Welcome ... to the Coronado National Forest!

Sky Islands

The 1.7 million-acre Coronado National Forest is made up of 15 mountain ranges which rise dramatically from a sea of surrounding desert. Elevations range from 3,000 to 10,720 feet above sea level, supporting vegetation communities as biologically diverse as those encountered on a trip from Mexico to Canada. Views from these mountains are spectacular, and visitors might experience all four seasons during a single day on the Coronado, spending the morning wandering among giant sequoias and colorful wildflowers, having a picnic lunch under the brilliant golden leaves of a cottonwood tree, and playing in the snow later in the afternoon.

The Coronado National Forest is named for the Spanish explorer Don Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, who led his expedition from Mexico through southern Arizona in 1540. Coronado was searching for gold and the legendary Seven Cities of Cibola. He never found gold, but his name lives on.

Please . . .

Help keep the Coronado clean and beautiful. Pack out what you pack in. Avoid damaging plants and other natural or cultural features. Use grease; pack it out. Avoid damaging plants and everything else. These sites belong to everyone and are protected by law.

If you visit an interpretive site or historical or prehistoric sites, please do not remove anything. These sites belong to everyone and are protected by law.

Historical Sites

Interpretive trails in and around historic and prehistoric sites allow visitors to experience the past in the mountains of southeastern Arizona. From the remote military post of Camp Rucker in the Chiricahua Mountains, to the prehistoric Hohokam Village in Catalina State Park, to historic cabins in the wilderness, the past is an important part of the forest.

If you visit an interpretive site or encounter evidence of prehistoric people while visiting the forest, please do not remove anything. These sites belong to everyone and are protected by law.

Wildlife Viewing

The variety of vegetation, climate, and geology in the mountains supports a wonderful diversity of wildlife. Nearly 600 vertebrate species are found in the forest, including unusual animals such as coatimundi, Gila monster, and javelina. More common vertebrates such as mountain lions, bobcats, and black bears also make the Coronado their home. Bird life is especially rich with over 400 species of birds found in southeastern Arizona. Cave Creek, Madera, Ramsey and other canyons of the southern mountain ranges are renowned bird watching areas for rare species such as the Elegant Trogon. The forest is home to a number of threatened or endangered plant and animal species as well. Management activities are designed to improve habitats for these species and assist their recovery in both population and distribution.

Recreational Opportunities

The Coronado National Forest offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities year-round. During the summer, the higher elevations are most popular, offering temperatures on any given day that are at least 20 degrees cooler than the surrounding desert. These mountaintop sites also provide opportunities to ski and play in the snow during the winter months. Many of the low elevation recreation areas are located in scenic canyons or foothills, these sites are most popular during the fall, winter, and spring. The Coronado offers over 1,100 miles of trails, with five recreation areas located in scenic canyons or foothills.

Peña Blanca Lake (B-8)

Located just 5 miles from the Mexican border, this 48-acre lake is surrounded by colorful cliffs and offers boating, fishing, a lakeshore trail, camping, and picnicking.

Parker Canyon Lake (C-8)

This scenic 132-acre lake in the Huachuca Mountains offers boating, fishing, picnicking, hiking along the lakeshore, and adjacent camping. There is also a general store with boat rentals.

Reef Townsite (C-8)

This historic mining district is located high in the Huachuca Mountains south of Sierra Vista. Opportunities include camping, picnicking, an interpretive trail and hiking trails.

Mt. Graham (D-3)

The spectacular Pinafores Mountains, near Safford, offer camping, picnicking, fishing, the Columbia Visitor Information Center (seasonal), equestrian facilities, and trails for hiking, biking, and horseriding.

Cochise Stronghold (D-6)

This natural fortress of the famous Apache leader, Cochise, is 1.5 hours east of Tucson in the Dragoon Mountains and offers camping, picnicking, a nature trail, a historic interpretive trail, and other hiking trails.

Cave Creek Canyon (F-6)

This dramatic canyon situated on the east side of the Chiricahua Mountains, near the New Mexico border, is well known for its wide variety of birds and offers camping, picnicking, a visitor center (seasonal), and hiking trails. The visitor center is accessible.

