

# Elliott Barker Wildlife Area

Distance from Casa del Gavilan:

20 miles – 45 minutes

Trail length: 3 miles of road

Four trails. Each are 2-3 miles each direction

Elevation change: trails vary from 525 feet to 1,050 feet climb

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Points of interest: 5,400 acre remote wildlife area

Administered by New Mexico Game and Fish.

Required documents: One \$5 Habitat Management and Access

Validation (HMAV) per group of 4 adults

Open April 1 – May 14 and August 1 – December 14 ONLY

**CLOSED Dec 15 – March 31 and May 15 – July 31**

For more information see: [www.wildlife.state.nm.us/](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/)

Contact: 888-248-6866 or [jspa@state.nm.us](mailto:jspa@state.nm.us)



The Elliott Barker Wildlife Area presents a unique opportunity to visit a little-known, remote wildlife area not far from the Casa del Gavilan. Located on the west side of Philmont Scout Ranch, access is through a dirt and gravel road through Ponil Canyon where Philmont Scout Ranch first began in 1939. A \$5 permit is required for at least one person in a party of up to four people, excluding anyone under the age of 18. This is the same permit required for Charette Lakes Wildlife Area, so you can visit both Areas for the same price. Please see the information provided below to purchase the permit. It's a bit of a nuisance to go through the online application process, but it's well worth it to visit this remote Wildlife Area between Philmont Scout Ranch and the Valle Vidal unit of Carson National Forest. No restrooms, drinking water, or other facilities are available along the route or in Barker, so you'll want to be properly prepared. Pack out your trash.

According to the Raton office of New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, it is permissible to drive the road through Elliott Barker Wildlife Area when it is open for access. However, motor vehicles may not drive off the main road. The road is dirt and gravel, and may not be suitable for all vehicles. You don't necessarily need a high clearance, 4-wheel drive vehicle but it would be highly advisable as you'll be crossing Ponil Creek several times once you're past Philmont's Ponil Camp. The road between Ponil and the far end of Elliott Barker crosses Ponil Creek a handful of times. To check the current flow of Ponil Creek at a gage station about a mile below Six-Mile Gate, see the following website: <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/07207500/#parameterCode=00065&period=P7D>

Before your start, check the current "gauge height" for Ponil Creek. The gauge height at this station runs somewhat higher than what you'll find where the road crosses Ponil Creek. With a station gauge height indicating water at a depth of 2.0 feet or less. Water depth at the first crossing, which appears to be one of the deepest, should be no more than 10-12 inches. This is a reasonable depth for mid-sized SUVs such as Blazers, as well as full-sized SUV and trucks. A station gauge height indicating water at a level of 2.3 feet can result in water depths at the crossings of 14-16 inches, and moving much faster. This is still acceptable for a full-sized SUV or truck, but it's not advisable in a small or mid-sized SUV. The creek crossings have good gravel bases, so getting stuck is not a serious problem. Keep in mind that a heavy shower anywhere up to 10 miles north in Ponil Canyon can rapidly raise the water level, potentially making the crossings unsafe until the water level falls. This could take a day or two after a heavy rainstorm. It is not advisable to make this trip if heavy rain is threatening.

To reach the wildlife area, proceed north out of Cimarron on Highway 64 toward Raton. Just after crossing over the Ponil Creek bridge on the north edge of Cimarron, turn left onto New Mexico Route 204. This road quickly becomes gravel and dirt, so you may want to think twice about the trip if heavy rain is in the forecast. You will lose your cell phone signal after a few miles, and be without it for the rest of the trip. The road is washboard in areas as far as the Chase Ranch, but the washboard is much less past this point.

Proceed past the Chase Ranch on the left. This historic Cimarron ranch is now a museum administered by Philmont Scout Ranch. Check ahead with the National Scouting Museum at Philmont if you're interested in a tour of the Chase Ranch while you're "in the neighborhood". Six miles from Highway 64 you'll reach "Six Mile Gate". A railroad box car is on the right side of the road. Beyond the box car, in North Ponil Canyon a mile beyond the locked gate, is the first fossilized track of a Tyrannosaurus Rex discovered anywhere in the world. Since the discovery in 1983, two additional tracks have been discovered in Montana and Wyoming. The T-Rex is estimated to have been 37 feet long, weighed up to 6 tons, and likely had a foul temper. The track was left about 66 million years ago, which would have put it near the end of the reign of dinosaurs. Access to this site is strictly prohibited except while on a Philmont expedition.

