



Foundation Document Overview

Mesa Verde National Park

Colorado



Contact Information

For more information about the *Mesa Verde National Park Foundation Document*, contact: meve_superintendent@nps.gov or 970-529-4465 or write to:
Superintendent, Mesa Verde National Park, PO Box 8, Mesa Verde, CO 81330-0008

Purpose



MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK protects, preserves, researches, and interprets an archeological landscape including more than 600 cliff dwellings, wilderness values, and remarkable scenic resources in southwest Colorado.



Significance

Significance statements express why Mesa Verde National Park 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.

- Mesa Verde National Park is an example of thousands of years of human interaction with the environment, reflected in a remarkable density and variety of sites related to the Ancestral Pueblo occupation of the Southwest.
- Mesa Verde National Park is important in the history and heritage of the tribes and pueblos of Mesa Verde, and to many others for whom multigenerational ties exist.
- Mesa Verde National Park protects and preserves more than 5,000 archeological sites. These include more than 600 alcove sites, some of the best known and most accessible cliff dwellings in North America.
- In the early 1900s, visitors to the Mesa Verde area were captivated by the remarkable cliff dwellings they observed, and became vocal advocates for park establishment. This began a tradition of local and global stewardship of archeological resources that continues to this day.
- Mesa Verde National Park was designated in 1906 in a process that paralleled the establishment of the 1906 Antiquities Act. Mesa Verde National Park's significance and worldwide value was further recognized by the 1978 designation as one of the eight original "World Cultural Heritage Sites."
- The Mesa Verde Administrative District exemplifies a regionally significant Pueblo revival architectural style that influenced the development of a design aesthetic for southwestern national parks.
- As the first national park dedicated to the works of prehistoric cultures, Mesa Verde has played a key developmental role in the science of conservation archeology. This rich legacy dates to the early history of the national park system, with seminal works by preeminent researchers, and continues to be an essential part of park operations.
- Mesa Verde National Park supports outstanding wilderness values, clean air, night skies, and scenic views of the mountains, canyons, and mesas of the Four Corners Region.

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.

- **Mesa Verde Archeological Landscape.**
- **Mesa Verde Museum Collection and Archives.**
- **Scenic Resources.**
- **Mesa Verde Administrative District.**
- **Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Connections.**
- **Archeological Preservation and Investigation.**
- **Wilderness Landscape.**

Mesa Verde 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.

- **National Park Developmental Period 1906–1966.**
- **Water Resources.**
- **Rare and Endemic Plants.**
- **Paleontological / Geological Resources.**



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.

- **Interaction Between the Ancestral Pueblo People and the Social and Natural Environment.** The interaction between the Ancestral Pueblo people and environment revealed in the archeological record offers an opportunity to understand how environment shapes culture and how culture shapes environment.
- **Establishment of Mesa Verde National Park and World Heritage Designation.** Grassroots concern about site destruction and artifact removal from the Mesa Verde served as a catalyst for passage of the 1906 Antiquities Act and the establishment of Mesa Verde National Park. Designated a World Heritage Site in 1978, the park continues to inspire present and future generations to become stewards and offers global collaborative opportunities in preservation and learning.
- **A Living Link Between Past and Present Ways of Life.** Mesa Verde National Park is a living link between the past and present that reflects the diversity of the human experience.
- **Natural Landscapes, Systems, and Processes.** Mesa Verde's natural landscapes provide an outdoor laboratory for investigating the park's dynamic biotic communities, natural setting, and formation and physical processes, while protecting wilderness values and scenic views.
- **Archeology.** A continuing desire to understand Mesa Verde's past has shaped and continues to shape the discipline and practice of archeology.



Description

Mesa Verde National Park was established by an act of Congress signed by President Theodore Roosevelt on June 29, 1906, to preserve “from injury or spoliation of the ruins and other works and relics of prehistoric or primitive man,” the first national park of its kind. Mesa Verde National Park is located near the Four Corners region of southwestern Colorado, where the states of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico meet. The park’s approximately 52,000 acres is land that was inhabited by Ancestral Pueblo people from approximately AD 550 to 1300 and includes the most extensive concentration of well-preserved prehistoric cliff dwellings in the United States.

Through its establishment, Mesa Verde National Park was charged with the preservation of the archeological sites and other works and relics of prehistoric inhabitants within its boundaries. To protect certain areas of the park in a wilderness status, in 1976 Congress set aside 8,500 acres known as Mesa Verde Wilderness (PL 94-567, 90 Stat. 2692) under the provisions of the Wilderness Act (78 Stat. 890). On September 8, 1978, Mesa Verde National Park was among the first sites designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Cultural Site in recognition of the park resource’s outstanding value and importance to all humankind.

Visitors of Mesa Verde National Park have a wide variety of opportunities to explore and learn about the natural and cultural wonders of the park. The park offers many sites that provide insights into the lives of the Ancestral Pueblo people including Far View Sites, the Mesa Top Loop, Step House, and the Badger House Community at Wetherill Mesa. In summer, ranger-guided tours of three cliff dwellings, Cliff Palace, Balcony House, and Long House are offered, while self-guided options exist for Spruce Tree House and Step House. About 20 miles of hiking trails are scattered throughout the park. The Mesa Verde Visitor and Research Center provides orientation for visitors and houses the park’s 3 million object museum collection research library and archive.

