

LONESOME RIDGE

Nominated ACEC: Lonesome Ridge ACEC

Nominated by: BLM

Size: 3,100 acres

Scenic Value

Relevance

The nominated ACEC is located along the southern end of the Guadalupe Escarpment in New Mexico, adjoining National Forest and National Park lands in New Mexico and Texas. The limestone escarpment is part of the Capitan Reef Complex, considered the world's foremost example of a Permian age fossil reef. Lonesome Ridge provides some of the most rugged terrain in the Guadalupe Escarpment. The area features spectacular scenery with sheer limestone canyon walls over 1,500 feet high. Transition from diverse native desert vegetation to mature trees is observable with changes in elevation. The ability to observe fossils, rock composition, geological structures, vegetation, and topography draws visitors and researchers from all over the world. Breathtaking views, unique geological features, diverse flora and fauna, proximity to other federally-protected lands and unobstructed views of nature add to the visual impact of the area.

Importance

- Has more than locally significant qualities which give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource.
- Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.

Fish or Wildlife Resource

Relevance

The nominated ACEC is an ecological transition zone from limestone mountains and pinion-juniper habitat on the Lincoln National Forest to the lower elevation shrub-grass habitat on BLM-managed land. This unique dissected landscape and escarpment provides habitat heterogeneity in the nominated ACEC, which, in turn, increases the biodiversity in the area. The cliff faces and caves located on the escarpment provide shelter and optimal nesting habitat for many avian species such as the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) and Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*). The largest nesting population of Cave Swallows in New Mexico is located nearby in the Carlsbad Caverns. The Peregrine Falcon is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species of Concern and is a threatened species for the state of New Mexico. The dense vegetation in the canyon bottoms and along arroyos provide nesting habitat for many species including the Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*), a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species of Concern and threatened species for the State of New Mexico (BISON-M). The Bell's Vireo occurs in dense shrub land and woodland along lowland stream courses or riparian areas. Approximately 90% of New Mexico's populations of Bell's Vireo nests are located nearby in Carlsbad Caverns National Park, Rattlesnake Springs (NMDGF).

Importance

- Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.

Natural System or Process

Geology

Relevance

The nominated ACEC is part of the Capitan Reef Complex, the world's foremost example of a Permian-age fossil reef.

Importance

- Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.

Karst Resources

Relevance

There are six known significant caves within the nominated ACEC. Due to their remoteness, these caves have very limited visitation and remain in near pristine condition. Swallow Hole Cave, the largest known cave entirely within the nominated ACEC, is home to a large population of Cave Swallows. It is also the only known cave within the planning area formed within the Capitan Reef limestone.

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