Continue along the main road in Ponil Canyon past the "Entering Philmont" sign and across the cattle guard. This point marks the boundary into Philmont Scout Ranch. Signs indicating "No trespassing" are on either side of the cattleguard. This indicates there is no trespassing off

the road while crossing Philmont property. Between April 1 – May 14 and August 1 – December 14 the road itself is public access. From here to the Elliott Barker Wildlife Area, you will be driving on a roadway public easement through Philmont. Please be respectful of our neighbors, drive slowly, and give way to livestock, pedestrians, and hikers along the road. You are not permitted to leave the roadway either by vehicle or on foot. Five miles further along the road, you'll pass through Ponil Camp. This was the first base camp of Philmont Scout Ranch which opened in 1939. This area is especially active during August while Philmont is in session and Scouts are hiking the backcountry. Please use caution driving through this area. The Root Beer Saloon on the right is a long-time favorite of Philmonters after spending many days living off dehydrated trail food. At the far end of Ponil Camp, the road goes through the middle of Philmont's rifle range. Use care and make certain the range is not active as you drive through. North of Ponil Camp the road is used less and gets worse.

Don't hesitate to turn around if it doesn't look passable at any point. This would be a very lonely place to get a flat tire or have your vehicle stuck in the mud as it's a 14-mile hike from the Elliott Barker Wildlife Area back to Highway 64. A ranger lives at Ponil Camp year around if you run into any difficulties. The ranger lives in one of the first buildings you come to entering Ponil Camp from Highway 64--on the right (north) side of the road with the garage on the left of the house. Please don't disturb the ranger or other staff unless it's an emergency.

The road crosses Ponil Creek three times between Ponil Camp and the entrance to the Barker Wildlife Area. These three crossings have good rock bases, but use caution that the water isn't too high for your vehicle. Two miles past Ponil Camp you'll come to the entrance of the Elliott Barker Wildlife Area, marked by a large sign board in front of Philmont's Bent camp and a Philmont outhouse. You can continue the drive into and through the Barker Wildlife Area. The road through the Wildlife Area had several extremely boggy areas during the rainy summer of 2025, and there are several additional creek crossings. The road was just barely passable by 4 wheel drive vehicles. If you want to hike it's probably best to park in the grassy area on the left beyond the Barker Wildlife Area gate, and hike from here. Park at the gate and walk from there as motorized vehicles are not permitted beyond the parking area. You may get your feet wet crossing Ponil Creek several times as the road proceeds through the Wildlife Area. If the road is passable, you can continue to drive through the Barker Wildlife Area and park along the road in a wide spot or turnout to hike.

One and three quarters of a mile beyond the gate into the Wildlife Area are a few scattered remnants of the Stern Ranch--a dude ranch from the early 1900s -- are on the right (north) side of the road. If you look closer, you can find the walls and pipes for the swimming pool used by guests. From this area you can hike southwest to Wilson Mesa. The trail (an old road) is reasonably well marked on the left (south) side of the main road. Do not park on the south side of the road in front of the trail. There is a small area to park on the north side, across the road from the trail. The trail is very easy to follow. The grade of the trail up to Wilson Mesa isn't too bad, but it is a 1,000-foot climb and the road is very rocky from many years of use. Once on top of the mesa, continue southwest to the lake which can be quite low during dry times. You'll find the ruins of an old cabin a short distance west of the dam. Philmont's fence line is just beyond the lake. Philmont's Pueblano camp is only a half mile south, deep in South Ponil Canyon. You are not permitted to pass beyond the fence line onto Philmont's property. Coming back down from Wilson Mesa is a bit tricky as you need to be careful where you place your feet so as not to step on an unstable rock. Go slow and be careful of your footing on the way down.

