

Commonly Asked Questions - Visiting Policies
Empire Ranch Headquarters & Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (LCNCA)

For all general inquiries, call Bureau of Land Management Tucson Field Office, (520) 258-7200, located at 3201 E. Universal Way, Tucson, AZ 85756. Hours: Monday through Friday, 8am-4pm. Information is also provided on the [BLM Las Cienegas NCA website](#). For specific questions about group activities, permits or general land use, contact: [Catie Fenn](#), Outdoor Recreation Planner, BLM Tucson Field Office, 520-258-7204.

Commonly asked questions

How do I get to the Empire Ranch?

Las Cienegas National Conservation Area is located 45 miles southeast of Tucson. From Tucson, drive south on Interstate 10 to scenic highway 83, exit 281. Head south on State Highway 83, between milepost 40 & 39, turn east into the LCNCA entrance, noted by the “Historic Empire Ranch” sign.

Where can I obtain a map?

Maps are available at the BLM’s Tucson Field Office.

Are there tours of the Empire Ranch Headquarters?

The Empire Ranch Foundation provides tours on the second Saturday of the month at 11am and 1pm. For more information, contact the Empire Ranch Foundation at 888-364-2829 or visit the Foundation’s [web page](#). For large, private group tours, you may need a Bureau of Land Management Special Recreation Permit (SRP). Please see “Do I need a Permit?” below.

When is the Empire Ranch Headquarters open to visit?

The Empire Ranch Headquarters is located within Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (LCNCA). This is public property and is open to the public for self-guided touring on a daily basis, 365 days a year. It is recommended that visitors visit during daylight hours, since the buildings and yards have no artificial lighting.

Most of the doors in the Ranch House are unlocked and visitors may enter any unlocked door. Visitors are asked to close doors upon leaving to keep out rattlesnakes, skunks, bats, and other critters. Visitors are also cautioned to watch where they step, and leaving things as found, and unharmed. There are descriptive signs within individual rooms in the Ranch House. Background information is available in a Welcome Kiosk located in the Living Room of the Main Ranch House, and background information that can be downloaded from the [Empire Ranch Foundation website](#).

The Empire Ranch Foundation partners with the Bureau of Land Management's Tucson Field Office to help promote preservation and education at the Empire Ranch Headquarters and Las Cienegas National Conservation Area. For questions about Empire Ranch Foundation activities, call 888-364-2829, or email, admin@empireranchfoundation.org.

Is the Empire Ranch Headquarters ADA accessible?

Some of the rooms at the Empire Ranch Headquarters are ADA & wheelchair accessible through the front breezeway entrance. The public restrooms in the parking area are ADA accessible.

What are among the visitor activities?

Wildlife viewing, picnicking, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, historic site touring, hunting, photography and scenic drives. There are no picnic tables/chairs; visitors may bring their own.

Is horseback riding permitted?

Horseback riding is allowed throughout LCNCA, cross Cienega Creek and Empire Gulch at cement crossings. More information is available through Bureau of Land Management/Tucson Field Office. For specific questions about group activities, permits or general land use, contact: [Catie Fenn](#), Outdoor Recreation Planner, BLM Tucson Field Office, 520-258-7204.

Are fires allowed?

Normally fires are allowed on Las Cienegas NCA, but not within the Empire Ranch Headquarters area without special permission from BLM.

When is hunting allowed? What can I hunt?

Arizona Game and Fish Department manages hunting. There are several types of hunts for deer, javelina and other animals. The Arizona Game and Fish determines all hunting seasons, and a hunting license is required. More information can be found on the [Arizona Game & Fish website](#).

Can I bring my dog? Does my dog have to be on a leash?

Yes, dogs are allowed, however it is advised to keep dogs on a leash. Be mindful that there is a catch-all law about creating a public nuisance or hazard if your dog interferes with other's enjoyment of the area. Dogs must be on a leash during Pronghorn Fawning season (April 1-June 30) in Pronghorn fawning areas.

Is there drinking water?

Yes there is drinking water in the water faucets at Empire Ranch Headquarters and at the Airstrip recreation group site.

Can I camp overnight? Are there RV hookups?

Overnight camping is allowed in designated camping areas or out on backcountry roads in dispersed sites. There are no RV hook ups.

If I have a large party of six vehicles, do I need a permit?

Generally, if there are more than 29 people in a group, a permit may be required. If your activity is commercial, competitive, advertised, or organized, a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) is likely required. Permits take time to process; apply for permits up to 180 days in advance of the event.

Can I bring my off-road vehicle?

Off Highway Vehicles (OHV) vehicles are allowed on roads only, not in washes or off-road (except for 49 wash road - a 4x4 wash route). High-speed dirt bikes are not recommended due to the low speed limits posted. The speed limit within LCNCA is 25 mph. All OHV users must follow the OHV rules posted on the [Arizona Game & Fish website](#).

Where can I find nearby camping or lodging?