Rustler Park (E-6)

This beautiful meadow surrounded by cool pines in the Chiricahua Mountains offers camping, picnicking, and hiking trails. Closed seasonally.

Rucker Canyon (E-7)

Located in the pine forests of the Chiricahua Mountains, this scenic area offers camping, picnicking, and hiking. Camp Rucker Historic Site and Interpretive Trail provides visitors a glimpse into the history of this area.

To view the current Coronado Pocket Guide and Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM) with your smart device, you may scan the QR codes below.

Points of Interest

The Coronado National Forest offers recreational opportunities for everyone, from the rugged Miller Peak Wilderness to an easy shuttle ride up Sabino Canyon. There are many accessible facilities available on the forest. Some are described in the recreation table (located below the map on the opposite side) and others are included below.

• Catalina State Park (B-4): The spectacular Santa Catalina Mountains form the backdrop for this beautiful closed park located just a few miles north of Tucson. Managed by Arizona State Parks, the area offers camping, picnicking, hiking, and equestrian facilities. Accessible facilities include parking, restrooms, and trailheads.

• Mt. Lemmon (B-4): In only an hour’s drive northeast from Tucson, visitors can be in the cool pines of the Santa Catalina Mountains. The mountains offer breathtaking vistas, campgrounds, picnic areas, hiking trails, Rose Canyon Trail, Mt. Lemmon Shl Valley, and Palisades Visitor Center. Accessible facilities at Palisades Visitor Center include parking, a viewing deck, and the visitor center. Accessible facilities are also available at these vista points: Babo Doag, Molino Canyon, 7 Cataract, Windy Point, Geology, Hoodoo, San Pedro, Sycamore Canyon and Aspen.

• Sabino Canyon (B-5): Located northeast from Tucson, this scenic canyon features towering cliffs and a creek with lush riparian vegetation. Activities include a visitor center, nature trails, shuttle rides, and picnic sites. The shuttle accommodates two wheelchairs and reservations are recommended; call (520) 749-2327. Accessible facilities are available at the visitor center.

• F. L. Whipple Observatory Visitor Center (B-7): Located in the scenic foothills of the Santa Rita Mountains, this visitor center focuses on astrophysics and the observatory atop nearby Mt. Hopkins. A picnic area and interpretive trail are located nearby. Accessible facilities include parking, the visitor center, a picnic site, and restrooms.

• Madera Canyon (B-7): Just an hour south of Tucson, this beautiful canyon offers camping, picnicking, hiking trails, and excellent bird watching opportunities.

• Perla Blanca Lake (B-5): Located just 5 miles from the Mexican border, this 48-acre lake is surrounded by colorful cliffs and offers boating, fishing, a lakeshore trail, camping, and picnicking.

• Rocky Tubs (F-6): This historic mining district is located high in the Huachuca Mountains south of Sierra Vista. Opportunities include camping, picnicking, an interpretive trail and hiking trails.

• Mt. Graham (D-3): The spectacular Pinafores Mountains, near Safford, offer camping, picnicking, fishing, the Columbia Visitor Information Center (seasonal), equestrian facilities, and trails for hiking, biking, and horseriding.

• Cochise Stronghold (D-6): This natural fortress of the famous Apache leader, Cochise, is 1.5 hours east of Tucson in the Dragoon Mountains and offers camping, picnicking, a nature trail, a historic interpretive trail, and other hiking trails.

• Cave Creek Canyon (F-6): This dramatic canyon situated on the east side of the Chiricahua Mountains, near the New Mexico border, is well known for its wide variety of birds and offers camping, picnicking, a visitor center (seasonal), and hiking trails. The visitor center is accessible.

• Rustler Park (E-6): This beautiful meadow surrounded by cool pines in the Chiricahua Mountains offers camping, picnicking, and hiking trails. Closed seasonally.

• Rucker Canyon (E-7): Located in the pine forests of the Chiricahua Mountains, this scenic area offers camping, picnicking, and hiking. Camp Rucker Historic Site and Interpretive Trail provides visitors a glimpse into the history of this area.

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