If you plan to use the GPS in your phone for hiking in this area, keep in mind the GPS will use your cell phone battery very quickly. Download the area map onto your phone so your map will work out of cell phone range. Keep an eye on the battery level and be back to an area with which you're familiar well before your phone battery runs out. Your cell phone will not work in the Elliott Barker Wildlife Area.

### To purchase your pass for the Elliott Barker Wildlife Area:

You may purchase a license or validation (HMAV) from any Department office, license vendor, by phone at 888-248-6866, or through the Department's Online License System at: <https://onlinesales.wildlife.state.nm.us/> This is the same website used to purchase hunting and fishing licenses so the form will ask for information which may seem intrusive (gender, height, weight, etc.) This may seem onerous, but it is to confirm the person carrying the license is the person to whom the license is registered. Some information, such as driver's license number, is asked but not required. Required items are marked with a red asterisk. You can skip the other questions.

Go to: <https://onlinesales.wildlife.state.nm.us/>

Establish an account by providing the information requested. Re-log into your account once established.

Select "License Sales (year)" in the left column, then "OTC Licenses, Permits and Stamps"

Check the "Continue" button at the bottom of the "Terms of Agreement" box

List of various hunting and other licenses will show. Select "Habitat Management and Access Validation" in the left column, 2nd from bottom

Click "Review Order" at bottom of page

A pop-up box appears stating "Additional Requirements may apply" indicating you may also need a 'Habitat Stamp'. The Habitat Stamp apparently applies only to hunting and fishing, and not to wildlife viewing (as far as I know).

Click "OK" in bottom right corner of this pop-up box. The box will close, showing "Habitat Management and Access Validation" previously selected.

Click "Add to cart"

Your shopping cart will include \$4 for the license and a \$1 "vendor fee"

Click "Checkout" at bottom

Check both boxes on the "Terms of Agreement", then the "Credit Card" box to pay by credit card

Enter credit card information

The system will log you out and ask you to go back into your account. Log back in and go to "My purchases"

The purchased "Habitat Management and Access Validation" license will be listed.

Click "Print License" – or save the PDF file to your phone

License is valid from April 1 through March 31 of the following year

### Rules for State Game Commission land:

#### It is unlawful:

- For any individual to enter SGCL and not be designated for access. SGC Lands designated for access are listed on the Department's website.
  - For any individual to enter closed SGC Land or closed areas of SGC Land. Closures will be posted on site or on the Department's website. Exceptions: Each properly-licensed hunter and up to three (3) guests are exempt from closures during their published hunt period. Each properly-licensed big game hunter and up to three (3) guests are exempt from closures during a seven (7) day scouting period prior to the published start of their hunt period.
  - For any individual to enter SGC Land during big game and waterfowl hunt dates published in the New Mexico Hunting Rules and Information. Designated areas on certain SGC Lands are exempt from this rule; see specific SGC Land information on the Department's website. Exceptions: Each properly-licensed hunter and up to three (3) guests are exempt from closures during their published hunt period. Each properly-licensed big game hunter and up to three (3) guests are exempt from closures during a seven (7) day scouting period prior to the published start of their hunt period.
  - To operate any vehicle off of established roads or on closed roads within SGC Land.
  - To deface or remove rocks, minerals, plants (including fruits, nuts, and berries), animals, firewood, or man-made feature from SGC Land.
  - For any person to excavate, injure, destroy, or remove any cultural resource or artifact from any SGC Land.
  - To camp in excess of fourteen (14) consecutive days on SGC Land. Exceptions: licensed hunters and guests may camp in excess of 14 days concurrent with their hunt/scouting period.
  - To possess unleashed dogs or other pets on SGC Land. Exceptions: dogs may be unleashed for permitted field trial or hunting purposes during published hunt periods only on SGC Lands where use of dogs for hunting purposes is allowed by rule.
  - To have an open fire, unless safely contained on SGC Land.
  - To use or possess any hay or feed for domestic livestock use on SGC Land other than pelleted or grain feed, or hay certified as weed free.
  - To conduct any commercial activity on SGC Land without first obtaining a commercial permit. Commercial activity is any activity for which a fee is charged or other compensation is received. Exception: Hunting activities conducted by an outfitter registered with the Department.
  - To violate any access rule specified by the Director for a specific SGC Land and disseminated by posting or notice provision by the Department (e.g. posted signs, New Mexico Hunting and Fishing Rules and Information, or the Department's website).[19.34.3.10 NMAC].
- For more information: Visit the Department's website ([www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us)) or call 888-248-6866



