Welcome to Gila National Forest, 3.3 million acres of public ownership within the Southwest, including south-central New Mexico. The forest is a registered National Heritage Area by the National Park Service. The Continental Divide meanders for 170 miles through this awesome canyon country, once the stronghold of Geronimo, prominent leader, warrior, and medicine man of the Chiricahua Apache, and the home of other native people for thousands of years until scattered throughout the forest. One outstanding example has been preserved for today's visitors by the New Mexico State Historical Society. The Cliff Dwellings National Monument includes the Mogollon, Talus, Diablo, Bruzal, Salitro, San Francisco, Gallo, Mangas, Pinos Altos, Big Sherry Mountains, and Black Range. Elevations range from 5,000 feet in the Chihuahuan Desert and rise to almost 11,000 feet on the often snow-covered crest of White Sands National Monument.

Recreation
The scenic drives, camp and picnic grounds, horseback riding, and mountain bikes used by the Gila draw thousands of visitors each year. Leisure travel through the forest is the most popular activity, and the Gila National Recreation Area, along with other units of the Chiricahua National Monument, provide an excellent peek at the nature and climate of this unique area. Also, the Mogollon, Talus, Diablo, Bruzal, Salitro, San Francisco, Gallo, Mangas, Pinos Altos, Big Sherry Mountains, and Black Range. Elevations range from 5,000 feet in the Chihuahuan Desert and rise to almost 11,000 feet on the often snow-covered crest of White Sands National Monument. The scenic drives, camp and picnic grounds, horseback riding, and mountain biking used by the Gila draw thousands of visitors each year. Leisure travel through the forest is the most popular activity, and the Gila National Recreation Area, along with other units of the Chiricahua National Monument, provide an excellent peek at the nature and climate of this unique area. Also, the Mogollon, Talus, Diablo, Bruzal, Salitro, San Francisco, Gallo, Mangas, Pinos Altos, Big Sherry Mountains, and Black Range.

Wildlife
Wildlife and fish are valuable resources of the forest. Each year thousands of visitors come to Gila to fish, hunt, and view wildlife, providing an important source of income for businesses in nearly every community. Among the animals such as deer, elk, turkey, bear, mountain lion, raccoon, coyote, bobcat, and porcupine, there are also many beautiful Sonoran whitetail or “Coues” deer. Numerous trophy class game animals have been taken in recent years. Protected Gila trout live in the forest's river systems are also a refuge for such sensitive, threatened, and endangered species as the roundtail chub. Trout can also be taken at the popular Quemado Lake, Lake Roberts, and Snow Lake. The Aldo Leopold Wilderness areas are populations above 6,000 feet. Hidden deep in the Gila and Pinos Altos Mountains is a stronghold of Geronimo, prominent leader, warrior, and medicine man of the Chiricahua Apache, and the home of other native people for thousands of years until scattered throughout the forest.

Fire Safety
Campfires are allowed in the forest except during times of extreme fire danger. Before you head into the forest, always check to see what fire restrictions the forest has in effect. During extremely dry conditions, fires are often prohibited, especially during summer, fall, and winter seasons. Coal fires can last for many days and may be hidden by snow or debris.

Water
Water is the lifeblood of all activities and is especially vital in New Mexico. Most of the water available for use in this region comes from the mountain lands which make up much of the national forests. The Forest Service is charged with protecting and improving the water producing capabilities of mountain watersheds. Rain and snow on the Gila bring 12 to 18 inches of water per year to this thirsty land. Timber, grass, and shrubs use some of the moisture. Their roots stabilize the soil, thus allowing the remaining water to feed underground basins, creeks, springs, aquifers, and wetlands. Water also supports wildlife developments, as well as the Rio Grande and Gila, San Francisco, and Minersville Rivers.

Points of Interest
Cosmic Diamond - The Gila National Forest is home to the first designated Dark Sky Sanctuary in North America and the International Dark Sky Association. It is located part of the Cosmic Campground on the east side of the Gila Wilderness.
Whitehorn Canyon/Catwalk National Recreation Trail - Whitehorn Canyon is part of the Whitehorn Wilderness Area. The Catwalk is one of the most scenic trails in the Southwest. This undeveloped natural campground area is a nesting place for many birds and other wildlife species simply by its grandeur, remoteness, and three miles on each side of the road, places individuals can visit and enjoy but not change. The 139,000-acre Gila Wilderness, established on June 3, 1924 at the urging of the great conservation pioneer Aldo Leopold, was the Nation’s first designated wilderness. The 2001,060-acre Aldo Leopold Wilderness. The 29,004-acre Ladder Trails Wilderness includes the Mogollon, Talus, Diablo, Bruzal, Salitro, San Francisco, Gallo, Mangas, Pinos Altos, Big Sherry Mountains, and Black Range.

Motor Vehicle Use Maps
More Americans than ever are using off-road vehicles (OVV) to enjoy the outdoors. However, if not managed carefully, motorized recreation can damage both the land and the resources that visitors have come to enjoy. In 2003, the Forest Service published a new rule for motor vehicle use on national forests and grasslands. This rule requires each national forest and grasslands designated as a National Forest Service (NFS), National Forests, NPS, Trails, and NPS on lands that are open to motor vehicle use on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM). All visitors should check with the nearest FS office to obtain an MVUM.

Gila National Forest - New Mexico
Pocket Guide

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