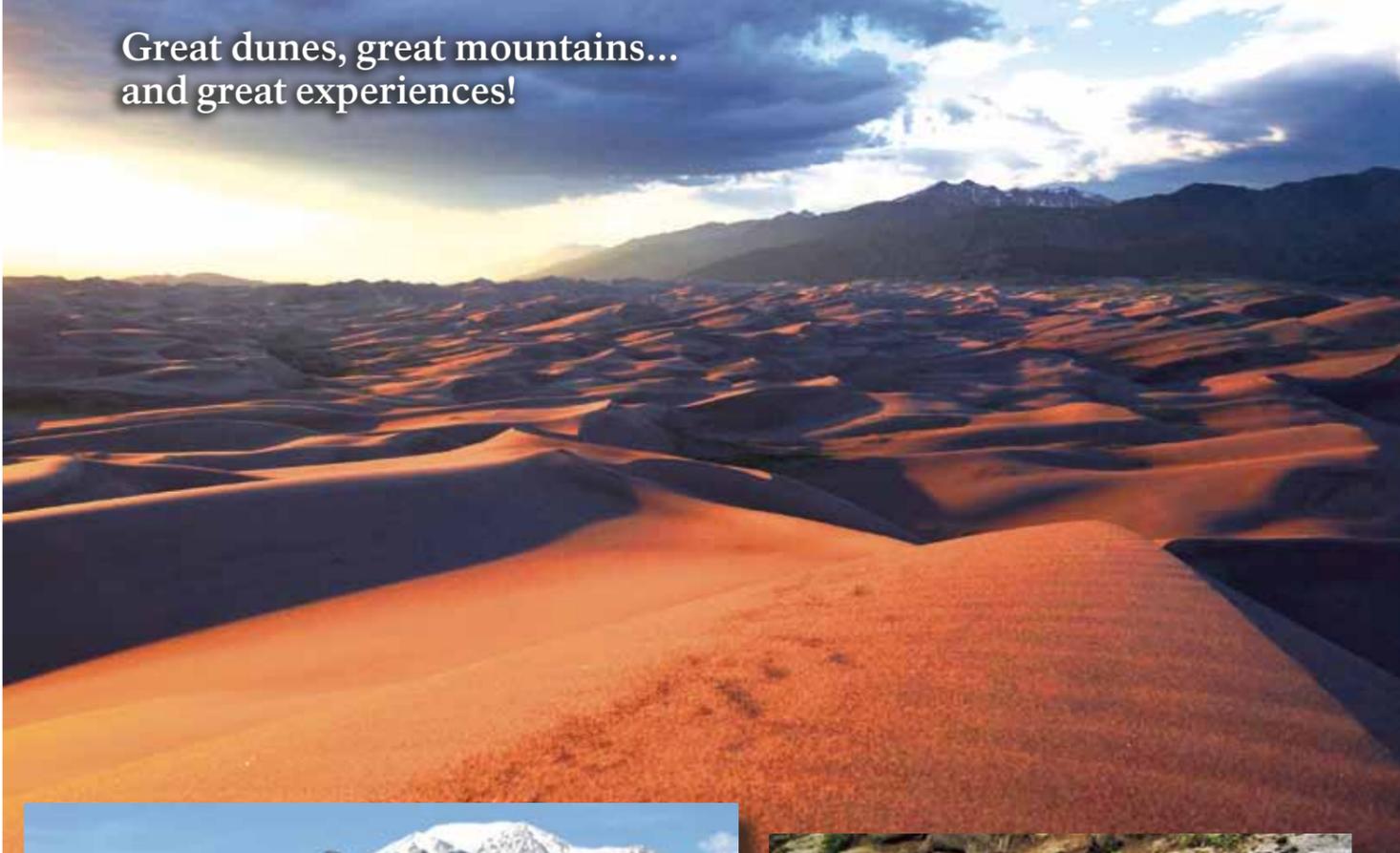


Visitor Guide

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 sand dunes in North America... and a whole lot more.



