100 Years of Preserving Wildlife at Wind Cave National Park

When Wind Cave was established as a national park in 1903, little more than eight miles of cave were known. It was a quiet place in western South Dakota where unique cave formations dazzled visitors and geologists alike.

The surface world – a mixed-grass prairie and ponderosa pine forest – gathered little attention. The vast prairie of the Great Plains was an ecosystem to conquer – an action needed to make way for farms and ranches. As this conquest transpired, habitats for thousands of different organisms disappeared; gone were the bison, elk, and pronghorn antelope that once roamed the land. The disappearance that generated the most discussion was the demise of the bison. These magnificent animals were being wantonly slaughtered.

In response to the carnage, and in an effort to reestablish free-ranging bison herds throughout the country, Teddy Roosevelt and William Hornaday created the American Bison Society. As the Society looked for suitable homes for these animals, they noticed the prairie of Wind Cave National Park. Within the park was a mixture of wide open prairie and small forested areas – habitats perfect for the reintroduction of vanishing prairie species. In August 1912, one hundred years ago, Congress established the Wind Cave National Game Preserve for the purpose of reintroducing bison and other big game animals threatened by changes occurring on the Great Plains.

Returning the Animals

Fourteen bison from New York Zoological Society were delivered to the preserve in November of 1913. Within a year, elk and pronghorn were also relocated to the preserve. The Wind Cave National Game Preserve was on its way to becoming a home for prairie wildlife.

The story of protecting endangered wildlife is a challenge. In 1918 coyotes were such a nuisance that a federal trapper was brought in. Between 1912 and 1921, 598 predators were killed. Soon after, the populations of bison and elk reached a point where there were more animals than grazing space and they either needed to feed them or remove them. It was another 20 years before ecologists such as Aldo Leopold began talking about protecting all parts of the ecosystem, including predators.

Protecting the Land

Because of challenges caused by the 1930’s dust bowl and the ideas of Leopold and others, emphasis began to shift from simply protecting game animals to understanding the systems that support them – including grasslands and predators. These efforts helped provide the viewsheets of the park we see today, ones similar to those George Catlin described in the 1830s: “this prairie where heaven sheds its purest light and lends it richest tints.”

Traditions Continue

Wind Cave National Park’s tradition of reintroducing and protecting native wildlife and the land that supports them continues today. Between July 4 and November 5, 2007, forty-nine black-footed ferrets, one of North America’s rarest mammals, and a predator, were reintroduced. They are once again a resident of the park’s prairie dog towns where they play an essential role in helping restore balance to the ecosystem.

Gifts from the Past

Understanding the balances in our natural world is difficult. When early biologists started raising bison, elk, and pronghorn, it had never been done. The experience gained helped future leaders, adapting to changes in ideas and practices.

Wind Cave National Park has been managed to protect amazing natural resources for more than a century. Here, thriving plant and animal communities are preserved and protected. National parks are special places where ideas evolve, concepts are developed, and we enjoy the results. Because of the historical efforts of many people, visitors from around the world have an opportunity to explore a timeless land where the buffalo still roam and the deer and antelope still play.
Simple Rules for Safety and to Protect Park Resources

Protecting the Park

Park resources are for everyone to enjoy. Do not disturb or remove plants, wildlife, antlers, bones, rocks, or any other natural or cultural feature. They are protected by federal law. These resources are all part of the park’s ecosystem and are important to the park’s history and to the survival of other animals and plants. Please leave these objects undisturbed so the next visitor can enjoy them.

Weapons

As of February 22, 2010, a new federal law allows people who can legally possess firearms under federal, South Dakota, and local laws to possess firearms while visiting Wind Cave National Park. However, hunting and/or the use of firearms is still prohibited. It is the visitor’s responsibility to understand and comply with all applicable state, local, and federal firearms laws. Federal law prohibits firearms in certain facilities in this park; these places are posted with signs at public entrances. If you have questions, please contact the park at 605-745-4600.

