

EDITOR'S  
**NOTE**

## Texas' Gift to the Nation

**S**eventy-five years ago this summer, the country was gripped by news of the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe. But even at the height of the conflict, the commander-in-chief could not resist turning his attention, at least for a few minutes, to West Texas. On June 6, 1944, President Roosevelt met with a Texas delegation to discuss the future of what would become Big Bend National Park. Six days later, he signed legislation establishing it, capping a decades-long effort to preserve a state and national treasure.

"It's pretty profound that during the D-Day invasion, when the world's on fire and no one knew what the outcome would be, there were forward-thinking people who knew we would need special places like this once we were through those difficult times," says Tom Vandenberg, the park's chief of interpretation.

In the early 1930s, Texas Ranger and state Rep. Everett Townsend spearheaded efforts to have the land set aside as some kind of park. First called Texas Canyons State Park and renamed Big Bend State Park, almost all of the private land that now makes up the national park was purchased by the state for \$1.5 million in 1942 and gifted to the federal government in late

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1943. Texans' adoration for the beautifully desolate landscape hasn't faded over the generations. "I've worked in a lot of national parks and the majority of visitors aren't typically from within state, but 70 percent of our visitors are from Texas," Vandenberg explains. "Texans love this place, and many have been here 15 times or more."

New exhibits at the visitors center and interpretative displays debut in May in honor of the milestone anniversary. As a bonus, Vandenberg says the significant rainfall last autumn could make for a particularly glorious wildflower season. Whether it's your first trip or your 15th, don't miss the chance to celebrate Texas' grandest gift.

*Emily R Stone*

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The Mesa de Anguila trail, recommended for experienced backpackers, offers exceptional views of Big Bend National Park, which celebrates its 75th anniversary this year.