From the valley floor to the crest of 13,000 foot peaks in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains – the park and preserve contain ecosystems ranging from sand sheet to dunes to tundra—each supporting specially adapted plant, animal and insect life. Days are typically sunny, even in winter, and nights offer skies so dark you can see the Milky Way.

While I hope you'll enjoy the dunes—maybe even try sand sledding-- and take some time to splash in Medano Creek, I also encourage you to take advantage of other recreational opportunities including hiking, backpacking, car camping along the Medano Pass Primitive Road, and fishing and hunting in the Preserve.

Whatever your interests, I think you'll discover that Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve has much to offer in every season.

Lisa Carrico
Superintendent



Explore dunes, creeks, wetlands, grasslands, forests, lakes, and alpine tundra at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. Pictured: aerial view of dunefield, Medano Creek, and waterfall in Sand Creek Basin.



2-3 Main Use Area and Places Nearby

Things to do, suggested ways to prioritize your time, and nearby natural features



4-5 Back- country

Suggested trails and destinations, color map, photos, distances, and backcountry tips



6-7 General Info

Camping and lodging options, entrance fees, weather, pet info, sand sled rentals, accessibility, programs, and junior ranger info

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 Colorado! 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. If you are in immediate danger, crouch in a lower area on top of a pack or other insulator to prevent a ground charge.

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.

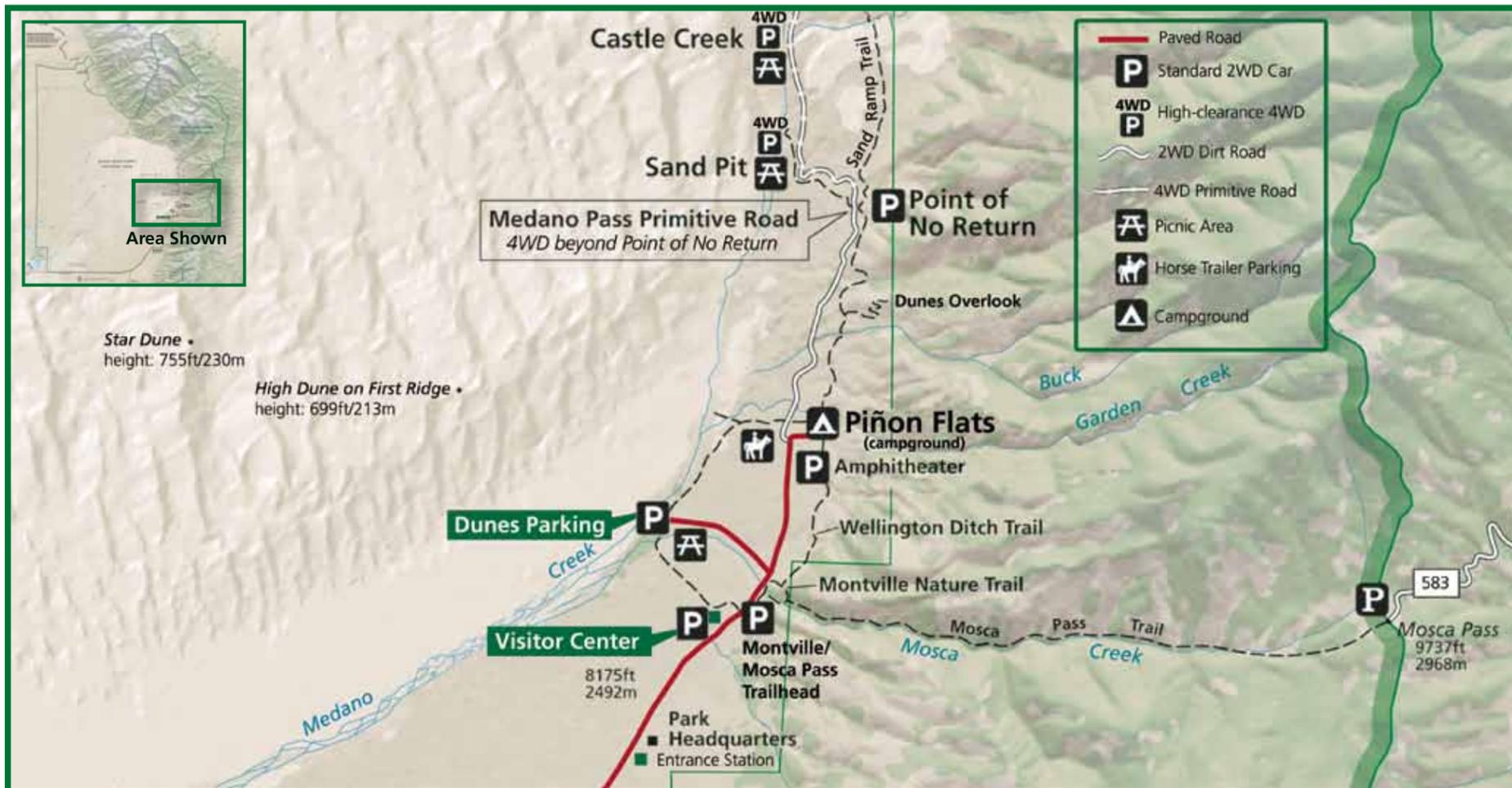
Altitude Park elevations range from 7,515 feet to 13,604 feet (2,291m to 4,146m) above sea level. The Visitor Center and campground are at approximately 8,200 feet (2,499m). Symptoms of altitude sickness and dehydration include shortness of breath, headaches, and nausea. Drink plenty of water (about 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. Verizon phones generally have service in main use areas of the national park; other carriers may have limited reception. You can contact a ranger at the Visitor Center during business hours.