# Elliott Barker Wildlife Area



**Location:** The Elliott Barker Wildlife Area is located about 15 miles northwest of Cimarron.

**Total Acreage:** 5,416 acres.

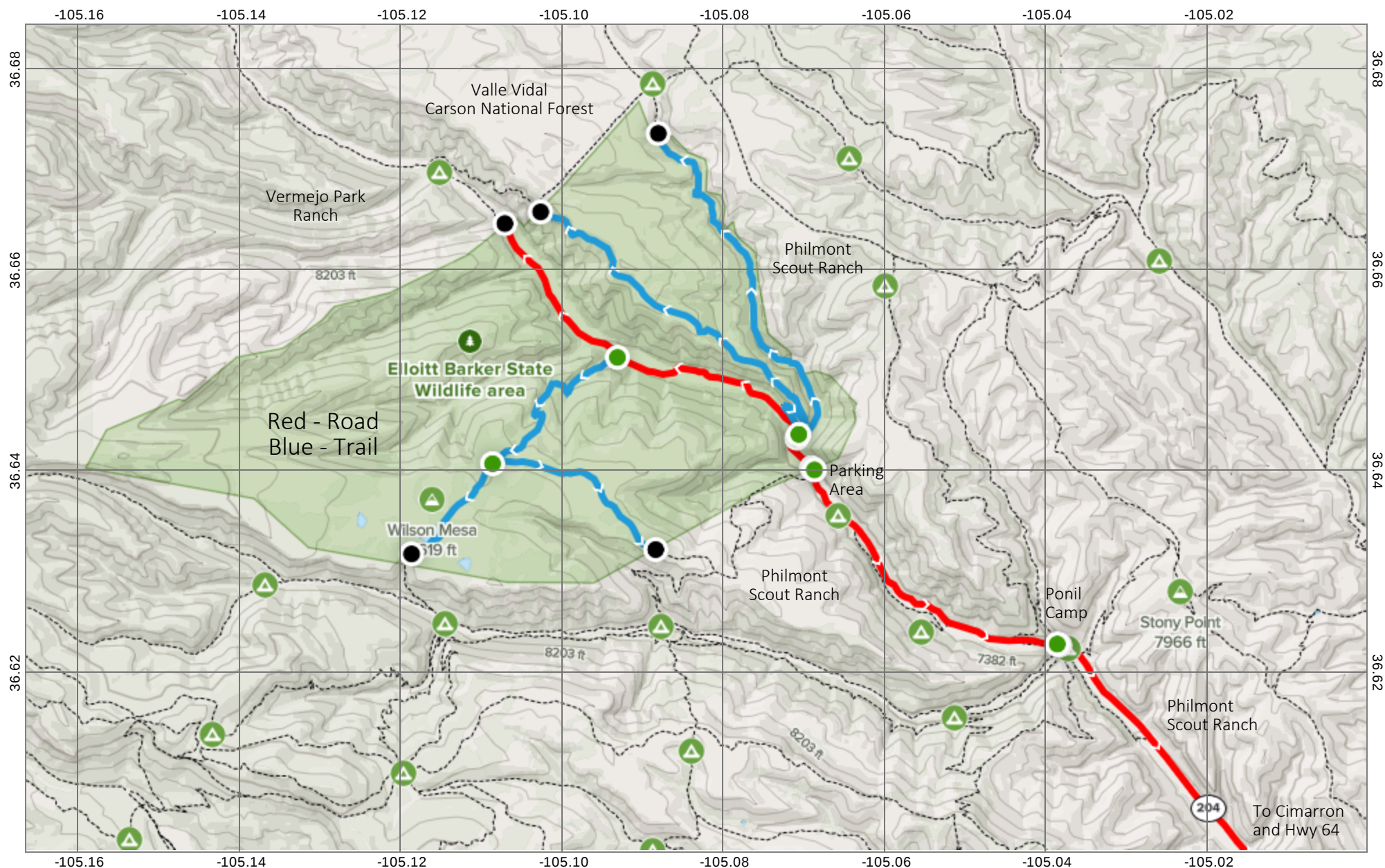
**Purchase:** The Elliott Barker Wildlife Area was purchased in 1966 to protect prime habitat for deer and elk.

