



Foundation Document Overview

Canyonlands National Park

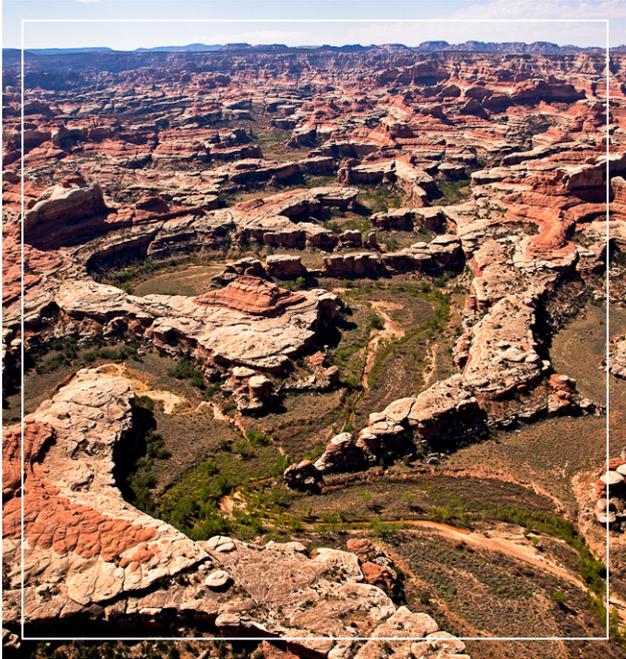
Utah



Contact Information

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Purpose



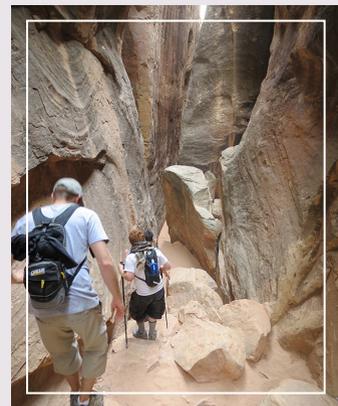
The purpose of CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK is to preserve striking geologic landscapes and associated ecosystems in an area encompassing the confluence of the Green and Colorado rivers possessing superlative scenic, scientific, and cultural features for the inspiration, benefit, and use of the public.



Significance

Significance statements express why Canyonlands National Park's resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Canyonlands National Park and its expansive natural setting exhibit an array of striking geologic landscapes composed of canyons, mesas, buttes, and spires formed from multiple and varying sedimentary rock formations.
- Canyonlands National Park protects the confluence, significant reaches, and associated ecosystems of two major western rivers, the Green and Colorado, which have shaped the complex natural and human histories of the park and surrounding region.
- Canyonlands National Park contains world-class archeological sites and districts, including the Great Gallery, which is the type-site for Barrier Canyon style rock art.
- An assemblage of roads, many associated with a history of mining and ranching activities, continue to provide visitors with exceptional recreational opportunities to access the backcountry of Canyonlands National Park.
- Canyonlands National Park provides incomparable opportunities to view superlative scenery from various perspectives above the rivers and then descend into the midst of these scenic landscapes to experience remote wildness and solitude.
- The diverse natural landscapes and rich cultural history of Canyonlands National Park provide outstanding opportunities for the scientific study of natural ecosystems and how they are affected by human use and climate in different settings over long periods of time.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Geologic Landscapes and Features.** Canyonlands National Park protects a striking geologic landscape composed of a diverse and multilayered assemblage of canyons, mesas, buttes, and spires, as well as many notable features of great scientific interest including grabens and Upheaval Dome. These landscapes and features were formed by geologic processes such as sedimentation, erosion, salt dissolution and tectonics, and meteorite impact operating over hundreds of millions of years.