**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: entire dunefield
- Round trip hike: 2.5 miles (4 km) - no trails
- Elevation gain: 699 feet (214 m)
- Average Time: 2 hours



Medano Creek (seasonal)

- Flows April through June in an average year
- Peak flow with surges typically occurs late May - early June
- Adjacent to Dunes Parking
- Depth is variable depending on time of season and snowpack
- Follow current and forecast flow: www.nps.gov/grsa



from Montville/ Mosca Pass Trailhead



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; 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.



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
- For a full view of dunefield, visit Zapata Falls Recreation Area (next page)

from Point of No Return

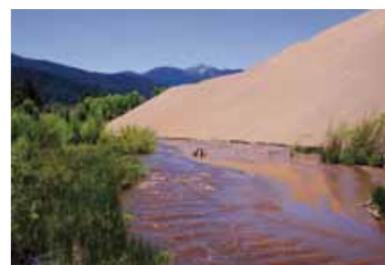
Sand Pit Picnic Area

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



Castle Creek Picnic Area

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



Plan Your Visit: Main Use Area

Below are suggested things to do, with the highest priority activities listed first.



2 hours

- Watch the 20-minute movie and enjoy interactive exhibits and the park store at the Visitor Center.
- Experience Medano Creek (seasonal, spring/early summer; varying depths; check nps.gov/grsa for current flow)
- Explore the lower dunes. Rent a specially designed sand sled (page 6). **In summer, explore early morning or evening to avoid heat exhaustion and burned feet from 150° F (66°C) sand. Lightning strikes occur during afternoon storms. Always wear closed-toe shoes.**



Birding, Mosca Canyon



Kite flying

Other options if you have more time:

- Enjoy an interactive afternoon ranger program at the Visitor Center (1pm and 3:30pm).
- Visit Sand Pit or Castle Creek Picnic Areas (page 2).
- Hike Mosca Pass (page 2).
- Hike Star Dune, the tallest dune in North America (755 feet/230 m). **In summer, start very early morning to avoid heat exhaustion, burned feet, and lightning strikes.** Plan 5 hours for 6 miles (10 km) round trip. Hike over High Dune on First Ridge to the west, or follow Medano Creek downstream to the base of Star Dune.
- Explore the grasslands (see below).
- Hike the Dunes Overlook Trail (page 2)
- Experience the night at Great Sand Dunes: stargazing, hiking under a full moon, watching for meteors, listening for owls.
- Attend a free evening ranger program at the Amphitheater on summer weekends about night skies/nocturnal ecology or other topics.
- Explore the backcountry (pages 4-5).

