



U.S. ARMY

CASTNER RANGE
NATIONAL MONUMENT

Fact Sheet



Natural Resources of Castner Range National Monument

Castner Range National Monument (Monument), located on Fort Bliss, Texas, encompasses approximately 6,672 acres of the northern Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem. The Monument represents the largest open space and one of the last undeveloped natural areas within the city limits of El Paso. While recent biological surveys are limited due to past military use and the presence of unexploded ordnances, previous assessments and ecological studies indicate the region contains significant biodiversity, hydrological features, and unique geologic formations.

Vegetation: Vegetation on the Monument includes a mix of desert scrub, mixed-scrub grassland, and arroyo/riparian vegetation with multiple cacti and agave species. Although the Monument has not been formally surveyed for plants, it is estimated that more than 80 families and 450+ species (and subspecies or varieties) of vascular plants occur on the Monument. Mexican Gold Poppies (*Eschscholzia californica* var. *mexicana*) famously bloom across the Monument in spring, drawing thousands of visitors to witness the seasonal display.



Mexican gold poppy in bloom.

The Monument is also potential habitat for several desert shrub species and the endangered Sneed's pincushion cactus (*Coryphantha*

sneedii var. *sneedii*), which occurs on exposed areas of steep, sloping limestone in the shrublands or grasslands of the Chihuahuan Desert. As is true across the western United States, riparian areas and all areas that carry water (e.g., arroyos) are disproportionately more important for a large variety of wildlife species for cover, breeding, raising young, shade, and as food and water sources. Studies on Fort Bliss have demonstrated that arroyo-riparian drainage areas are used more by wildlife than adjacent upland areas, particularly by birds.

Wildlife: The Monument has a large variety of birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles, although formal surveys have not yet been completed.

Among the many mammal species expected on the Monument are bobcats (*Lynx rufus*), mountain lions (*Puma concolor*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), coyotes (*Canis latrans*), gray foxes (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), kit foxes (*Vulpes macrotis*), badgers (*Taxidea taxus*), and desert cottontails (*Sylvilagus audubonii*). Seventy-six desert bighorn



Gray fox blending into its surroundings.



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sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) were reintroduced to Franklin Mountains State Park by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in December 2025. The



Scaled quail habitat is protected on the Monument.

bighorn sheep move freely between the Monument and the State Park. The Monument is also home to migratory and resident species of birds, including

passerines, raptors, upland game birds, and more.

Surface Water: Surface water in the region is rare and mostly ephemeral. Important habitat for wildlife, two riparian springs on the Monument are Indian Spring and Whispering Spring. These provide perennial or seasonal water sources that support vital desert riparian habitats. As the Chihuahuan Desert receives minimal annual precipitation, such features play a critical role in sustaining the ecological integrity of the region and its resident species.

Geology: Geologically, the Monument portion of the Franklin Mountains contains

the only undeveloped alluvial fans emerging from the mountain range, particularly from Fusselman Canyon. These fans are important for aquifer recharge and illustrate hydrologic patterns of erosion and deposition. The Franklin Mountains are 23 miles (38 km) long and less than 5 miles (8 km) wide. The Monument consists of a linear series of north-south-trending, westward-tilted fault blocks, which are bounded on the east and west by major normal faults and examples of the basin-and-range structural and physiographic type. These tilted fault blocks are a result of the Rio Grande Rift with the main phase of rifting being responsible for creating the Franklin Mountains occurring approximately

25 million years ago. The Monument also contains an unconformity where ancient Red Bluff Granite meets overlying Bliss Sandstone. The Castner Limestone formation is notable for preserving fossilized Precambrian algae, including the species *Oollenia frequens*, identified in 1958.

The Monument offers a unique opportunity to protect open space, study the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem, and establish long-term conservation monitoring to inform management of this fragile desert environment.



White Rock Canyon in Castner Range National Monument.