



CARLSBAD CAVERNS NATIONAL PARK

Credit: © Galya Andrusko | Tandem

New underground treasures are still being discovered at Carlsbad Caverns, many of which are jeopardized by expanded drilling in the area.

Carlsbad Caverns is home to some of the most spectacular examples of underground geologic features found anywhere in the United States. Located in southeastern New Mexico, the park contains more than 300 limestone caves carved over the course of 250 million years.

One of the most exemplary caverns in the system is known as the Big Room. At nearly 4,000 feet across and 255 feet high, the Big Room is the fifth-largest underground chamber in the United States. Many areas have yet to be explored. In fact, an entire new chamber was most recently discovered in 2013.

Carlsbad Caverns sits at the convergence of the Delaware and Permian Basins, one of the nation's most active and profitable oil and gas fields. Oil and gas development can have unanticipated consequences to the unique geology of the caverns and groundwater sources. It can also have disastrous effects on the health of nearby communities.

In the city of Carlsbad, wells can legally be drilled within 500 feet of a home. That number drops to 300 feet outside of city limits. The skyrocketing pace of development in the region has already produced tremendous threats to the people who call this community their home. In January 2019 alone, operators in the Permian Basin in New Mexico flared or vented more than 1.9 billion cubic feet of methane. Along with this venting and flaring comes hydrogen sulfide, benzene, toluene and other volatile organic compounds that are hazardous to human health.¹ Meanwhile, this administration has continued to roll back regulations requiring operators to capture their excess methane.

Not all threats to Carlsbad Caverns are currently known. Scientists continue to discover caverns and formations that are at risk of being lost forever if the breakneck development pace continues under this administration. One of the most famed recent discoveries, Lechuguilla Cave, was discovered after decades of cave explorers hearing wind rushing