3-5 hours, you can also...

- Hike to the top of the first ridge of dunes for a view of the entire dunefield (see "High Dune on First Ridge", page 2).
- Visit Zapata Falls Recreation Area to cool off on a summer afternoon, and enjoy a spectacular view of the dunefield from the mountains.
- Hike the Montville Loop Trail: short, shady foothills hike beside a small creek.



At 755 feet (230 m) from base to top, Star Dune is the tallest dune in North America.

Grasslands Exploration



Prairie Sunflowers, August

from Pullouts Along Entrance Road

- Off-trail; variable distances
- Sunflowers peak in mid-August
- View birds, lizards, elk, pronghorn
- Small prickly pear cactus are in some areas; wear sturdy shoes



Elk, October

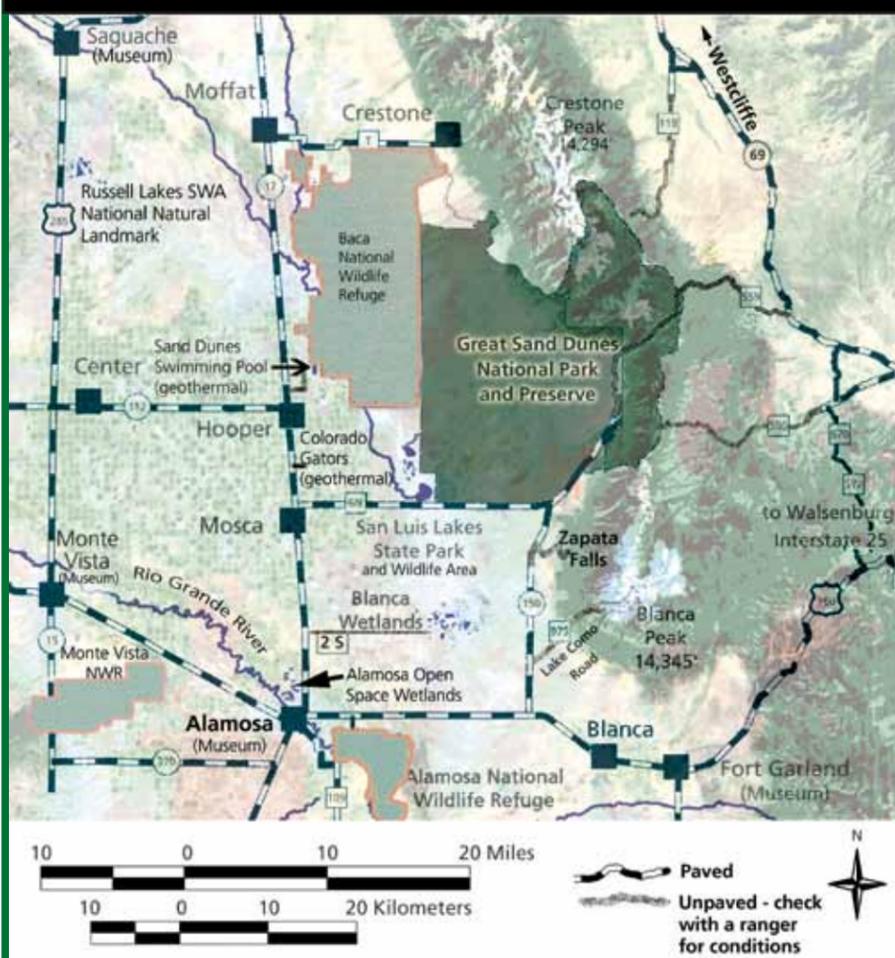
from the Visitor Center

Sand Sheet Loop Trail

- Short loop trail into grasslands with interpretive signs
- Round Trip Hike: 0.25 miles (0.2 km)
- Elevation Gain: 50 feet (15 m)
- Average time: 30 minutes



Nearby Public Lands



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 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.

