

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich

White Sands National Park Establishment Act

#WhiteSandsNP



CREDIT: National Park Service

“The vision to create White Sands National Park has been driven by a diverse coalition of community leaders and local elected officials for years. By elevating White Sands National Monument to a national park, we can help boost the local economy and ensure the monument receives the recognition it deserves, while enhancing the military mission at WSMR. Everyone who visits White Sands marvels at its remarkable geology, spectacular scenery, and outstanding recreation experiences. And the broad regional support we’ve received for what could be our state’s second national park demonstrates the endless opportunities this designation would offer to communities and local businesses across southern New Mexico.”

– U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich

White Sands National Park Establishment Act

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) is introducing the White Sands National Park Establishment Act to designate White Sands National Monument as our newest national park. The stunning gypsum dunefield—the largest in the entire world—is not just a breathtaking backdrop for unforgettable family adventures. It also holds world-renowned culturally and biologically significant resources that are worthy of recognition as a national park.

History and economic impact

Since White Sands National Monument was established in 1933, it has attracted visitors from around the world. For the last two decades, White Sands has seen more visitors than any other National Park Service site in New Mexico—an average of more than half a million people each year. In 2016, visitors to the monument spent \$29.3 million in the local economy, with 98 percent of that coming from non-local visitors.

The “Find Your Park” campaign celebrating the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016 contributed to record numbers of Americans and international visitors visiting our national parks, making this the ideal time to promote the status of White Sands. Increased visitation to White Sands National Park will be a major boost to the local economy in Alamogordo, Otero County, and all of southern New Mexico. A recent study conducted by Headwaters Economics found that making White Sands a national park could increase visitation by 21 percent each year and create \$7.5 million of additional annual tourism spending.

Elevation from National Monument to National Park

Because White Sands is already managed by the National Park Service, visitors to the new national park would experience no change in management. Entrance fees and access would stay the same. However, becoming a national park would immediately bring new attention and prominent inclusion in global and domestic travel materials. More international and out-of-state visitors would bring in more revenue, allowing for even better resource protection, interpretation, and visitor services.

Recent discoveries in White Sands

Although the monument has been the subject of immense interest for researchers over the last century, recent significant discoveries make White Sands even more deserving of national park status.

- ✧ White Sands was recently designated as a Mega-Track site for all the Pleistocene (Ice Age) mammal tracks unearthed and documented there. The monument has largest collection fossilized tracks in gypsum in the world and the largest concentration of tracks in the Americas from that period. Tracks have been found from dire wolves, saber-toothed cats, woolly mammoths, ancient camels, and more.
- ✧ Human tracks have been discovered, too. White Sands received global attention just last week when scientists announced the finding of the only known prints demonstrating humans interacting with an Ice Age mammal, a giant ground sloth.
- ✧ This and other evidence found in the last decade—including thousands of hearth sites preserved in ways found nowhere else—show that humans have lived in and around the dunefield as far back as 11,700 years ago.
- ✧ New species and subspecies of insects, reptiles, mammals, and others groups are being discovered in White Sands every year. These animals rapidly adapted to the unique dunefield conditions within less than 10,000 years, as did many of the plants found in the monument. Many species in the monument are found nowhere else on Earth.
- ✧ Scientists in many disciplines continue to conduct groundbreaking research in White Sands, and have made new advances in understanding – from the hydrological processes that help maintain the dunefield to microorganisms in the soil to new techniques for space exploration.

Working with the military

During the development of his legislation, Senator Heinrich worked closely with the Department of Defense to ensure the bill will enhance the missions at southern New Mexico's important military installations. Existing agreements between the military and the National Park Service to protect use of critical airspace and testing grounds for White Sands Missile Range, Holloman, and Fort Bliss will remain in place.

Additionally, the legislation will complete a land exchange between the Army and the National Park Service that they have been working on since the 1970s to simplify management, ensure invaluable cultural resources are better protected, and provide new capabilities at the missile range and the new national park.