



## CASTNER RANGE: A Vital Addition to Franklin Mountains State Park

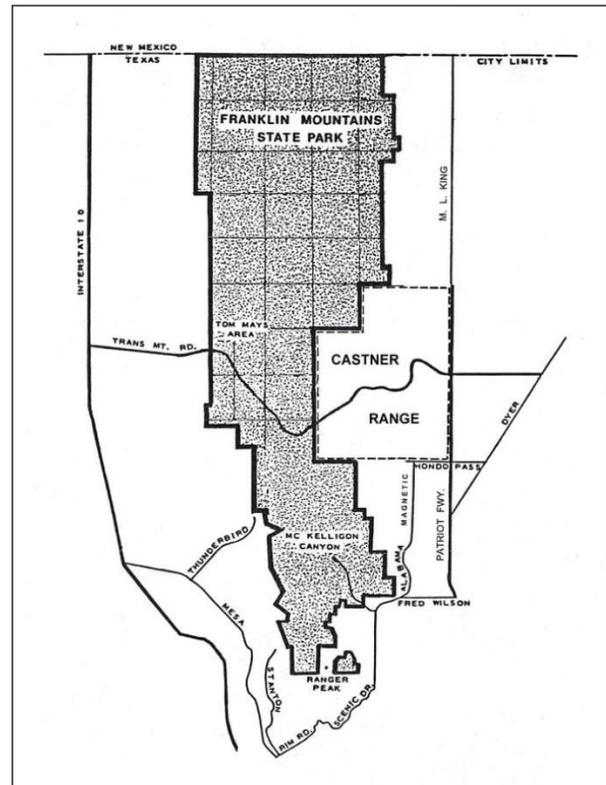
Franklin Mountains State Park and adjacent Bureau of Land Management lands in New Mexico cover most of the Franklin Mountains but not the entire range. On the east side of the mountains, a particularly significant parcel belongs to the U.S. Army. It's the Castner Range, an old artillery range no longer in use. West of the Patriot Freeway, Castner Range covers some 11 square miles, extending almost to the mountain ridge line. It is land of surpassing beauty and biological richness. Castner Range has a combination of unique plant and animal habitats, complex geology, spectacular scenery and rich cultural features unequalled anywhere else in the Franklins.

This former artillery range remains open space today thanks to the stewardship of the Army and the presence of unexploded ordnance. The Army has identified Castner Range as surplus to its needs and, as funds permit, has been searching the surface for old artillery rounds since 1995. Once this search is complete, the land could be put to other open-space uses, such as a park or wildlife refuge. The Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition has long recommended that Castner Range remain wild and be added to Franklin Mountains State Park.

### Why is Castner Range so important?

#### Water

The greatest concentration of springs in the Franklins is on Castner Range. They are the hidden jewels of these desert mountains, supporting pockets of unexpectedly lush vegetation and providing invaluable wildlife habitat.



#### Alluvial Fans

Eroded material carried by water from a mountain canyon and deposited at the canyon mouth creates a broad, sloping landform termed an alluvial fan. In the Franklins, most of the fans have been built on or excluded from the State Park to accommodate future development. Only on Castner Range are good examples of alluvial fans, particularly the one emerging from Fusselman Canyon, still being protected.

#### Scenic Beauty

Castner Range includes some of the most geologically complex, and visually striking, parts of the Franklins. It is the only place where El

Paso can still preserve a beautiful unobstructed view, from freeway to ridge line, of all three mountain zones (steep slopes, foothills, alluvial fan).

### **A Museum in the Open**

Structurally, the Franklin Mountains are a north-south trending fault block that has been tilted westward. Thus, it is on the east side that we see the early geologic history of our region most fully exposed. In the Castner Range foothills, you can find the oldest rocks in the El Paso area. They are part of the Castner Formation, deposited as alternating layers of lime and clay mud in a shallow sea 1.3 billion years ago.

### **Rare Plants**

The lower elevations of Castner Range on either side of Trans Mountain Road support a unique floral assemblage that is an important Texas resource. Unique soils and a far west Texas location combine to make this the only known location in Texas for several plants. The most outstanding member of this floral assemblage is the showy Mexican Gold Poppy, found in Texas mainly on the lower slopes of Castner Range.

### **Cultural Resources**

Castner Range is dotted with archaeological sites, including the Fusselman Canyon Petroglyph Site and the White Rock Shelter.

### **Military History**

For many military families, especially those with links to the time when Castner Range was an active training site, the land and its poppy fields are an important memorial to those who have served our country.

### **Recreational Opportunity**

Though off-limits today due to unexploded ordnance, the range has outstanding recreational potential. The management plan for Franklin Mountains State Park envisions a network of trails in the mountain canyons and the lower elevations of Castner Range should the range ever be added to the Park.

Castner Range, in many ways, is the heart and soul of the Franklin Mountains. It must remain wild, from its poppy fields to its rugged mountain canyons. It is a legacy we can't let slip away.

### **You Can Help**

Momentum is growing for a decision about the future of Castner Range. You can help shape that decision:

- ✓ Fort Bliss is getting ready to prepare a land-use plan for the range. Public meetings are expected soon. **Get involved** in the planning process.
- ✓ The City of El Paso has recommended to the Army that all of Castner Range be protected. **Thank your city representative** for the City's pro-active efforts to protect the range.
- ✓ Many of the important decisions about Castner Range will be made in Washington, DC. **Urge your U.S. Representative** to work for protection of the range as recommended by the City and for funding to continue the clean-up of unexploded ordnance on Castner Range.
- ✓ **Support the work of the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition** to protect Castner Range. Sign up to receive Coalition e-mail alerts to stay informed.

#### **The Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition**

The Coalition consists of 30 organizations and numerous individuals dedicated to preserving the scenic beauty and wilderness character of the Franklin Mountains in Texas and New Mexico.

Borderland Mountain Bike Association • Border Toasters, Toastmasters International • Bordersenses • Celebration of Our Mountains • Chihuahuan Desert Education Coalition • Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue • Eco-Club EPCC • El Paso Archaeological Society • El Paso Cactus And Rock Club • El Paso County Master Gardeners • El Paso Native Plant Society • El Paso Regional Group Of The Sierra Club • El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society • El Paso Youth Symphony • Environmental Advocates at UTEP • Friends of the Arroyo • Friends Of The Rio Bosque • League Of Women Voters Of El Paso • Mesilla Valley Audubon Society • Mountain Park Community Association • National Active and Retired Federal Employees Chapter 1473 • Trinity First United Methodist Men • Photography Enthusiasts Of El Paso • Rio Grande Soaring Association • Southern New Mexico Group of The Sierra Club • Southwest Environmental Center • Skyline Optimist Club Of El Paso • Sunrise Neighborhood Association • Trans Pecos Chapter Of The Texas Master Naturalists • Vista Hills Rotary Club

#### **For more information:**

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