RESOURCES THREATENED

PUBLIC HEALTH

NATURAL RESOURCES

AIR QUALITY

NIGHT SKIES

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

BY THE NUMBERS

101

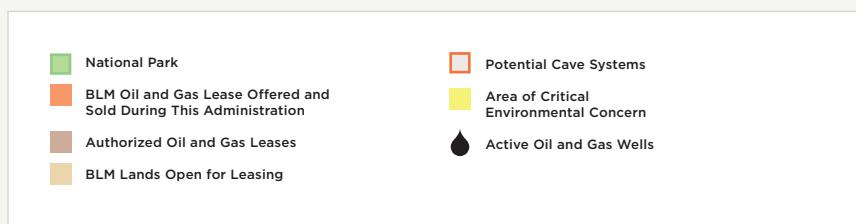
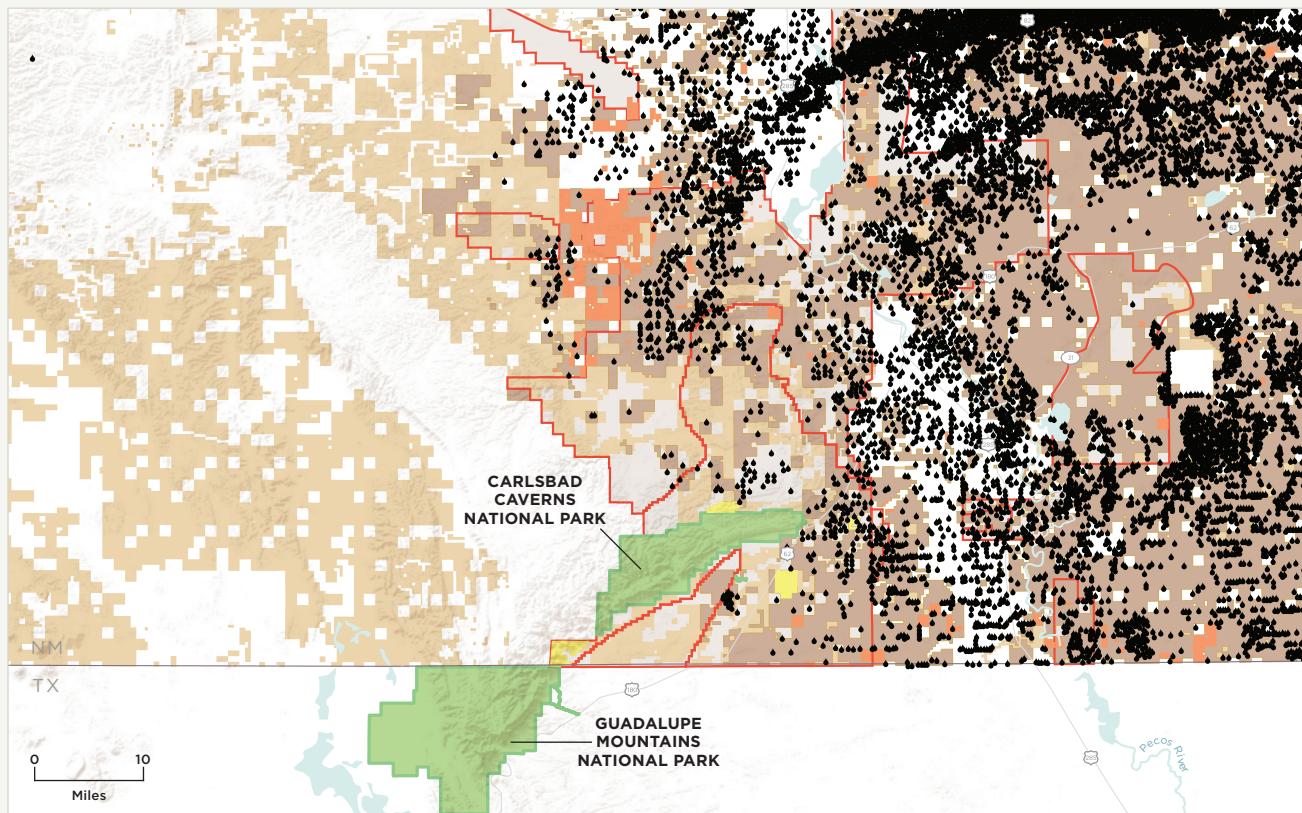
Active drilling rigs in New Mexico. More than Wyoming, North Dakota and Utah combined. Most are located in Eddy County, home of Carlsbad Caverns National Park.⁴

600

Percentage increase in air pollution such as volatile organic compounds in the Permian Basin of Southeast New Mexico since 2011⁵

31

Parcels the BLM has offered for oil and gas but then deferred due to conflicts with Park resources.



through the cave.² The National Park Service conducted a dig operation to reveal a much larger labyrinth of caves—of which over 136 miles have been mapped, running to a depth of 1,600 feet.

This incredible discovery is particularly vulnerable to oil and gas drilling as stated by the Park Service: “Oil and gas drilling on BLM-managed areas could leak gas or fluids into the cave’s passages, killing cave life, destroying the fragile ecosystem and threatening the safety of people inside the cave.”³

¹ Tay Wiles, “The hidden consequences of New Mexico’s latest oil boom,” High Country News, May 22, 2019, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/51.10/public-health-the-hidden-consequences-of-new-mexicos-latest-oil-boom>

² National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/cave/learn/nature/lechuguilla_cave.htm

³ National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/cave/learn/nature/lechuguilla_cave.htm

⁴ Jordan Blum, “Rig Count Falls as New Mexico surpasses Oklahoma in drilling activity,” The Houston Chronicle, July 3, 2019, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/energy/article/Rig-count-falls-as-New-Mexico-surpasses-Oklahoma-14069801.php>

⁵ Clean Air Task Force and Earthworks, “Country Living, Dirty Air: Oil and Gas Pollution in Rural America,” July 2018 http://www.catf.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CATF_Pub_CountryLivingDirtyAir.pdf?utm_source=Earthworks+Press+List&utm_campaign=3ed745a4a0-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_07_12_05_58&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d36f253784-3ed745a4a0-275226041