Primitive camping is allowed and does not require a permit. Camping may not exceed 14 consecutive days. Visitors must camp away from cattle and wildlife water holes. Campers need to bring water and firewood. The nearest lodging is available in Sonoita, five miles south on Highway 83, and in Patagonia. Campfires are allowed, except during periods of extreme fire danger. There are restrooms just adjacent (north) of the Empire Ranch Headquarters, and at the "Airstrip Recreation Group Site".

Where are nearest location for food and supplies?

A gas station and a variety of restaurants and services are located in the town of Sonoita, AZ, seven miles south from the Highway 83 turnoff to Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, or three miles west of the southern entrance off of Highway 82.

Where are available First Aid or Emergency Services?

First aid is available at the Santa Cruz Sheriff's office in Sonoita or the Sonoita Elgin Fire Department, (520) 455-5854. The nearest hospitals are located in Sierra Vista, about 40 miles southeast or Tucson, approximately 50 miles northwest. The only Level 1 Trauma Center in Southern Arizona is UMC University Medical Center. Call 911 for all emergencies.

Where can I hike?

If you call or visit the BLM/Tucson Field Office, (520) 258-7200, they have maps available that can provide the information you need, including road and trail details. Hiking is allowed throughout LCNCA. There is a .5 mile hike through the Heritage Discovery Trail at Empire Ranch Headquarters. Most LCNCA back roads make good hiking trails. Oak Tree canyon just north of Headquarters connects to the Arizona Trail, three miles east on the Coronado National Forest.

Do I need a permit?

Permits are not required to visit the national conservation area. However, commercial, competitive, and large organized group events require a special recreation permit. Permits are generally required if the group number is over 29, or if the activity needs BLM oversight or will have an impact to public lands and people. Here is the general pre-application interview checklist to use Public Lands (BLM):

- Are you charging a fee?
- Do you expect to make money on the event or is the fee to cover expenses?
- Will there be a competition?
- Will you advertise?
- How many people do you expect to attend?
- Are you an organized group?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may need a permit from the BLM. Please review the How To Apply page and contact BLM/Tucson Field Office, (520) 258-7200.

Who do I call for a permit, or if I have specific questions? When do I know I need a permit?

Special Recreation Permits (SRP) are handled through the BLM/Tucson Field Office which has jurisdiction for this area. For specific questions about group activities, permits or general land use, contact: [Catie Fenn](#), Outdoor Recreation Planner, BLM Tucson Field Office, 520-258-7204.

What are use definitions?

Commercial use is defined as recreational use of the public lands and related waters for business or financial gain. The activity, service, or use is commercial if any person, group or organization makes or attempts to make a profit, receive money, amortize equipment, or obtain goods or services, as compensation from participants in recreational activities occurring on public lands led, sponsored, or organized by that person, group, or organization. An activity, service, or use is commercial if anyone collects a fee or receives other compensation that is not strictly a sharing of, or exceeds, actual expenses incurred for the purposes of the activity, service or use. Commercial use is also characterized by situations where there is paid public advertising to seek participants or participants pay for a duty of care or an expectation of safety. Profit-making organizations and organizations seeking to make a profit are automatically classified as commercial, even if that part of their activity covered by the permit is not profit-making or the business as a whole is not profitable. Use of the public lands by scientific, educational, and therapeutic institutions or non-profit organizations is commercial and subject to a permit requirement when it meets any of the threshold criteria above. The non-profit status of any group or organization does not alone determine that an event or activity arranged by such a group or organization is noncommercial.

Financial Gain occurs when an individual or entity receives or attempts to receive money, donations, gratuities, or gifts, amortizes equipment, or barter for goods or services.

Competitive Use means any organized, sanctioned, or structured use, event, or activity on public land in which two or more contestants compete and any of the following elements apply: (1) Participants register, enter, or complete an application for the event; or (2) A predetermined course or area is designated. It also means one or more individuals contesting an established record such as speed or endurance.

Organized Group Activity or Event means a structured, ordered, consolidated, or scheduled event on, or occupation of, public lands for the purpose of recreational use that is not commercial or competitive, and which BLM has determined needs a special recreation permit based on planning decisions, resource concerns, potential user conflicts, or public health and safety.

Vending means selling or renting recreation related goods or services such as firewood, equipment repair, shuttles, rentals, etc. on the public lands or related waters.

How much does a permit cost? How long does it take to get one?

SRP applications are accepted 180 days to one year prior to the proposed use, unless waived by the Authorized Officer. The fees are: \$100 non-refundable per SRP, and 3% of gross receipts (if commercial), and \$5 per participant if a competitive or organized group event.

What insurance requirements pertain to Special Recreation Permits?

All commercial and competitive applicants for SRPs, except vendors, must obtain a property damage, personal injury, and public liability insurance policy that BLM judges sufficient to protect the public and United States. The policy must name the *U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management* as additionally insured and stipulate that the permittee or the insurer will notify BLM 30 days in advance of termination or modification of the policy. BLM may also require vendors, and other applicants, such as organized groups, to obtain and submit such a policy. Information regarding land use and special use permits is available [here](#).

All inquiries for the public recreation use of LCNCA should be made to BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner, [Catie Fenn](#), BLM Outdoor Recreation Specialist, phone, 520-258-7204.