



Foundation Document Overview

Chiricahua National Monument

Arizona



Contact Information

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Purpose



CHIRICAHUA NATIONAL MONUMENT preserves and interprets the distinctive rhyolite rock formations known as “the Pinnacles,” designated wilderness, and features of vital historical and scientific interest for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations.



Significance

Significance statements express why Chiricahua National Monument 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.

- Chiricahua National Monument features distinctive and abundant examples of rhyolitic rock formations, which form a rare and impressive geologic landscape. The park’s pinnacles, spires, and balanced rocks were created 27 million years ago by one of the largest known volcanic eruptions in the American Southwest.
- Chiricahua National Monument, within the scenic Chiricahua Mountains Sky Island Complex, protects exceptional biodiversity due to its location at a rare intersection of four major biomes (Sierra Madre, Rocky Mountain, Chihuahuan Desert, and Sonoran Desert).
- Chiricahua National Monument, with its federally designated wilderness area, provides an opportunity to experience class I air quality, natural soundscapes, and one of the darkest night skies in the continental United States.
- Chiricahua National Monument preserves, in a relatively small area, evidence of a diverse human history spanning thousands of years, encompassing prehistoric indigenous peoples, Chiricahua Apaches, Buffalo Soldiers, European American pioneers and ranchers, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and early tourists and park promoters.
- Generations after being displaced from the Chiricahua Mountains, the Chiricahua Apaches and other American Indian tribes continue to feel a deep spiritual connection to these lands, which are a treasured part of their homeland. Ongoing research and discoveries continue to reveal important information about the connections between American Indians and the landscape.

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.

- **Distinctive Rhyolite Formations, known as “The Pinnacles.”** By far the most noticeable natural features in Chiricahua National Monument are the rhyolite rock formations that the park was established to protect.
- **Native Flora and Fauna of the Madrean Sky Island Ecosystem.** The Madrean Sky Island ecosystem of the park protects a great diversity of flora and fauna as well as critical habitat for threatened, endangered, and/or endemic species.
- **Wilderness Character.** Eighty-six percent of Chiricahua National Monument is designated wilderness, managed to protect the character of the landscape and to preserve its natural, untrammeled, undeveloped, and other features of value.
- **Scenic Views and Air Quality.** The Clean Air Act section 162(a) designates Chiricahua National Monument as a “Class I” area, providing special protection for air quality sensitive ecosystems and clean, clear views both within and beyond the park boundary. These views are a key component of the visitor experience.
- **Faraway Ranch Historic District.** The Faraway Ranch Historic District includes structures, resources, and landscapes associated with the local Chiricahua Apache, the end of the western frontier, Buffalo Soldiers, European American pioneers and ranches, and the people who promoted early tourism in the region.
- **CCC Structures and Landscape.** The Civilian Conservation Corps played a significant role in the development, interpretation, and survey of the park in the 1930s, including constructing the majority of the rustic-style stone structures, scenic drives, and trails that are still in use today.
- **Archeological and Ethnographic Resources.** Human presence in the Chiricahua Mountains extends back to the Paleo-Indians. Archeological sites within the park illustrate how American Indians lived prior to contact with European Americans as well as the resulting, post-contact meshing of cultures.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Geology.** The dramatic beauty and quiet mystery of Chiricahua National Monument belies the violent volcanic deposition of white-hot ash. The resulting sediment, soils, and rocks laid the foundation for a geologic “work-in-progress.”
- **Biodiversity.** Within the scenic sky island of the Chiricahua Mountains, Chiricahua National Monument provides visitors and researchers opportunities to explore and study richly diverse plant and animal life where biological and other natural processes continue relatively unaffected by human influence.
- **Wilderness Values.** The remoteness of Chiricahua National Monument allows contemplation and imagination through solitude, exploration, and discovery of the natural world—away from the distractions of contemporary life.
- **Human History.** Stories and evidence of struggle, perseverance, stewardship, and connection to the land, unite the experiences of the prehistoric indigenous peoples, the Chiricahua Apaches, the Buffalo Soldiers, European Americans, the CCC workers, and the early settlers. All left a lasting legacy and were in turn transformed by their experiences.