- **Green and Colorado Rivers.** The Green and Colorado rivers are the lifeblood of the park, and fundamental to their integrity are clean water, native biotic communities, characteristic landforms, and the natural hydrologic, geomorphic, and biotic processes necessary for sustaining them.
- **Cultural Resources.** The Salt Creek and Horseshoe Canyon archeological districts, both listed on the National Register of Historic Places, contain important world-class archeological and rock art sites, including the Great Gallery, which is the type-site for Barrier Canyon style rock art. National register-listed properties related to historic grazing and mining activities and a national register-eligible network of roads such as Elephant Hill, Shafer Trail, and White Rim Road are also present in the park.
- **Clean Air and Superlative Scenery.** Clean air and undeveloped natural viewsheds afford expansive vistas of geologic landscapes and iconic Colorado Plateau features such as the La Sal, Abajo, Henry, and Navajo mountains. Clean air enhances the color and contrast of landscape features, allows visitors to see great distances, and safeguards ecosystem, visitor, and staff health.

- **Remote Wildness and Solitude.** Canyonlands National Park is primarily a backcountry park with limited accessibility. The wilderness character, natural acoustical environment, and dark night skies enhance opportunities to experience the remoteness in solitude.
- **Diverse Assemblage of Colorado Plateau Ecosystems.** The park protects a diverse and interconnected assemblage of Colorado Plateau ecosystems, and fundamental to their integrity are clean water, stable soils, native biotic communities, and the hydrologic, geomorphic, and biotic processes necessary for sustaining them.
- **Collaborative Conservation, Science, and Scholarship.** Collaboration with external partners and engagement in scientific and scholarly activities are values and processes that are fundamental for achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance in the context of shared landscape values, rapidly changing social and environmental conditions, and uncertainty in outcomes of management decision making.

Other Important Resources and Values

Canyonlands National Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Rare and Iconic Wildlife Species.** Rare desert bighorn sheep, Mexican spotted owls, peregrine falcons, and other raptors are important components of park ecosystems, and are observed and enjoyed by park visitors.
- **Paleontological Resources.** Geologic landscapes in Canyonlands National Park preserve extensive fossil evidence of prehistoric life.
- **Museum Collections.** The park's museum collections contain three-dimensional objects and natural history specimens and artifacts that are representative of the resources within the park's boundaries. Archives also are a component of museum collections and document park and resource management history.

Description

Canyonlands National Park is in southeastern Utah, on the Colorado Plateau. The area is mostly high desert characterized by eroded sedimentary rocks including several distinct types of sandstone, shale, and limestone formations. It is rugged and spectacular country and encompasses approximately 337,598 acres. The confluence of the Colorado and Green rivers lies within the park. These rivers wind through the heart of Canyonlands, cutting through layered sedimentary formations to form four deep and distinctly different canyons known as Labyrinth, Stillwater, Meander, and Cataract. Both rivers are characterized by gentle gradients upstream of the confluence, where “flat water” reaches are ideal for travel in canoes and kayaks. In Cataract Canyon below the confluence, numerous rocky debris flows from steep canyon walls have created a long series of large rapids where sandstone and limestone boulders present obstacles to navigation and provide an opportunity for visitors to experience a world-class reach of whitewater boating that continues downstream from Canyonlands into Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

The rivers divide the park into four districts: (1) Island in the Sky, (2) Needles, (3) the Maze, and (4) the rivers themselves. While the districts share a primitive desert atmosphere, each retains its own character and offers different opportunities for exploration and encounters with natural and cultural history. The four districts are not directly linked by any roads, so travel between them requires two to six hours by car. Island in the Sky is positioned between the two great rivers, above their confluence, and forms the northern and most-visited region of the park. It is composed of two sections, the mesa top above and the White Rim below. The Needles District forms the southeast corner of Canyonlands and was named for the colorful spires of Cedar Mesa sandstone that dominates the area. The Maze is the wildest and least accessible district of Canyonlands, ranking as one of the most remote areas in the United States. Despite this, it includes some of the most significant rock art in North America, including the Great Gallery.

