

CASTNER RANGE NATIONAL MONUMENT



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is Castner Range and why was it designated as a National Monument?

Castner Range National Monument (CRNM, the Monument) has the unique distinction as the only National Monument under United States Army management. The Monument encompasses 6,672 acres situated on the eastern slopes of the Franklin Mountains on lands administered by Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas. On March 21, 2023, Castner Range was designated a National Monument by Presidential Proclamation 10534 and serves as a tribute to our nation's Veterans, and preserves significant natural and cultural resources. The Monument is also one of the last remaining undeveloped areas in the El Paso region, providing a unique opportunity to conserve a natural landscape that is representative of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem.

Does the local community support the Monument's designation?

This Monument's designation is built on more than 50 years of public support and advocacy for permanent protection of Castner Range. Not only was the protection of the Monument's natural and cultural resources paramount, but preserving open space was also a focal component of the grass roots effort by the local community to conserve this land.

What protections will National Monument designation provide?

The Monument Proclamation directs the Army to protect historic, scientific, natural, and cultural resources and values of the area. These include significant archaeological and paleontological resources; rare and fragile natural resources, unique geological features; and sites of cultural significance to Tribal Nations for the benefit of all Americans. It requires the Army to expeditiously execute military munitions response actions in accordance with required cleanup processes and allows for the potential phased opening of CRNM for public access once conditions necessary to protect visitors' health and safety are met.

Section 2846 of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act directs the Army to protect and conserve ecological, scenic, wildlife, recreational, cultural, historical, natural, educational, and scientific resources on Castner Range, and dictates restrictions on public use. It prohibits commercial development within the Monument, construction of buildings or structures, facilities, or roads (temporary or permanent), the use of motor vehicles or motorized equipment, use of the Monument for the landing of aircraft, and the use of any other form of mechanical transport (e.g., bicycles, E-bikes, monowheel, and all-terrain vehicles). Measures required to protect the health and safety of Monument visitors are exempt and allowed, including the use of emergency vehicles as necessary. It also withdraws the area from new mining claims and mineral leasing.

The Army will develop a General Management Plan, which is a long-term management plan that sets the goals and allowable uses for the Monument. The public will have multiple opportunities to be involved in the planning effort.

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What is the military history of the Monument?

The Monument is an important part of the history of the United States military, with training activities dating back to 1926. The Army established Castner Range when the 1st Cavalry Division was at Fort Bliss, who used it heavily through WWII (in particular the 82d Field Artillery Regiment) and ceased small arms range and artillery live-fire training in 1966.

What natural resources can be found on the Monument?

The Monument is home to a variety of native species, including the Texas Horned Lizard, desert mule deer, desert bighorn sheep, golden eagles, and many other resident and migratory birds. It also supports seasonal wildflower blooms, most notably the vibrant Mexican Gold Poppies that attract visitors and photographers in springtime. There is scientific interest in the Monument's unique geological features, including the Red Bluff Granite and the Bliss Sandstone. The area also contains fossilized algae and other paleontological resources that provide insights into the region's geological history.

What cultural resources can be found on the Monument?

The Monument contains more than 40 archaeological sites, including three that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Cultural features, such as landscapes, objects, plants, and animals, often used at the center of time-honored traditions and stories of sacred significance to Tribal Nations, are protected. The continuum of human use and cultural ties are revealed by rock art, lithic scatters, and burial grounds.

How will Tribal Nations be affected by Monument designation?

To the maximum extent permitted by law and in consultation with Tribes, protection of sites important to Tribal Nations in the Monument and access by members of Tribes for traditional cultural and customary uses will continue. In recognition of the importance of these lands and objects to Tribal Nations, and to ensure that management decisions affecting the Monument reflect Tribal expertise and Indigenous Knowledge, the Army will meaningfully engage with Tribal Nations with cultural ties to the area.

Can I visit the Monument?

Safety is our top priority. Currently, the Monument is closed to public access while we conduct comprehensive munitions cleanup efforts from previous military training and implement necessary precautions to ensure future access meets strict safety standards.

When will Castner Range be fully open to visitors?

Due to the complexity and magnitude of the cleanup, it will be years before the Monument will be safe for public access.

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Will the Army address potential environmental impacts during the cleanup and restoration process?

Environmental impacts are carefully evaluated and mitigated throughout the cleanup and restoration phases. The Army is implementing best practices for environmental stewardship to minimize impacts and maintain the Monument's cultural and natural integrity for future generations.

Is there a visitor center?

There is no dedicated visitor center at present, but options for an interpretive facility are being explored to provide educational exhibits about the Monument's unique history and resources.

What activities can I do near the Monument?

Visitors can enjoy hiking and scenic views at nearby Knapp Land and Lost Dog Conservation Easements, Franklin Mountains State Park, and El Paso Museum of Archeology. Visitors can also enjoy other outdoor activities the local community has to offer, including the El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens, Hueco Tanks State Park & Historic Site, Centennial Museum and Chihuahuan Desert Gardens, and Chamizal National Memorial.