**Description:** A long high mesa with canyon slopes, rocky outcrops, and side canyons with Ponil Creek flowing through the middle, making it perfect habitat for deer, elk, bear, and turkey.

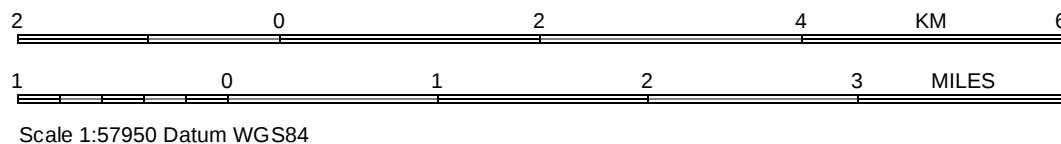
**For More information:** More information about hunting, fishing and other activities, may be found on the Department's website: [www.wildlife.state.nm.us/](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/).

GAIN Activities	What to See, Do, and Learn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Wildlife Viewing</li> <li>✓ Photographing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Wildlife Viewing</b>-Wildlife watchers may see deer, elk, bear and turkey. Good binoculars are important. The best time to view wildlife is at dawn or dusk. Allowed April 1-May 14 and August 1-December 14.</p>
Access	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Hiking</li> <li>✓ Bicycling</li> <li>✓ Horseback Riding</li> </ul>	<p><b>Photographing</b>-The best time to photograph wildlife is at dawn or dusk. A telephoto lens may be important. Allowed April 1-May 14 and August 1-December 14.</p> <p><b>Hiking</b>-Hiking is the best way to see wildlife at the Elliott Barker Wildlife Area or other wildlife management areas. Allowed April 1-May 14 and August 1-December 14.</p> <p><b>Bicycling</b>-Allowed only on established roads. Allowed April 1-May 14 and August 1-December 14.</p> <p><b>Horseback Riding</b>-Allowed April 1-May 14 and August 1-December 14.</p>
Hunting and Fishing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Hunting</li> <li>✓ Fishing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Camping</b>-Allowed only by licensed hunters in designated areas and only during their hunt.</p> <p><b>Fishing</b>-Allowed, but poor habitat due to recent forest fire.</p> <p><b>Hunting</b>-Deer, elk, bear, turkey, and small game.</p>
Closures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Yes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Closures</b>-Elliott Barker Wildlife Area is closed to wildlife viewing, photographing, hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding May 15-July 31 and December 15-March 31.</p>
Facilities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ No rest rooms</li> <li>✓ No camp sites</li> <li>✓ No drinking water</li> </ul>	<p><b>Facilities</b>-Elliott Barker Wildlife Area does not have rest rooms, camp sites, or drinking water.</p>
Fees	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Yes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fees</b>-Hunters and anglers must have appropriate licenses and permits. Wildlife viewers, photographers, hikers, bicyclists, and horseback riders must have a valid license or permit. See the Department's website <a href="http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us">www.wildlife.state.nm.us</a> for more information.</p>
Motorized Vehicles	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Not allowed beyond the roadway and parking area</li> </ul>	<p><b>Motorized Vehicles</b>-Not allowed beyond parking area.</p>
<p><b>For more information on hunting and fishing rules and seasons, please read current hunting or fishing Rules and Information Booklets available on the Department's website, at Department offices, or from license vendors state-wide.</b></p>	