Wildlife

Animals in the park are wild and unpredictable. Do not approach or attempt to feed them. Feeding animals causes them to become dependent on human food sources and may fail to survive the winter. Animals that are fed are attracted to highways where they can be struck by vehicles. Be aware that rattlesnakes are sometimes found in prairie dog towns and other areas of the park. Bison also frequent prairie dog towns. They can run 35 miles per hour and may weigh a ton! Stay a safe distance from all wildlife – at least 100 yards from bison and elk.

Pets

To protect your pet and park wildlife remember: pets are prohibited in the backcountry and on most hiking trails. Pets are permitted on the Elk Mountain Nature Trail at the campground and on the Prairie Vista Nature Trail near the picnic area. Be sure to clean up after your pet. Pets may not be left unattended and must be on a leash at all times. Be aware that ticks are common in high grass. They may affect your pet and you.

Do not leave your pets in your vehicle while visiting the cave or for any length of time. The temperatures inside a vehicle can become extreme, putting your pet in grave danger. Kennel space is available in Hot Springs or Custer. Pets may not be left unattended outside of a vehicle, even if they are leashed.

Planning Your Visit

Visitor Center

The Wind Cave Visitor Center is a great place to start your park visit. The visitor center is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily, with extended hours during the summer. The visitor center is closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day. All cave tours begin at the visitor center and are offered daily throughout the year when the visitor center is open. For cave tour schedules see page 7.

Exhibits, maps, book sales, backcountry permits, information about cave tours and ranger programs, lost-and-found services, and Federal Recreational Lands Passes are available here.

Ranger Programs

When visiting the park, plan to attend a ranger-led program. While cave tours are offered all year long, additional programs are presented in the summer. For more information about ranger programs and cave tours see page 6.

Backcountry Camping

Wind Cave National Park’s backcountry offers visitors an excellent opportunity to experience and enjoy the abundant resources of the park. Backcountry camping is permitted in the northwestern part of the park. Several habitats and a variety of plants and animals can be found in this area.

Backcountry campers must have a permit. Permits are free and can be obtained at the visitor center. For your safety and for the protection of park resources, follow all regulations during your stay. Leave no trace of your visit. Pack out what you pack in. Fire danger could be high this year. Please remember: Open fires are not permitted in the backcountry. Pets are also not permitted in the backcountry.

Trash and Recycling

Please help us protect the park and the planet by properly recycling or disposing of all trash. Trash receptacles and recycling facilities are available at the visitor center, the picnic area, and the Elks Mountain Campground. The park recycles glass, aluminum cans, steel cans, and plastic containers with PETE 1 or HDPE 2 markings. Please rinse recyclables before placing them in containers.

Hiking Safely

When hiking park trails (see next page) make sure to carry plenty of water as daytime temperatures in the summer can exceed 100°F (38°C). Water is not readily available along the trails. Any water found in the backcountry should be treated or boiled before drinking. Flies, mosquitoes, and wood ticks can be found in the wetter areas of the park. Be watchful for prairie rattlesnakes in prairie dog towns and near cliffs and rocky areas. Rattlesnakes will not usually strike unless provoked.

Bicycling

Bicycling is limited to established park roads that are open to the public. Bicycling off road, on trails, or in the backcountry is prohibited. When bicycling, be aware that animals roam freely through the park. Keep a safe distance from bison and all wild animals. Highway U.S. 385 has wider shoulders for bicyclists than S.D. 87 where the road is winding and narrow. Bicyclists should take precautions when on this road. Traveling the park’s back roads, NPS 5 and 6, provides a great opportunity to see the prairie area of the park.

Horseback Riding

Horseback riding is a wonderful way to experience the park’s backcountry. All horse and pack animal use requires a free permit which may be obtained at the visitor center. Almost all of the park is open to riding; however, riding is prohibited directly on any hiking trail, near water sources, on roadways, and in the campground and picnic areas.

Traveling in the Park

All vehicles (including bicycles) must remain on roadways that are open to the public. Off-road driving or bicycle riding is prohibited.

