

Davis Mountains Conservation Plan Executive Summary

Project Vision

The Davis Mountains project will be a durable and functional landscape-scale model of private lands conservation, contributing to an ecologically compatible and sustainable economy, and with a viable and widely accessible interpretive outreach program, sound land management through stewardship and restoration, and thorough biological inventory, monitoring, and management.

Introduction

The Davis Mountains are located in the Chihuahuan Desert in West Texas, about 130 miles north of Big Bend National Park (Figure 1). This area is distinctive as one of the Chihuahuan Desert's sky island ecosystems, relatively lush mountain ranges within a vast desert. The Nature Conservancy and others are working to protect these sky island systems across the southwest. Many face impending habitat fragmentation or serious habitat degradation. The Davis Mountains, on the other hand, are largely intact and ecologically functional, an excellent example of high quality montane habitats. *The Nature Conservancy's conservation emphasis here is on helping maintain the system of large, private landholdings that have protected this area in the past, and on helping sustain and enhance the biological diversity that makes the Davis Mountains so remarkable.*

Figure 1. Chihuahuan Desert ecoregion

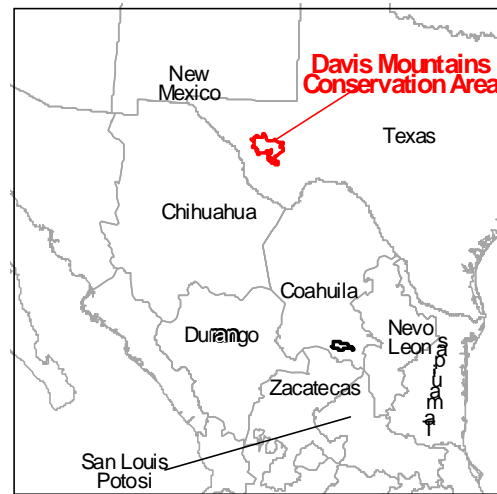
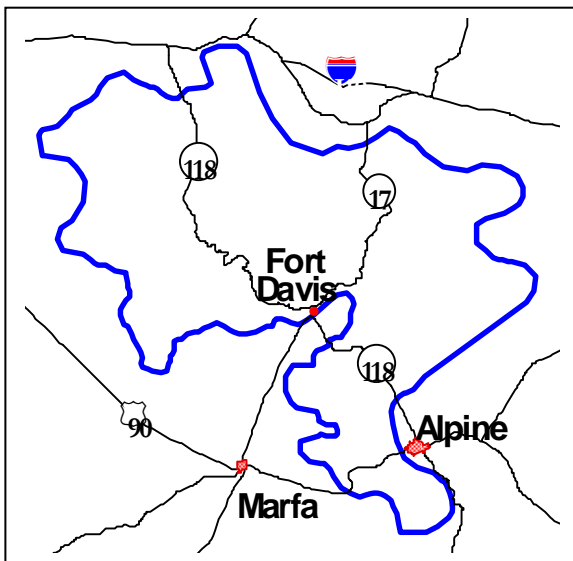


Figure 2. Davis Mountains conservation area



The Davis Mountains conservation area is generally defined by the geologic formations that make up the mountain range and its foothills (Figure 2). The conservation area boundary is based on the extent of the sky island ecosystem. It is not a project boundary and does not define the area within which the Conservancy and its partners intend to work. The nature and scope of on-the-ground conservation will be determined by community members and Conservancy staff and will be based on conservation need, feasibility, and a respect for private property rights. The 437,076-hectare (1,080,000-acre) conservation area support hundreds of plant and animal species, some found only in the Davis Mountains.

Challenges and Opportunities

The Nature Conservancy uses conservation area plans to develop site-specific conservation strategies that guide our work on the ground. In brief, the planning process involves identifying the species and natural communities that are of conservation concern, determining if and how these species and communities are compromised, and then working with partners to mitigate the identified threats and enhance biodiversity.

There are six natural communities of conservation concern in the Davis Mountains ecosystem (below). Together, these communities typify the array of habitats found in this ecosystem and support most of its characteristic plant and animal species. Some, though not all, of these communities are biologically altered or stressed and in need of human intervention to ensure their continued viability.

- **Foothill Grasslands**
- **Springs, Streams and Riparian Corridors**
- **Pinyon-Juniper-Oak Savannas and Woodlands**
- **Montane Evergreen Forests**
- **High Mesic Canyons, Bluff Bases, and Boulder Fields**
- **Montane Chaparral and Rock Outcrops**

To help ensure that these communities remain intact and healthy, The Nature Conservancy of Texas will collaborate with local landowners and other stakeholders to

- establish projects that minimize habitat fragmentation,
- ensure that Davis Mountains water resources can support ecosystem function and local human communities,
- support ecologically compatible enterprises that contribute to a diversified ranching economy, and
- maintain and enhance biodiversity and productivity of rangelands, woodlands, and forests in the Davis Mountains.

These are The Nature Conservancy's objectives for our work in the Davis Mountains; however, the broad community representation on the planning team helped ensure that these goals also reflect the desires of other Davis Mountains landowners. The Conservancy's aim is to fit our work into the community in ways that create synergy with others' efforts and benefit all stakeholders.