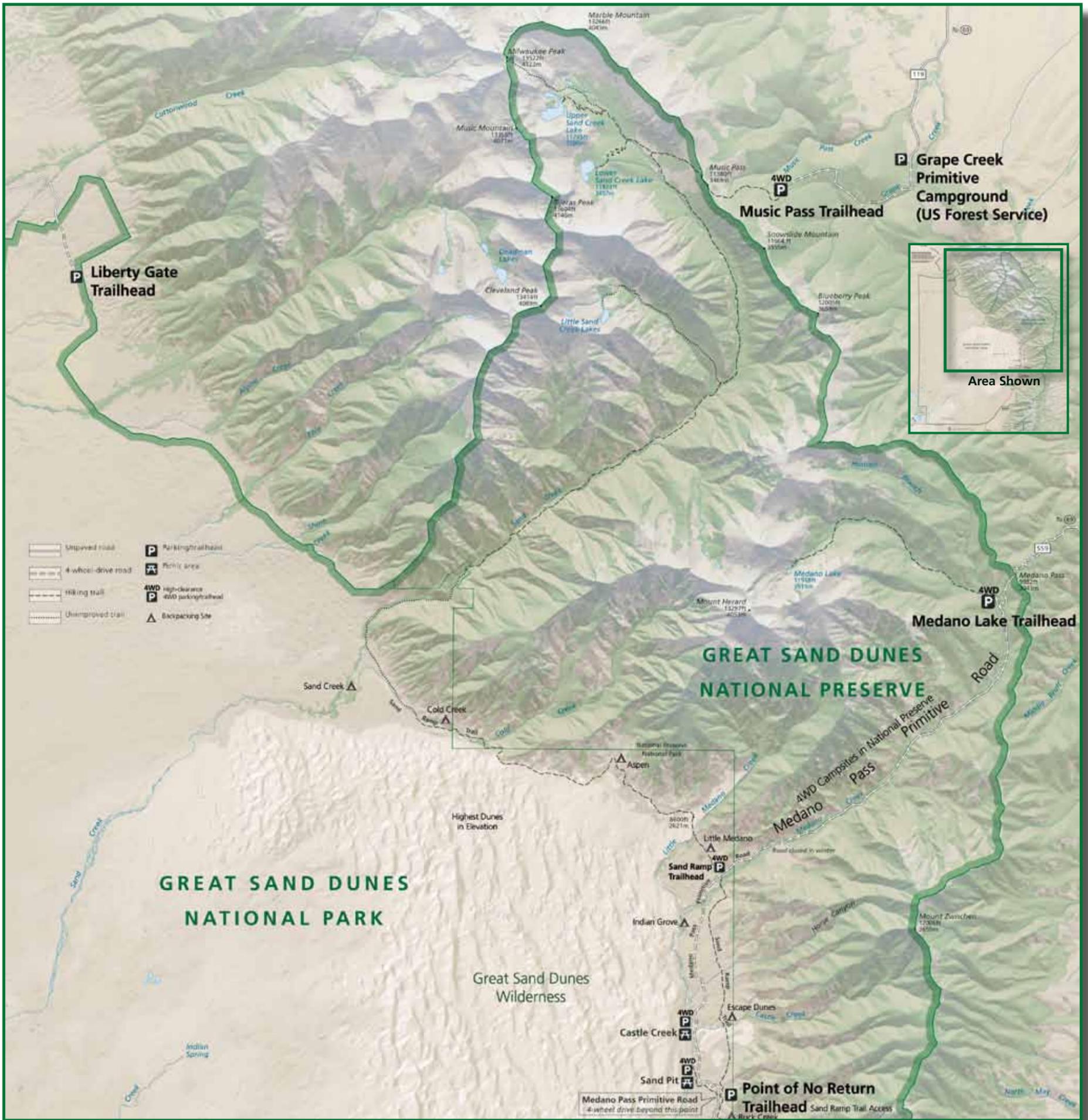
National Wildlife Refuges Alamosa and Monte Vista NWR open year round, 719-589-4021. Baca NWR Visitor Center is open to the public; call 719-256-5527 for hours.



