



2023 Annual Conference Program

Thursday, September 21

1:00-3:00 pm NPSNM Board Meeting, Alpine Public Library.
805 W Ave E, Alpine TX 79830

Friday, September 22

8:00-9:00 am Registration, Alpine Civic Center. 801 W Holland Ave.

9:00-9:30 am Welcome and Opening Remarks. Dr. Kevin Floyd, President of the El Paso Chapter

9:30-10:30 am Keynote – Flora of West Texas: an overview highlighting selected habitats and the flora within. Michael Eason

10:30-10:45 am Break

10:45-11:30 am The Cacti of Texas in Their Natural Habitat. Dr. Ad Konings

11:30 am-12:15 pm Rare Plants of Big Bend National Park. Dr. Carolyn Whiting

12:15-1:00 pm Lunch

1:00-1:45 pm Aquatic Plants of West Texas. Casey Williams

1:45-2:30 pm Growing Southwestern Native Plants. Patty Manning

4:30-6:00 pm Tour of Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center in Fort Davis for registered dinner attendees. 43869 TX-118, Fort Davis, TX 79734

6:30-8:30 pm Welcome dinner at Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center for registered dinner attendees

Saturday, September 23

Field trips.

All field trips will meet at the Alpine Civic Center at 8 am. Look for the signs for the different trips to find your leader(s). We will pick up our boxed lunches and try to arrange carpooling as much as possible. Remember to wear appropriate shoes and a hat, and bring plenty of water, sunscreen, snacks, a camera, and hiking poles where needed. This is wide open country without a lot of services between towns, so we recommend that you fill your vehicle up before arriving at the Convention Center.

See the separate field trip description file for more detailed information about the options.

Half to three-quarter day, which allows for participants to explore the area on their own in the afternoon. See the list of self-guided hikes and area attractions for ideas.

F-01. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) – Marathon Grasslands Preserve Tour

~10 miles north of Marathon, TX toward Fort Stockton on HW 385.385

42 miles, 40 min

Description: A private, guided tour of the Marathon Grassland Preserve which is closed to the public. Located in the northern portion of the Marathon Basin region, the 2,701-acre preserve is comprised of diverse grasslands that extend up to the Glass Mountains. The preserve represents some of the most diverse Chihuahuan Desert grassland habitat in Texas and supports an array of wildlife, including migratory raptors and grassland birds, pronghorn, kit foxes, burrowing owls, golden eagles and the federally endangered northern aplomado falcon.

Leader: Dr. Carlos (Lalo) Gonzalez, Nau Endowed Professor of Habitat Research and Management at Borderlands Research Institute and Assistant Professor in the Natural Resource Management Department at Sul Ross State University

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate; there are no trails, but the landscape is very flat, and there won't be a lot of walking, mainly driving, stopping, and getting out to look around.

Maximum number of attendees: 30

Fees: None

Facilities: None

Other: Signed Liability Release Required

F-02. Marfa Garden “The Wonders of Dry Desert Plants” Tour

1000 N Capote Street, Marfa, TX

32 miles, 30 min

Description: A tour of the garden featured in the book “Marfa Garden: The Wonders of Dry Desert Plants” led by the author and landscape designer Jim Martinez. “Marfa Garden” is a full-color celebration of more than sixty flowering plants of the Chihuahuan Desert and neighboring regions. This garden’s recognition has included a PBS episode of Garden Fit, and the 2021 book “Under Western Skies: Visionary Gardens from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast.”

Leader: Jim Martinez, author and landscape designer

Difficulty: Easy

Maximum number of attendees: 12

Fees: None

Facilities: Yes

F-03. Caldwell Ranch Tour

2 Caldwell Ranch Road, Fort Davis, TX 79734

53 miles, 1.2 hours

Description: A private tour of the Caldwell Ranch near The Nature Conservancy Davis Mountains Preserve. This pristine high-elevation ranch offers a unique opportunity to explore Davis Mountain vegetation communities in an area normally closed to the public. Depending on rainfall, the ranch will have diversity including native penstemons, golden rod, gay feather, Indian paintbrush, sumac, and Apache rose. Trees include pine, emery oak, grey oak, red oak, sycamore, black walnut, and wild Cherry.

Leader: Michael Eason and Pam and Will Harte, owners

Difficulty: Moderate; uneven and unimproved trails

Wheelchair/ADA accessible: No

Maximum number of attendees: 20

Fees: None

Facilities: Yes

Other: Any photos taken during the field trip are for private use only, and may not be shared publicly, e.g., online. Vehicles with high clearance are recommended.

