Water

Water is the lifeblood for all activities and is especially vital in the arid southwest. Most of the water in this region comes from the Tularosa and Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The Forest Service is charged with protecting and improving the water producing capabilities of these mountain ranges. Rain and snow on the Carson brings 12 to 40 inches of water per year. Trees, grass, and shrubs use some of this moisture. Their roots stabilize the soil and store water for use during the dry summer months. Water flowing from these streams provides irrigation for agriculture, drinking water for cities, and recreation areas. The Carson contributes over 40 percent of the water flowing into the Rio Grande.

Wildlife

Every year hundreds of visitors come to the Carson to fish, hunt, and view wildlife, providing an economic benefit for businesses and local communities. Big game species such as black bear, elk, and mule deer are common on the Carson. Big horn sheep are frequently seen at higher elevations and pronghorn antelope forage on the grasslands.

Other wildlife include the exclusive mountain lion, porcupine, beehive, various small mammals, and at least 11 species of birds. Due to its wide range of elevations and corresponding vegetation types, the forest has a diverse fauna that includes 53 fish species, 26 amphibians, 28 reptiles, 110 mammals, and 341 bird species.

There are about 160,000 acre Valley Unit, donated by Poucette Company in 1920, hosts spectacular terrain with scrubby meadows and abundant wildflowers. Many of these areas are popular with bikers and hikers. A creek, which includes a trout fork herd of up to 2,000 fish, is protected, and special hunting and fishing seasons and bag limits have been implemented.

Two seasonal closures, one winter and one spring, help keep resources intact during harsh winter weather and protect them during spring planting season.

In addition to regular hunting and fishing licenses, Habitat Improvement Stamps are required in some special hunting and fishing seasons due to weather conditions and for the protection of wildlife.

The Carson has 400 miles of cold mountain streams and numerous lakes, many stocked with native trout by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Popular fishing streams include the Jemez, Santa Fe, Rio Pecos, Rio Rindo, Rio Costilla, Red River, Rio San Antonio, and of course, the nearby Rio Grande. Anglers preferring lake fishing to reservoirs or alpine streams may often others. Fishing and hunting are open to anyone with a license, which is regulated by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Water from the Carson National Forest provides drinking and irrigation water for many communities in New Mexico.

Some of the finest alpine downhill skiing in the US is found at Taos Ski Valley, Red River, and Sipsey Ski Areas. While ski trails can be found throughout the forest, the Enchanted Forest Cross-Country Ski Area provides miles of groomed cross-country ski trails.

Wildflower at the Jicarilla Ranger District

Restoring at US 540

Community Partnerships

Increasing demand for the ecosystem services such as public lands services as Carson National Forest drives the need to engage further with community partners to accomplish land management goals. Forest personnel work with local communities and partners such as the Enchanted Circle Trails Alliance, Del Norte Mountain Bike Alliance, Rio Grande Water Fund, Nature Conservancy, and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, to name a few. Projects focus on maintaining sustainable trail systems and recreation facilities, restoring fire resilient, improving the ecosystem resilience of streams and wetlands, and involving people in outdoor conservation education activities. If you would like to be a Forest Volunteer, please contact the nearest district office or one of these organizations.

Be Responsible

Camper fire is allowed in the forest except during times of extreme fire danger. Before you break into the forest, always check to see if campfire restrictions are in place for your destination. NEVER leave a fire unattended — keep water handy. ALWAYS put your campfire out Cold mix and stir coal with water and dirt. Crush cigarette butts completely.

Public land is managed in trust for all citizens and international visitors. Inform yourself regarding local conditions and requirements for your safety by checking with local offices, reading signs, and reviewing bulletin boards. Changing terrain and weather conditions present a variety of hazards, including but not limited to many landslides, rockslides, falling trees or limbs, high winds, wild animals, severe weather, always being lost or overexerted, hypothermia, and exposure to the unreasonable acts of other people. Please recognize hazards and take precautions.

After camping for 14 days, campers must move off the land (or find another developed campground) and can stay in the vicinity another 28 days in a 45 day period.

Other Points of Interest

Other points of interest in the area include the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad, the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, and the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument (administered by the Bureau of Land Management). Several Indian tribes in the vicinity have incorporated their cultural traditions into their historic sites and view ceremonies throughout the year.

To view the current Carson Pocket Guide and MVUM maps with your smartphone, you may scan the QR code below.