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.

Exploring: Backcountry



Directions to Backcountry Trailheads

- **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



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



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 during this time.

National Park Backcountry



Tent in dunes backcountry

- Overnight backpacking options include camping in the dunes 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 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).



Indian Grove backcountry site



Aspen backcountry site

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), about 1.5 hours
- One way distance to Highway 69: 22 miles (34 km), about 2.5 to 3 hours
- Roadside camping is permitted only in 21 numbered campsites in the national preserve. No permit is required.
- 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.

from Medano Lake Trailhead



Pikas (pictured) and marmots are commonly seen near the alpine lakes of Great Sand Dunes National Preserve.

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.

from Music Pass Trailhead



Lower Sand Creek Lake



Upper Sand Creek Lake

Sand Creek Lakes

- Large alpine lakes below huge cliffs
- Snowfields present through mid-summer
- Fishing
- Round Trip Hike: 8 miles (13 km) to either lake
- Elevation Gain: 2000 feet (610 m) to either lake

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

General Information

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



Weather Information

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.



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

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, and can be obtained when the entrance station is open.

Non-Commercial Vehicle and Occupants	\$15
Oversized Vehicle, 15+ passengers, age 16+	\$7/person
Motorcycle and Riders	\$10
Great Sand Dunes Annual Family Pass	\$30
Interagency Annual Pass (for all federal fee areas)	\$80
Interagency Senior Pass (Lifetime, 62 and older)	\$10
Interagency Access Pass (lifetime, permanently disabled)	Free



The Great Sand Dunes Annual Pass is the best option for families or individuals who visit Great Sand Dunes often.

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.



Recycling

#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
Steel Cans, Propane Cans	Campground

Camping Options in the National Park and Preserve

Piñon (Pinyon) Flats Campground

Open Apr. 1 - Nov.1

Piñon (Pinyon) Flats Campground contains 88 individual sites, of which 44 sites (Loop 2) can be reserved through recreation.gov or by calling 1-877-444-6777. The other 44 sites (Loop 1) are first-come/first-served.



All sites can fit at least 1 tent, and many sites fit RVs up to 35 feet. There are no RV hook-ups. Flush toilets and sinks are available in all loops. All sites cost \$20.00 per night for a maximum of 8 people and 2 vehicles. With a senior or access pass, sites are \$10 per night. All tents and sleeping covers must fit on the established tent pads provided to minimize impacts in the campground. Check-out is 1 pm for all campers. Quiet hours are from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Generators may run between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Three sites for groups of 15 or more are also available for reservation through recreation.gov or by calling 1-877-444-6777. Group sites cost \$65-\$80 depending on size of site.

Backpacking

Backpack into the Great Sand Dunes Wilderness, one of 7 designated sites along the Sand Ramp Trail, or into the national preserve. A free backcountry permit for the national park must be obtained in person at the Visitor Center, from 30 minutes after opening to 30 minutes before closing. See page 5 for more information.



Drive-In Camping on Medano Pass Primitive Road

Drive-in camping is permitted in 21 forested sites along the Medano Pass Primitive Road in Great Sand Dunes National Preserve. Access to these sites requires a high-clearance 4WD vehicle. No permit is required. See page 5 for details.



Nearby Camping and Lodging

Great Sand Dunes Oasis (near park entrance)

- RV/Tent Campground (hookups available), store, basic groceries, gas station, and duplex motel open April - October; restaurant May - Sept. 719-378-2222
www.greatdunes.com

Great Sand Dunes Lodge (near park entrance)

- Modern motel with pool, open mid-March through October. Located up the hill above the Oasis Store. 719-378-2900
www.gsdlodge.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. \$11 per night. 719-852-5941 (BLM office in Monte Vista; no phone at campground)

San Luis State Park (15 miles west of park entrance)