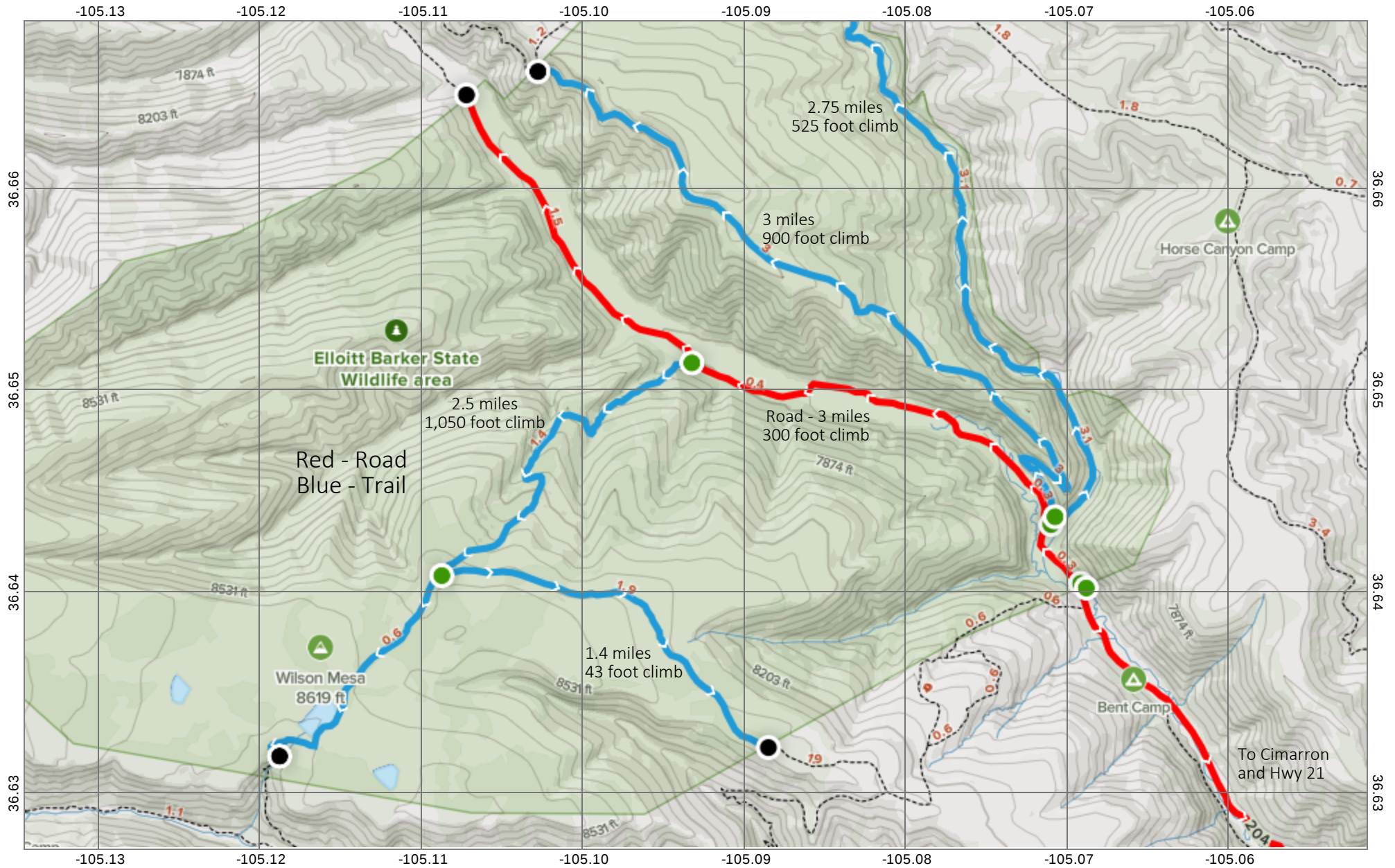
# Elliott Barker Wildlife Area



★  
↑ 7.5°E  
11/7/20



# Elliott Barker Wildlife Area



★  
7.5°E  
11/7/20

1 0 1 2 3 KM  
0.5 0 0.5 1 1.5 2 MILES  
Scale 1:28973 Datum WGS84