The 1,278-acre Mount Rushmore National Memorial is located in the central Black Hills in southwestern South Dakota, 2 miles southwest of Keystone, along State Highway 244, also known as the Gutzon Borglum Memorial Highway. The majority of the landscape is composed of massive granite outcrops intermingled with ponderosa pine forest. Mount Rushmore is a symbol for freedom and democracy and a special place for all people and cultures. The majority of visitation is for purposes of seeing the carved mountain and associated visitor facilities.

When artist Gutzon Borglum began carving Mount Rushmore National Memorial in 1927, he was aware of the lasting legacy of his vision. He once reflected on his dream, “If I can memorialize for the ages a tiny bit of America’s greatness by carving four of her leaders who contributed so much to this greatness, then I will have contributed something of value to the affairs of man. I want to create a monument so inspiring that people from all over America will be drawn to come and look and go home better citizens.” Gutzon Borglum chose the long-lasting Harney Peak granite of South Dakota so that his creation would remain for thousands of years.

The idea for a commemorative sculpture in the Black Hills came from Doane Robinson, the state historian of South Dakota. With his vision to attract tourists to the state, Doane worked with state and national politicians to carve out a portion of the Black Hills for this project. The land was set aside in 1925, and the US Congress began appropriating funds for the project in 1927. Artist Gutzon Borglum worked with more than 400 local workers to carve the monumental faces. Gutzon Borglum passed away in 1941, his son, Lincoln Borglum, became the first superintendent of the memorial when Congress declared the sculpture complete in October 1941.

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### 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.

- Mount Rushmore National Memorial is a place that reveals the contrast of cultural ideals and the reality of the American experience.
- Mount Rushmore National Memorial stands as a tribute to the successes, setbacks, and perseverance of the visionary leaders and common people who shaped the country’s past and laid plans for the future.
- Mount Rushmore, carved to represent the birth, growth, preservation, and development of the nation, is valued as a public work of art intended to evoke freedom, patriotism, and democracy in viewers.
- Mount Rushmore National Memorial is a place where visitors can celebrate and contemplate the individual and collective essence of patriotism.
- The Black Hills are considered sacred and of great importance to many tribes.
- The combination of ecosystem and geologic conditions at Mount Rushmore National Memorial provides a powerful setting for contemplation of the interaction between humans and the natural world.
- Mount Rushmore National Memorial is a result of creative and innovative partnerships that sustain and nurture the memorial and its meanings today and into the future.
- The sculptor Gutzon Borglum and the workers, through vision, struggle, and perseverance, created an inspirational icon on Mount Rushmore that is recognized throughout the world.
- The changes to the natural landscape at Mount Rushmore National Memorial have evoked emotions regarding the impacts of human endeavors.

### 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.

- The Sculpture
- The Natural Setting
- Geology
- Museum Collection
- Views of the Sculpture
- The Sculptor’s Studio.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial may contain 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.

- The Hall of Records
- Historic Structures and Features

### Significance

Significance statements express why Mount Rushmore National Memorial 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.

- Mount Rushmore is an internationally recognized symbol, representing the ideals of freedom and democracy.
- Mount Rushmore National Memorial preserves a cultural and natural landscape within a dramatic setting of ponderosa pine forest and granite walls and spires in the Black Hills region of South Dakota.
- The sculpting of Mount Rushmore provided economic stimulation for the Black Hills region and greatly contributed to the tourism industry in South Dakota.
- The Mount Rushmore sculpture is a unique engineering and artistic achievement, considering the tools and processes available during the Depression era.
- The Mount Rushmore sculpture forever changed the landscape of a natural system.

### Purpose

The purpose of Mount Rushmore National Memorial is to commemorate the founding, expansion, preservation, and unification of the United States by preserving, protecting, and interpreting the mountain sculpture in its historic, cultural, and natural setting while providing for the education, enjoyment, and inspiration of the public.