- RVs or tents, electric hookups available. No trees. Separate entrance fee required. Intermittent lake water. 1-800-678-2267
www.coloradostateparks.reserveamerica.com

General Information

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

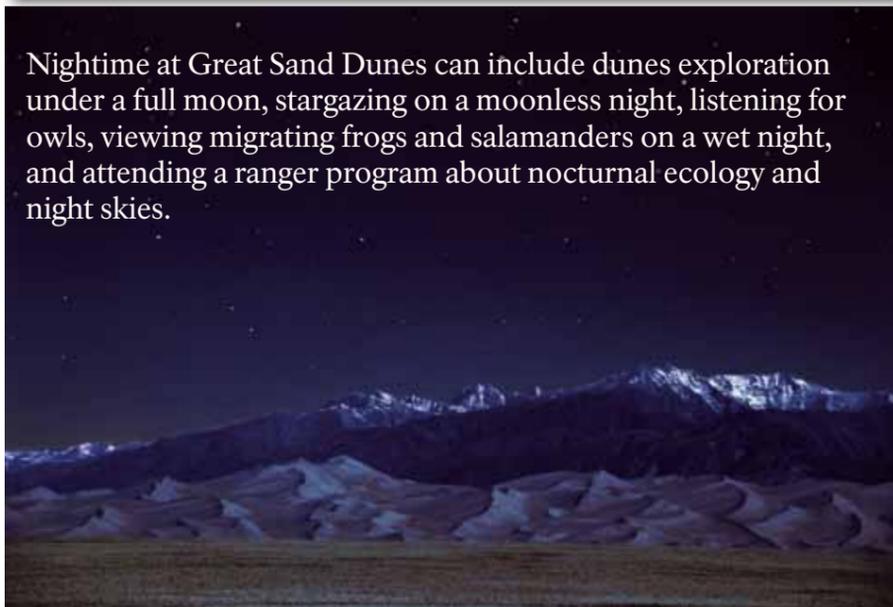


Visitor Center

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.

Sand Sledding and Sandboarding

The National Park Service does not rent sleds or boards. Rent a specially designed sandboard or sand sled at 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.



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 fall months. 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

Check the park website for this year's Junior Ranger Day! Kids of all ages participate in a variety of activities to earn fun prizes. The event is free; park entrance fees and camping fees are still charged (see page 6 for details).

This annual event is sponsored by the Friends of the Dunes.

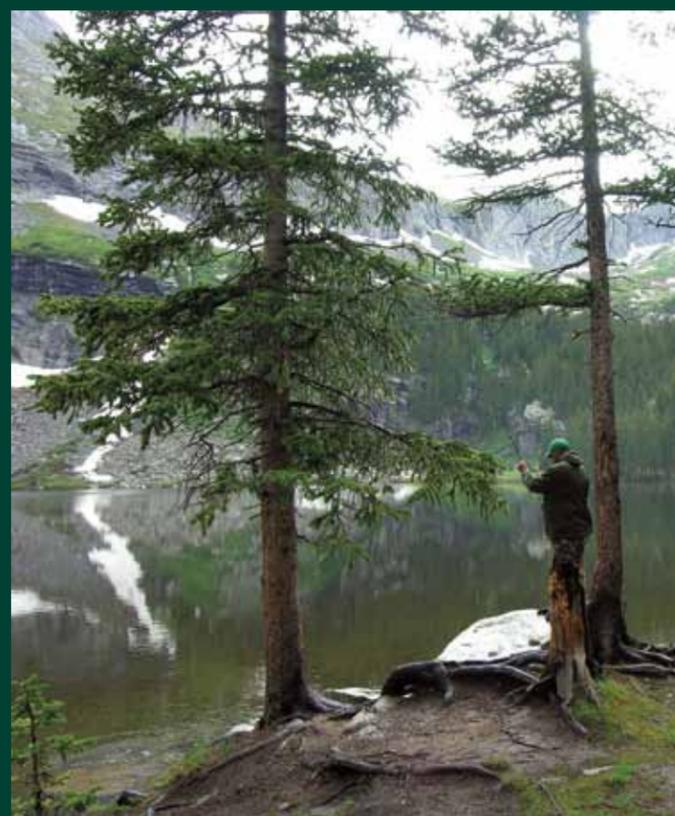


Great Sand Dunes National Preserve: A Unique Protected Area

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. 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.





