

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

NM-060-803A

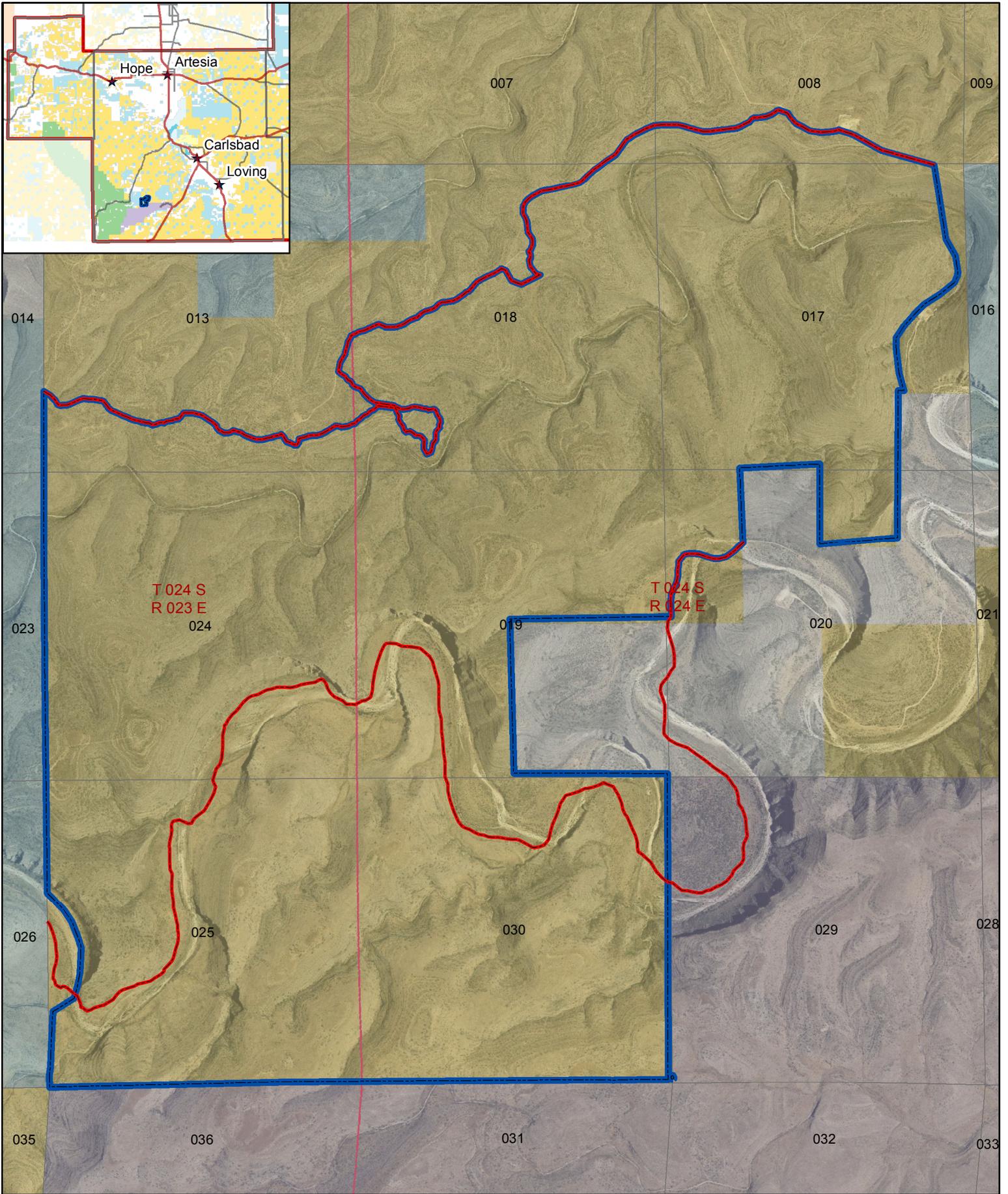
The northern boundary of the unit is a wilderness inventory road that is used to provide vehicle access to range improvement projects and recreationists. The eastern boundary is property boundary lines and a small segment of a wilderness inventory road. The western boundary is the property line and the cherry stemming of a windmill and water tank that is located immediately along the edge of the unit. The southern boundary is along boundary lines for Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

The unit primarily encompasses an isolated segment of Dark Canyon known as Serpentine Bends. Serpentine Bends is a segment of Dark Canyon that contains very sharp switchbacks within the canyon and contains very steep to vertical canyon walls, some of which are several hundred feet tall. Vegetation is mostly comprised of sparse grasses, juniper, shrub oak, and an abundance of lechuguilla and other succulents. Northern parts of the unit include many smaller, steep canyons that feed into Dark Canyon, including Stone Canyon. The area is very rough. This has contributed to a substantial lack of industrial development within the area. The area is used for livestock grazing but the ruggedness has also limited this activity. Vehicle access into the area is very limited. The one two track way that cuts across the unit is not accessible by the general public wanting to access the area by vehicle due to private lands on both sides of the way. The entire area has been closed by the Secretary of the Interior to oil and gas leasing to protect cave resources located within bordering Carlsbad Caverns National Park and on BLM administered lands. All of these factors have led to the area maintaining a very natural state.

The unit is set in a very remote location. Due to the lack of vehicle access, the area receives relatively sparse visitation. It is uncommon to encounter any other visitors in the area with the exception of during hunting season. The numerous canyons within the unit provide ample opportunities for visitors to experience complete solitude. The unit is sandwiched between over 30,000 acres of designated Wilderness in Carlsbad Caverns National Park and a largely undeveloped section of BLM lands. For this reason, the area has no man made noise intrusion.

There are no constructed trails, campsites, or other facilities within the unit. Any recreational activities by default would be primitive. Big game hunting is perhaps the most popular recreational activity that occurs within the unit. There are few places that, due to a lack of vehicle transportation routes, allow for a true primitive hunting experience either on foot or horseback. The topography is rugged enough to provide a challenge but not too rugged as to make it nearly impossible to hunt. This combined with an abundance of public lands and desirable big game species (Mule deer and Barbary sheep) makes this area popular with hunting enthusiasts and provides an outstanding primitive recreational experience. The area is also popular with cave explorers. There are four known undeveloped caves within the unit. The area is very popular with people who like to hike and search for undiscovered caves. The adjoining wilderness in Carlsbad Caverns National Park contains designated hiking trails and recreationally used undeveloped caves. All of these opportunities provide outstanding primitive and unconfined recreational experiences.

The steep winding canyon walls of Serpentine Bends are very scenic. The Carlsbad Field Office 1988 RMP designated much of the unit as a Scenic Area SMA. The caves found within the unit offer unique opportunities to study the geology of the Guadalupe Mountains. The unit also includes critical and occupied habitat for a special status rattlesnake, Mottled Rock Rattlesnake (*Crotalus Lepidus*) and special status cactus, Lee's Pincushion (*Coryphantha sneedii* – var. *leei*).



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Legend

- Inventoried Routes
- Lands with Wilderness Characteristics
- NM Townships
- Administered Lands**
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park Service
- Private
- State