

THIS WEEK ON THE LLANO ESTACADO

DECEMBER 14-19, 2009

THE HABITATS OF THE LLANO ESTACADO



PRAIRIE TO MESQUITE BRUSHLAND

Mesquite was once confined to the draws, but after overgrazing, the control of fires, the elimination of 90% of the prairie dogs, mesquite spread over the landscape.



DRAWS

Draws on the Llano Estacado are the usually dry headwaters of the Concho, Red Colorado, and Brazos Rivers. Pocket forests of soapberry and hackberry are found in isolated groves in the draws.



PLAYAS

Playas are small (and usually almost circular) depressions not along the draws. After rains of three+ inches the playas fill with water, but this may not occur more than once every five years!



ALKALI SOIL (SALINAS AND GYP CREEKS)

Over 40 Salinas (salt lakes) are found on the Llano Estacado and are important wintering sites for sandhill cranes and ducks. The Pecos River, Beal's Creek, and other creeks east of the Llano also have saline soil.



SHALLOW GRAVEL SOILS

(SHORT-GRASS PRAIRIE, CREOSOTE BUSH FLATS)

On the western edge of the Llano Estacado, buffalo grass prairies stretch for miles in eastern New Mexico. On the southwestern edge of the Llano and into the Chihuahuan Desert creosote bush is dominant.



SANDDUNES

Sanddunes stretch from Crane to Fort Sumner. Most are covered with shinoak in the world's largest oak forest. Patches of open sand are scattered throughout. Dune habitat is found north of draws, too.



CANYONS AND BREAKS

Spectacular canyons are cut into the sandstone of the eastern edge of the Llano Estacado. The Pecos River drainage deeply incises the limestone of the Stockton Plateau south of the Llano Estacado.



URBAN FOREST (AND FARMLAND)

Farmland covers over 70% of the top of the Llano Estacado. Oil fields are scattered everywhere. Every town is a forest. Wild animals and plants fill every niche available.