F-04. Aquatics and riparian habitats

Location TBD

Possible locations O6 Ranch is 30 min; Balmorhea State Park and Sandia Springs are 65 miles, 1.25 hours

Description: Most people do not think of aquatic habitats when considering the Trans-Pecos. In fact, many of the aquatic habitats support rare plants that are at risk due to changes in hydrology caused by increased droughts and groundwater pumping. Casey Williams has been surveying these habitats for several years, and has found many interesting species. This field trip will visit some of the locations to see some of these plants. The locations visited will depend on the monsoon rains. The preferred location is the O6 ranch located between Alpine and Fort Davis. This private ranch has a variety of habitats including mountain streams, ephemeral pools and springs. A brief talk on the ranch history and watersheds of the ranch will open the tour. Species we may encounter include Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum* sp.), Beggar's ticks (*Bidens laevis*), Monkey flower (*Erythranthe guttata*) and several uncommon pondweeds (*Potamogeton* species). If the area is dry the reserve option is a visit to Sandia Wetlands and the Balmorhea cienagas which have a good array of aquatic species any time of the year.

Leader: Casey Williams

Difficulty: Moderate; uneven and unimproved trails

Wheelchair/ADA accessible: No

Maximum number of attendees: 20

Fees: If visiting Balmorhea: Balmorhea State Park: \$7 per person or Texas Parks Pass.

Balmorhea Lake: \$5 per person

Facilities: Available at Balmorhea

Field trips to Big Bend National Park (full day with return to Alpine around 6 or 7 pm)

There are two options for Big Bend field trips. One will spend more time hiking one or more trails, with limited stops at some of the scenic areas. The other is for people who do not want to hike, and will be a driving tour that will visit more locations in the park but without exploring much away from the roads.

Participants who wish to spend more time in Big Bend can stay in the area after the tour ends. Just make sure not to carpool with anyone who needs to return to Alpine in the evening.

F-05. Big Bend National Park Chisos Basin Hike

Alpine to Chisos Basin Visitor Center is 108 miles, 2 hours

Chisos Basin to Santa Elena Canyon is 47 miles, 1.25 hours

Santa Elena Canyon to Alpine is 121 miles, 2.25 hours

Description: The Chisos Mountains are the center of Big Bend, and have peaks that reach well above 7000 ft above sea level. The Chisos Mountain Basin holds a ranger station, hotel, and restaurant, and is the start of many trails. We plan to hike the Windows Trail, but this might change depending on summer monsoons and where the plants will look the best. Plants we might see include *Agave havardiana*, *Opuntia* and smaller cacti, white honeysuckle, Texas Mountain Laurel, Mexican buckeye, evergreen sumac, and several species of oaks.

After the hike we can drive to Santa Elena Canyon, about 1.25 hours from the Basin, and take the short walk to the mouth of the canyon. Other quick stops along the way or on the way out of the park will depend on conditions of the plants and the participants.

Leader: Carolyn Whiting, Big Bend National Park botanist, and others TBA

Difficulty: Moderate; uneven and unimproved trails

Wheelchair/ADA accessible: No

Maximum number of attendees: 20

Fees: \$30 per vehicle or National Parks Pass

Facilities: Yes

Other: There are limited gas stations around the park, so please fill up in Alpine before meeting in the morning.

F-06. Big Bend National Park Driving Tour

Alpine to Rio Grande Village is 120 miles, 2.25 hours

Rio Grande Village to Chisos Basin is 30 miles, 45 min

Chisos Basin to Santa Elena Canyon is 47 miles, 1.25 hours

Santa Elena Canyon to Alpine is 121 miles, 2.25 hours

Description: This field trip is a highlight reel of Big Bend National Park. We will start at the eastern side of the park at Rio Grande Village. There is a short nature trail that passes through a beaver pond and views of the Rio Grande. A short distance from here is the Boquillas Canyon Lookout. We will then head back west towards the Chisos Basin. We might stop along the way at Dugout Wells or the Panther Junction Visitor Center before starting the drive up into the basin. The Chihuahuan Desert flora of ocotillo and creosote begin to change into woodlands and grassy montane meadows. In the Basin is a visitor center and small store. There is a short Window View Trail that provides a beautiful view out to the west side of the basin. We will descend back out of the mountains and continue west, turning onto the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive. We can see the Chisos Mountains from below, along with many desert vistas. There are several locations for quick stops as we follow the drive towards Santa Elena Canyon. There is a short walk to the mouth of the canyon, one of the most photographed parts of the park. From there we will start the return to Alpine, stopping as the scenery and vegetation dictates.

Leader: TBA

Difficulty: Easy, mostly driving and short walks

Wheelchair/ADA accessible: No

Maximum number of attendees: 20

Fees: \$30 per vehicle or National Parks Pass

Facilities: Yes

Other: There are limited gas stations around the park, so please fill up in Alpine before meeting in the morning.

Sunday, September 24

No conference events are planned. There are lots of amazing places to visit around the region on your way home, or if you choose to spend a few extra days exploring. Please refer to the self-guided field trip and area attractions list for inspiration.