Slow down and enjoy the view!

When driving park roads, obey all speed limits. They are strictly enforced to protect you and the wildlife. In the last twenty years over eighty bison have been struck and killed by motor vehicles in the park. You can help protect the wildlife; obey all posted speed limits and watch for animals on the road - they may appear suddenly. Keep your seatbelt fastened.

Drive safely, watch for animals on the road

Picnicking

The park’s picnic area is located ¾ mile north of the visitor center and is open year-round. The picnic area contains tables and fire grates. Drinking water is available in the summer months.

Restrooms

Restrooms are available year-round at the visitor center, picnic area, and the Elk Mountain Campground. Please help conserve water; it is important to the wildlife, the cave, and all of us.

Weather

Summer in the southern Black Hills brings warm daytime temperatures with cool evenings. Thunderstorms are common in June and July and occasionally in August. These thunderstorms can be dangerous with large hail and severe lightning. Slow-moving storms can dump large amounts of rain over a small area. The steep canyons, rock cliffs, and small creeks of the Black Hills are prone to flash flooding. Be cautious when camping near a creek bed even if it is dry. Move uphill if flooding starts.

Area Services

The park has limited food and beverage vending services in the visitor center. The park has no lodging, gasoline, grocery, or restaurant services. These are available in nearby towns: Hot Springs (15 minutes south) and Custer (25 minutes north). For information regarding services in Hot Springs, call 800-325-6991. For Custer, call 800-992-9818. Lodging, gasoline, and some grocery services are located in Custer State Park on the north border of Wind Cave NP.
Hiking in the Park

Wind Cave National Park includes 33,851 acres of prairie grasslands and ponderosa pine forest. The park is a fascinating combination of ecosystems where eastern habitats meet western ones. They support a diverse assortment of life. Hiking any of the 30 miles of trails can help visitors better understand the park. You may even want to leave the trail and travel cross-country along the ridges, through the canyons, or across the rolling prairie. A topographic map is recommended and can be purchased at the visitor center.

Centennial Trail
An excellent example of the diversity of the park can be seen by hiking Wind Cave’s six-mile section of the Centennial Trail. This trail crosses the prairie, climbs the forested ridges, and explores the wetter, riparian habitat of Beaver Creek. The 111-mile Centennial Trail meanders from Wind Cave National Park north through the Black Hills.

Nature Trails
There are three nature trails in the park. The Rankin Ridge Nature Trail leads to the highest point in the park where the views are spectacular. The Elk Mountain Nature Trail explores an ecotone, or meeting zone, where the grassland and forest converge. The Prairie Vista Nature Trail starts at the visitor center and explores the prairie grasslands. Informational signs are available on the trails or booklets are available for purchase at the trailheads. Each trail is about one mile in length.

Hiking Trails

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail Name</th>
<th>One-way Length</th>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold Brook Canyon Trail</td>
<td>1.4 miles (2.3 km)</td>
<td>Moderately Strenuous</td>
<td>The trail begins south of the visitor center on the west side of U.S. Highway 385. This trail travels through a forested area, traverses a small prairie dog town, and winds through Cold Brook Canyon to the park boundary fence. The open prairie is a good place to see raptors such as prairie falcons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wind Cave Canyon Trail</td>
<td>1.8 miles (2.9 km)</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>This former road follows Wind Cave Canyon to the park boundary fence. Wind Cave Canyon is one of the best places for bird watching. Limestone cliffs provide good nesting areas for cliff swallows, canyon wrens, and great horned owls. Standing dead trees serve as homes for red-headed and Lewis’s woodpeckers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Bison Flats Trail</td>
<td>3.7 miles (6 km)</td>
<td>Moderately Strenuous</td>
<td>Hike one-half mile down the Wind Cave Canyon Trail to pick up the East Bison Flats Trail. This trail leads hikers across the rolling hills of the prairie. From this trail you may see panoramic views of Wind Cave National Park, Buffalo Gap, and the Black Hills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lookout Point Trail</td>
<td>2.2 miles (3.5 km)</td>
<td>Moderately Strenuous</td>
<td>This trail follows the rolling hills of the prairie, traverses Lookout Point, and ends at Beaver Creek. Take a side trip up Lookout Point to see the results of the 2010 American Elk Prescribed Fire. This trail can also be combined with part of the Highland Creek Trail, and the Centennial Trail, to create a 4.5-mile loop that begins and ends at the Centennial Trailhead.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanctuary Trail</td>
<td>3.6 miles (5.8 km)</td>
<td>Moderately Strenuous</td>
<td>The trail begins about one mile north of the Rankin Ridge fire tower road. This trail follows the rolling hills of the prairie, crosses a large prairie dog town, and ends at the Highland Creek Trail. View the Rankin Ridge fire tower at the intersection of the Centennial Trail. This trail provided a fire break for the 2000 wildfire of 1,135 acres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centennial Trail</td>
<td>6 miles (9.7 km)</td>
<td>Moderately Strenuous</td>
<td>The southern access to the trail is on the east side of S.D. Highway 87. The northern access is on NPS 5, 1.4 miles east of its junction with S.D. Highway 87. This trail is part of a 111-mile trail through the Black Hills. The trail leads hikers across prairies, through forested areas, and along Beaver Creek. The trail is marked with posts and trees bearing the Centennial Trail logo. The trail travels through the 2010 American Elk Prescribed Fire area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Creek Trail</td>
<td>8.6 miles (13.8 km)</td>
<td>Strenuous</td>
<td>The southern trailhead is along the Wind Cave Canyon Trail one mile east of U.S. Highway 385. The northern trailhead is on NPS 5, 2.8 miles east of S.D. Highway 87. This trail is the longest and the most diverse in the park. The trail traverses mixed-grass prairies, ponderosa pine forests, and riparian habitats of Highland Creek, Beaver Creek, and Wind Cave Canyon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boland Ridge Trail</td>
<td>2.6 miles (4.2 km)</td>
<td>Strenuous</td>
<td>The trail begins one mile north of the junction of NPS 5 and NPS 6. This trail climbs to panoramic views of Wind Cave National Park, the Black Hills, Red Valley, and Battle Mountain. Elk are often seen from this trail.</td>
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Bringing Back the Wildlife

Where Oh Where Can the Buffalo Roam?

When Wind Cave was established as a national park, all the emphasis was on the cave. Its underground scenery amazed visitors and geologists alike. The cave's major feature, boxwork, had never been seen before. At that time the reason for creating national parks was to protect spectacular scenery such as Yellowstone, Yosemite, or Crater Lake, not ecosystems like the prairie. The acres of prairie above the cave were the domain of ranchers and farmers. It was not until the late 1800s when the debate over the bison wasraising and habitats were discussed. People like Teddy Roosevelt and William Hornaday knew that to save an animal from extinction one had to create sanctuaries for them. Their newly created American Bison Society began searching for a preserve for these “ungainly beasts” and discovered Wind Cave National Park’s mixed-grass prairie.

Through their efforts, Congress established the 4,000-acre Wind Cave National Game Preserve in August of 1912. The reintroduction of the animals began the following year. Today the park is a wildlife watcher’s paradise with herds of shaggy bison roaming freely on the prairie.

Bison share the landscape with many other animals such as elk, pronghorn, deer, coyotes, badgers, prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets, and mountain lions as well as nearly 200 species of birds. Explore the park; drive the back roads; hike the trails; and enjoy the amazing array of wildlife living in this remarkable national park.

How to Raise a Bison Herd

In 1913, when the American Bison Society began the process of establishing a free-ranging bison (or buffalo as they are often called) in the newly created Wind Cave National Game Preserve, they looked to the New York City Zoo to get their animals. Here, William Hornaday had been collecting and breeding some of the few remaining wild bison.

Fred Dille, of the U.S. Biological Survey, was in charge of accomplishing this special task. To start, he had to determine how to move fourteen bison from New York City all the way across the country to their new home near Hot Springs, South Dakota.

At the zoo, animal handlers had to build special crates for the bison and then load them onto an express train. That 2,000 mile journey took 1/2 days. Once the bison arrived in Hot Springs, every available truck and cart was pressed into service to move them the remaining eleven miles to the preserve. This unprecedented journey took a surprising ten hours. By the time the bison reached the preserve, quite a crowd had gathered to see them released. There was only one problem. The bison were not willing to back out of a crate! The frustrating process was described by Dille, “To suggest to a buffalo that he must back out of the crate by poking him in the head, will work with an elk but not a bison. Your actions are but a challenge to him and he does not propose to give ground.” The final operation was more a process of removing the crates from the animals than the animals from the crates. At last however, the bison were released and began their new life on the prairie. Six additional bison from Yellowstone were added to the herd in 1916.

In 1935, when the park and preserve merged, care of the animals was given to Wildlife Ranger Estes Suter. Suter was interested in creating a herd that looked and behaved like bison of the “old days”. He worked with Native American elders and locals to determine what a “true buffalo” really looked like and removed specific bison of the “old days”. He worked with Native American elders and locals to determine what a “true buffalo” really looked like and removed specific bison of the “old days”. He worked with Native American elders and locals to determine what a “true buffalo” really looked like and removed specific bison of the “old days”.

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Bull Bison and Pronghorn

Today, unlike when Estes Suter sat on top of his car to decide which bison to keep and which to remove, park biologists strive to protect the herd and ecosystems through scientific studies. Ideally, “wild” bison would live in free-ranging, naturally regulated herds. But that is not possible. Most herds are confined and subjected to varying degrees of management. Therefore herd size, population structure, levels of genetic variation, and the incidence of domestic cattle introgression must all be considered in park management decisions.

For Wind Cave, the effort to establish a wild bison herd started with 14 animals. The importance of that story was noted when one of the original 14 bison died. The bison, named Sandy because of his light color, “succumbed to the rigors of his 24th winter” in December 1936. Newspapers reported the event. “There are doubtless hundreds of buffaloes born on the plains which spent their last days in some park or zoo, but Sandy was one of the few to be born in a zoo and to die on the open range.”

Suter, Hornaday, Dille, today’s resource managers, and others have taken part in this adventure. They have provided us with the opportunity to see bison born and raised on an open range. And, if we are lucky, to see a herd so large they seem to fill the prairie.
Protecting Pronghorn

Reintroducing prairie animals continued in 1914 when thirteen pronghorn antelope were brought to the park from Alberta, Canada. While the other animals thrived, the pronghorn did not. A.P. Chambers, the first warden of the preserve, kept the captive pronghorn in small enclosures and fed them ground corn and alfalfa. The food apparently disagreed with them since he reported three died of indigestion.

Chambers also had trouble with predators. Wild pronghorn, according to Fred Dille, “are crazy to handle. So the wise heads of the Biological Survey figured it was best to capture the kids when first born and rear them. This was successful except they were too tame and not afraid of any dog or man.” This, of course, included coyotes and bobcats. In fact, predators were such a problem that in 1918 a trapper was hired to rid the preserve of them. Between 1912 and 1921, 598 predators were killed. Still, by 1924, the herd was down to only seven does. Soon after, a pronghorn buck was brought in from Nevada and the herd began to grow. Eventually, Chambers realized that the problem was not totally the fault of predators. Pronghorn, the fastest North American land mammal, need space to escape predators. Keeping them in enclosures was like serving them up as a meal. Chambers summarized his challenges saying, “The propagation of the (pronghorn) antelope is difficult. The only way this can be accomplished is by setting aside large tracts of land. They will not thrive in confinement.”

In 1935, when the preserve and Wind Cave National Park merged, the Civilian Conservation Corps removed interior fences. The larger 11,000-acre range seemed to have an effect, “It was interesting to watch the antelope the first day they found they could get on the new range. They covered the entire east range in a comparatively short time, running in all directions.”

Today there are close to 100 pronghorn in the park. But their numbers still fluctuate depending upon the number of coyotes and other predators and their ability to leave the park by crawling under the fences. Resource managers annually count these swift creatures each September to make sure the park has a healthy reproducing population.

The Ever Elusive Elk

Since their reintroduction in 1913 and 14, seeing wild animals like bison, pronghorn, and elk in their natural environment has been one of the thrills of visiting this national park. Protecting these animals and their habitat is a primary goal for the park. One of the best ways to protect them and their habitat is to define and maintain the park’s “carrying capacity.” To do this, biologists must determine how many animals of all species can live here without “eating themselves out of house and home”.

To accomplish this goal, scientist recently studied the park’s elk population and determined their numbers should range between 232-475 animals. Unfortunately, in the fall and winter, there may be twice that number in the park. Winter use of the park by large numbers of elk burdens ecosystems that support elk and many other animals. Elk tend to browse on small hardwoods. Botanists noticed that many hardwood areas were thinning out because of this browsing. Keeping elk away from developing aspen, ash, willow, and chokecherry affords these plants the opportunity to mature, providing habitat and food for many species.

To learn more about this, park biologists have been placing GPS collars on elk to track their seasonal movements in and out of the park. They discovered that some only spend brief periods of time within park boundaries. These studies also determined where and when the elk cross the fence. The park modified these fence crossings with gates that can be raised or lowered when needed.

These newly created “elk gates” are now being lowered during times when elk tend to leave the park and raised before they are likely to return. By restricting their movement we can maintain the elk population, protect the park ecosystems, and provide recreational opportunities for elk hunters outside park boundaries.

Through research, park managers build an understanding of the delicate balance between the needs of the animals and the needs of the system that supports them, making this a vibrant, healthy environment.

One Hundred Years and Still Going

Throughout their existence, black-footed ferrets have been elusive. They are dependent upon prairie dogs for ninety percent of their diet and prairie dog burrows provide essential shelter for ferret families. Since prairie dogs are considered pests and were being eliminated throughout the West, they and, in turn, ferrets became more and more scarce until by the late 1970s black-footed ferrets were thought to be extinct. T ragically, outbreaks of canine distemper, and, in the 1970s black-footed ferrets were thought to be extinct.

In 1981, a dramatic discovery raised the hopes of save this important species. In 1987 biologists took the last known species. Between 1985 and 1987 biologists took the last known species. T ragically, outbreaks of canine distemper, and, in the turn, ferrets became more and more scarce until by the late 1970s black-footed ferrets were thought to be extinct.

In 2007, Wind Cave National Park continued its role as a place that reestablished native species to the Great Plains. A total of forty-nine black-footed ferrets were reintroduced to the park’s prairie dog towns in 2007 with twelve more added in 2010. The presence of this remarkable predator helps restore balance to the prairie ecosystem and provides an opportunity for visitors from around the world to see a rare and elusive animal on the prairies of Wind Cave National Park.
Passages to see how the cave got its name. Cave giving visitors the opportunity Natural Entrance Tour blue fungus. The trees, planted by trees near the park visitor center. of Wind Cave.” states their mission as “expanding Cave National Park as a natural to supporting and promoting Wind National Park is a group dedicated citizens. The Friends of Wind Cave was “friended” by a group of local that everybody needs a friend, and many people have you “friend-eds” in the last few years. It seems that everybody needs a friend, and recently Wind Cave National Park was “friendied” by a group of local citizens. The Friends of Wind Cave National Park is a group dedicated to supporting and promoting Wind Cave National Park as a natural and cultural treasure. Lon Sharp, President of the Friends Group, states their mission as “expanding the awareness of the unique value of Wind Cave.”

Recently the Friends helped replant trees near the park visitor center. The original trees had been removed because they were infected with a blue fungus. The trees, planted by the Civilian Conservation Corp, were an integral part of the cultural landscape of Wind Cave National Park Headquarters and it was important to replace them. Seeing this need, the Friends responded by spending the day at the park digging holes and planting trees.

Besides planting trees, the newly formed Friends of Wind Cave National Park assisted the park in placing a bronze plaque honoring Stephen Mather near the visitor center. The park acquired the plaque in the 1930s after the death of Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, but it had been in storage since the visitor center was remodeled in 1979. “This was a great opportunity to begin a long-term relationship with Wind Cave,” said Friends president Lon Sharp. “We had a strong response from our members on a picture perfect day to be in the park.”

Friends groups are important because they form a partnership between the community and the park. Members act as ambassadors to help extend the presence and values of the park into the community. They also help leverage the work of park employees through donated labor and funds and promote a strong sense of stewardship of park resources.

If you are interested in becoming a Friend of Wind Cave National Park visit www.friendsofindcave.com.

Walks and Talks
Campfire Program Become better acquainted with park resources by attending an evening campfire program. These talks are presented during the summer at the Elk Mountain Campground Amphitheater. Topics may include wildlife, plants, geology, cave exploration, park management, or history. The programs last about 45 minutes.

Evening Hike Explore the happenings on a prairie dog town at night and possibly see an endangered species – the black-footed ferret! These evening hikes, presented late June thru July, start at the Elk Mountain Campground Amphitheater before driving to a nearby site. Bring a flashlight and wear hiking boots. Check at the visitor center for details.

Discovery Activity Daily, during the summer, ranger talks or demonstrations take place at the visitor center. These programs explain some facet of the park. Topics may include local wildlife, plants, geology, area history, or cave surveying. Check at the visitor center for meeting place and topic.

Become a Junior Ranger The Junior Ranger Program is an exciting opportunity for children and their families to learn about the park. Becoming a Junior Ranger helps youngsters understand the park’s ecosystems, the cave, and the animals. It also helps them learn how they can help protect all parts of our environment. Free Junior Ranger booklets are available at the bookstore.
Cave Tour Safety and Information

All tours are ranger-guided and leave from the visitor center. Tickets are sold on a first-come, first-served basis except for the Candlelight and Wild Cave tours (see Reservations below). During peak summer visitation, long waits for tours may be encountered. To avoid waits, the best time to visit the cave is during the early hours of the day. During the summer, weekends are good times to visit; Tuesdays and Wednesdays are the busiest days. Reservations for school and organized groups are available (see Reservations.)

Wind Cave is 53°F (11°C) throughout the year so a sweater or jacket is worn in caves from states where white-nose syndrome is found are not permitted on any cave tour.

Any clothing, foot-wear, or gear worn in caves from states where white-nose syndrome is found are not permitted on any cave tour.

Photography is permitted, but no tripods. Pets are not allowed in the cave. Do not leave your pets in your vehicle while visiting the cave. See Page 2 for more information about pets in the park.

Reservations

Tickets for most cave tours are sold on a first-come, first-served basis; however, reservations are accepted for schools or large groups. Reservations are strongly recommended for the more strenuous Candlelight Tour and required for the Wild Cave (spelunking) Tour. Reservations are accepted beginning one month before the tour and must be made by phone. Call 605-745-4600 for information or reservations.

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY

Dial 911 or contact any park ranger or call the park’s visitor center at 605-745-4600.
The Black Hills Parks & Forests Association

The Black Hills Parks & Forests Association sells books, maps, and other park related publications in visitor centers at Wind Cave National Park, Jewel Cave National Monument, Custer State Park, Buffalo Gap National Grassland, and Black Hills National Forest. The association publishes books and materials about these areas. Cooperating associations are non-profit, tax exempt organizations authorized by Congress to promote educational and scientific activities within national parks. All profits from association sales support the educational, interpretive, and research activities of these agencies.

Many different types of publications are available in the bookstores including books specific to Wind Cave National Park and others about local natural and cultural history. These publications, maps, and items are available at the bookstore, by mail order, or from the association web site, www.blackhillsparks.org. Fax: 605-745-7021, or email bhpf@blackhillsparks.org. Membership in the Black Hills Parks and Forests Association supports the organization and entitles members to a 15% discount on all purchases. The membership is $29.95 per year. For more information call 605-745-7020.

Wind Cave: An Ancient World Beneath the Hills – In this wonderful, easy-to-read book, Art Palmer explains the geology of Wind Cave, how it is related to the Black Hills, and how the cave and its formations formed. The charts and graphs help make the topic easily understood by people unfamiliar with geology. The pictures of the unusual Wind Cave boxwork alone make this book well worth the investment. $8.95

Wind Cave: One Park, Two Worlds – takes viewers on a journey into two vastly different landscapes of uncompromising beauty – the prairie and the cave. This 20-minute movie tells the dramatic stories of Wind Cave National Park’s natural and human history, including the story of Alvin MacDonald – the first explorer of this subterranean world and the story of the bison – the symbol of the Great Plains. Through breathtaking photography this video captures the spirit, mystery, and beauty of one of America’s oldest National Parks. $19.95

Wind Cave National Park: the first 100 Years – In 1903, Wind Cave National Park became the eighth national park in the nation and the first park created to protect a cave. Peggy Sanders encapsulates the park’s fascinating 100 year history in over 200 vintage images. Travel through time with the early cave and animal management teams, through the Great Depression, and into the present with an amazing collection of classic pictures and stories. $21.99

Wind Cave, The Story Behind the Scenery – if you are interested in learning more about the ecosystems, wildlife, and history of Wind Cave National Park, this book by Ron Terry is an excellent choice. It contains outstanding photographs and information about the cave and its unusual boxwork formation. This book goes beyond the cave, including photos and insights about the park’s incredible prairie. This book is part of a series by KC Publications that explores the natural, geological, and cultural history of the national parks. $11.95

Wind Cave National Park, Custer State Park, Jewel Cave National Monument, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, the Southern Black Hills National Forest, and the Centennial and Mickelson Trails are included. The map is part of a series of National Geographic Trails Illustrated Maps. There is also a Black Hills North map detailing the northern half of the Black Hills National Forest. $11.95

Trails Illustrated Map, Black Hills South – If you are interested in hiking, this is the trail map to have. This tear-proof, waterproof map details the Southern Black Hills from Mount Rushmore to the Cheyenne River. Wind Cave National Park, Custer State Park, Jewel Cave National Monument, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, the Southern Black Hills National Forest, and the Centennial and Mickelson Trails are included. The map is part of a series of National Geographic Trails Illustrated Maps. $11.95

The Black Hills Parks & Forests Association

Many different types of publications are available in the bookstores including books specific to Wind Cave National Park and others about local natural and cultural history. These publications, maps, and items are available at the bookstore, by mail order, or from the association web site, www.blackhillsparks.org. Fax: 605-745-7021, or email bhpf@blackhillsparks.org. Membership in the Black Hills Parks and Forests Association supports the organization and entitles members to a 15% discount on all purchases. The membership is $29.95 per year. For more information call 605-745-7020.

Wind Cave: An Ancient World Beneath the Hills – In this wonderful, easy-to-read book, Art Palmer explains the geology of Wind Cave, how it is related to the Black Hills, and how the cave and its formations formed. The charts and graphs help make the topic easily understood by people unfamiliar with geology. The pictures of the unusual Wind Cave boxwork alone make this book well worth the investment. $8.95

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Take a 360 degree Tour of Wind Cave National Park – This CD has over seventy immersive and interactive panoramic views of Wind Cave National Park and Jewel Cave National Monument. Share the views of the cave or the prairie that you enjoyed on your visit or explore the wilderness of the cave through pictures. The CDs play on your Mac or PC computers allowing you to see maps, photographs, and a 3D model of the cave. The 3D program provides views of the underground or surface world of both parks. $18.95

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