DESCRIPTION OF HOT SPRINGS NATIONAL PARK

Hot Springs National Park is a 5,500-acre park in Hot Springs, Arkansas, that preserves geothermal spring water and resources related to therapeutic bathing. Congress created the park in 1832 when it designated the land as Hot Springs Reservation, making it the first area nationwide to be set aside for protection by the federal government. In 1921, the reservation’s name changed to Hot Springs National Park. Today, Hot Springs National Park preserves and manages its natural and cultural resources for over 1.5 million annual visitors. Located about 55 miles southwest of Little Rock, Hot Springs National Park encompasses mostly forested mountains, but includes a developed urban edge formed by Bathhouse Row, which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1987.

Bathhouse Row is a ¼-mile-long row of eight bathhouse buildings along Central Avenue. It is the most heavily visited part of the park. This area encompasses six acres formally landscaped with open lawns, trees, shrubs, fountains, a formal staircase entrance, a promenade in front of the bathhouses, and a Grand Promenade behind the bathhouses. The Buckstaff Bathhouse and the Administration Building, located at the southern end of the row, are the only structures used for their original purposes. All other bathhouses have been adapted for other uses by either the NPS or private sector partners.

Hot Springs National Park collects and distributes thermal water for use in park buildings and public fountains as well as by area hotels and a local hospital. The park uses an extensive underground collection system that is largely concealed from public view as most of the 47 springs are capped to prevent contamination. Recent studies have shown that the greatest threat to the health of the thermal springs may be from development outside the park as most of the water recharge zone is beyond the park boundary.
 Fundamental resources and values are closely related to a park’s designated purpose and warrant primary consideration in planning and management because they are critical to maintaining the park’s purpose and significance. If these resources are allowed to deteriorate, the purpose and/or significance of the park could be jeopardized.

The fundamental resources and values of Hot Springs National Park are:

- Thermal water and all components
- Water collection and distribution system
- Public interaction with geothermal water and the natural environment for the promotion of holistic human health
- Cultural landscape, including the Bathhouse Row National Historic Landmark
- Museum collection

### Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are ideas or concepts about Hot Springs National Park that are key to helping visitors gain an understanding of park significance and resources. The themes, which are based on park purpose and significance, provide the basis for interpretive programs and media in the park.

- While Hot Springs National Park protects the quality of the geothermal spring water, it is up to us all to preserve the quantity of the water.
- The thermal water and experiences in the natural environment that originally drew people to the area continue to be key elements to a holistic approach to life, health, and wellness.
- For over 200 years, the mystery of these hot springs has lured people to conduct research and make scientific discoveries that provide a greater understanding of the geothermal system. This fascination with the spring water may also inspire future scientific breakthroughs.
- The impressive cultural landscape of Bathhouse Row evokes the continuum of the American spa experience through history, anchored in the methods and beliefs of the past, yet ever-evolving to meet the needs of modern times.
- The perceived healing value of the geothermal spring water prompted the U.S. government to take unprecedented action that ultimately provided equal access to the water for everyone.
The purpose of Hot Springs National Park is to protect its unique geothermal spring water and associated lands for public health, wellness, and enjoyment.

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**Significance**
Hot Springs National Park is the only national park that protects a unique combination of lithology, geologic structure, and water sources that produce the only nonvolcanic geothermal springs of such high quality (temperature, taste, color, odorless) in the United States.

**Purpose**
Hot Springs National Park offers unparalleled opportunities for research of a geothermal hydrologic system that has been geologically stable for 200 million years such as the study of the recently discovered globally unique thermophilic life forms and other yet-to-be-discovered resources.

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