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, Western National Parks Association advances education, interpretation, research, and community engagement to ensure national parks are increasingly valued by all. Your purchases at the WNPA park store in the Visitor Center help make the national park experience possible for everyone. Become a WNPA member today! www.wnpa.org

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

by Katherine Faz, Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services

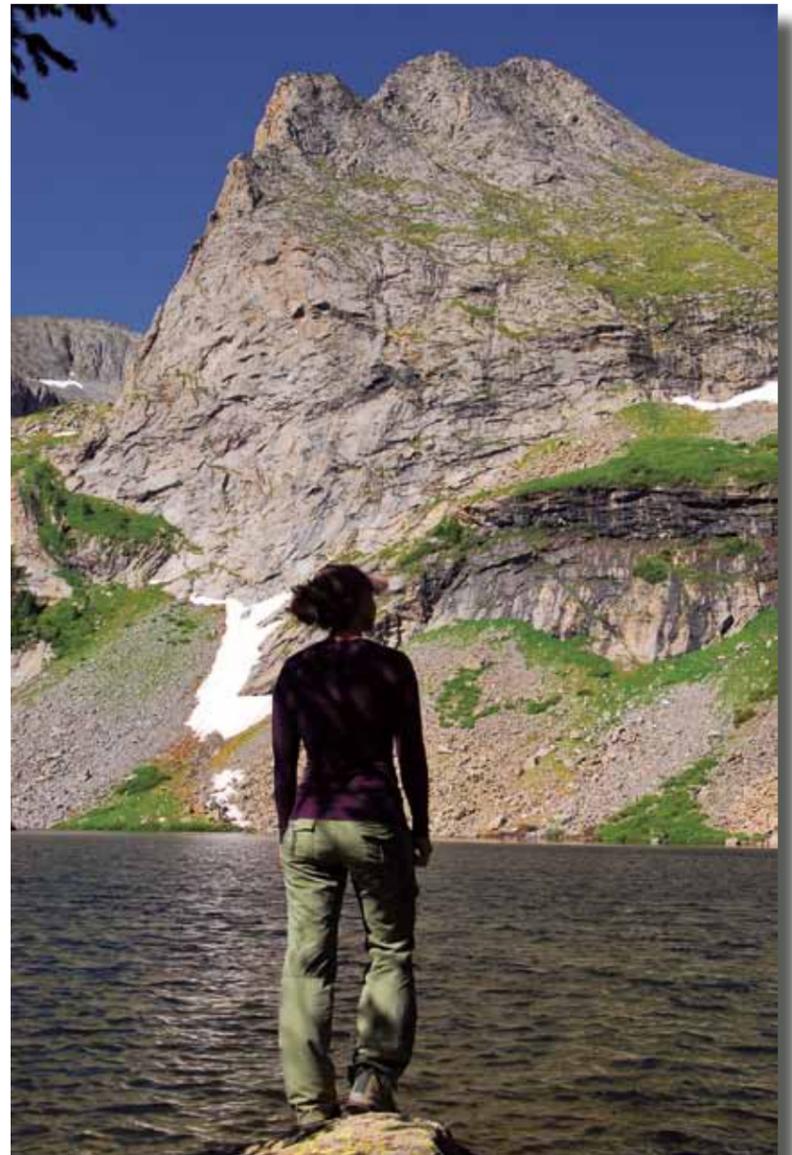
Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is well-known for its tallest dunes in North America, reaching heights over 750 feet, with a dunefield covering 30 square miles. A lesser-known but equally unique and important area within these boundaries is the Great Sand Dunes National Preserve; 41,686 acres 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 area offers backpackers, hikers, and sand sledders 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.



Lower Sand Creek Lake in Great Sand Dunes National Preserve is part of the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness.