

Wilderness.net's Capitan Mountains Wilderness Fact Sheet

Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Capitan Mountains Wilderness in 1980 and it now has a total of 35,067 acres. All of the wilderness is in New Mexico and is managed by the Forest Service.

Description

The birthplace of Smokey the Bear, discovered here as a cub in 1951, is a rugged piece of mountain real estate that straddles something that's unusual in New Mexico: an east-west-running range. Numerous canyons cut into the north side of the rocky range, while rocky outcroppings distinguish the region to the south. The terrain flattens now and then along the main ridge, and then opens out into meadows and groves of aspen. The Wilderness measures 12 miles long and two to six miles wide, with elevations varying from about 5,500 feet near the eastern boundary to 10,083 feet on Capitan Peak (sometimes called El Capitan Mountain). At the lower elevations, piñon and juniper woodland flourishes, with ponderosa pine making an appearance midslope, followed by mixed conifers (Douglas fir, Engelmann spruce, corkbark fir, and pine) on the main ridge. The original Smokey, the world-famous symbol of forest fire prevention, lies buried in nearby Capitan, but plenty of his kinfolk still reside in these woods. Other denizens include large populations of mule deer and wild turkey, both of which attract hunters in the fall (as do the black bears). Anglers can try to catch small brook trout at Pine Lodge, Copeland Canyon, Kelly Canyon, and Seven Cabins Canyon. Of the dozen or so hikes in the Wilderness, 8.2-mile Summit Trail follows the main ridge and probably offers some of the best views. Foot traffic is usually heaviest on the Capitan Peak Trail, which takes 5.7 miles of steep switchbacks to reach El Capitan's summit.

Leave No Trace

How to follow the seven standard Leave No Trace principles differs in different parts of the country (desert vs. Rocky Mountains). Click on any of the principles listed below to learn more about how they apply in the Capitan Mountains Wilderness.

1. [Plan Ahead and Prepare](#)
2. [Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces](#)
3. [Dispose of Waste Properly](#)
4. [Leave What You Find](#)
5. [Minimize Campfire Impacts](#)
6. [Respect Wildlife](#)
7. [Be Considerate of Other Visitors](#)

For more information on Leave No Trace, [Visit the Leave No Trace, Inc. website.](#)

Area Management

The Capitan Mountains wilderness is part of the 110 million acre National Wilderness Preservation System. This System of lands provides clean air, water, and habitat critical for rare and endangered plants and animals. In wilderness, you can enjoy challenging recreational activities like hiking, backpacking, climbing, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, horse packing, bird watching, stargazing, and extraordinary opportunities for solitude. You play an important role in helping to *"secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness"* as called for by the Congress of the United States through the Wilderness Act of 1964. Please follow the requirements outlined below and use Leave No Trace techniques when visiting the Capitan Mountains Wilderness to ensure protection of this unique area.

General Wilderness Prohibitions

Motorized equipment and equipment used for mechanical transport is generally prohibited on all federal lands designated as wilderness. This includes the use of motor vehicles, motorboats, motorized equipment, bicycles, hang gliders, wagons, carts, portage wheels, and the landing of aircraft including helicopters, unless provided for in specific legislation.

In a few areas some exceptions allowing the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport are described in the special regulations in effect for a specific area. Contact the Forest Service office for more specific information.

These general prohibitions have been implemented for all national forest wildernesses in order to implement the provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964. The Wilderness Act requires management of human-caused impacts and protection of the area's wilderness character to insure that it is "unimpaired for the future use and enjoyment as wilderness." Use of the equipment listed as prohibited in wilderness is inconsistent with the provision in the Wilderness Act which mandates opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation and that wilderness is a place that is in contrast with areas where people and their works are dominant.

Contacts

Smokey Bear Ranger District
901 MECHEM
RUIDOSO, NM 88345

Phone: 575-257-4095

Links on Wilderness.net

[National, Regional and Local Wilderness Organizations \(NGOs\)](#)

A listing of societies, organizations, coalitions and other wilderness-related advocacy and stewardship groups.

[Career and Volunteer Opportunities](#)

A listing of sites providing information about wilderness- and environmentally-related career and volunteer opportunities.

Applicable Wilderness Law(s)

Law	Date	Acreage Change (in acres)
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Public Law 96-550

December 19, 1980

34,000

New Mexico Wilderness Act - Public law 96-550 (12/19/1980) To designate certain National Forest System lands in the state of New Mexico for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, and for other purposes

 [download 96-550](#)