



Foundation Document Overview

Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument

Arizona



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of SUNSET CRATER VOLCANO NATIONAL MONUMENT is to preserve and protect the colorful 1,000-foot-high cinder cone and surrounding features, including the Bonito Lava Flow, ice cave, cinder fields, spatter cones, lava tubes, and squeeze-ups. This stark, black volcanic landscape on the Southern Colorado Plateau provides outstanding opportunities for learning and research.

Significance

Significance statements express why Sunset Crater Volcano 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.

- **Most Recent Eruption.** Erupting roughly 900 years ago, Sunset Crater Volcano is the youngest of 600 volcanoes within northern Arizona's San Francisco Volcanic Field.
- **Geology.** The monument's display of plate tectonics, volcanism, and pristine eruption features provides excellent opportunities for science, education, and interpretation in the context of regional and global geology.
- **Community.** This catastrophic event profoundly affected the life of people in the region and left a unique archeological and ethnographic record of human response, adaptation, and recovery. Sunset Crater Volcano and its impressive features continue to be significant to contemporary American Indian tribes.
- **Ecology.** A 100-square-mile cinder and ash blanket smothered all life nearest the volcano, resulting in ecologic succession and a unique assemblage of plants in a largely barren landscape. The fresh volcanic terrain provides an unparalleled opportunity to study eruption dynamics, change, and recovery in an arid climate.



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.

- **Volcanic Features.** The numerous volcanic features contained within Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument, including the Bonito Lava Flow, spatter cones, squeeze-ups, and cinder cones, represent a microcosm of the volcanic activities that shaped the surrounding landscape for six million years.
- **Volcano-Influenced Ecosystem.** The volcano-influenced ecosystem provides a snapshot of how ecological succession and soil development support critical habitat for endemic plant species, lichen, and trees in the harsh arid landscape.
- **Landscape/Scenery.** Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument offers spectacular views of undisturbed volcanic landscapes, cinder dunes, and lava flows. These views occur within an environment of clean air and pristine night skies.

Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument 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.

- **Historic Resources.** The Sunset Crater Volcano administrative complex has historic significance at the national level as an excellent example of Mission 66 development. Designed by architect Cecil J. Doty, the complex was built at a distance from the unique volcanic features, leaving an unobstructed view of the natural landscape. The administrative complex is a national register-eligible district and cultural landscape.

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.

The following unified interpretive themes have been identified for Flagstaff Area National Monuments:

- **The Human Experience and the Value of Heritage.**
- **The Continuum of Cultural Occupation and Ancestral Homelands.**
- **Landscape and Life: The Interplay of Human and Environmental History.**
- **Laboratories and Research Benchmarks.**
- **Geology within the San Francisco Volcanic Field.**
- **Climate Change.**

The following interpretive themes have been identified for Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument:

- **Geologic Processes and Volcanic Features.**
- **Human Response to the Eruption.**
- **Cultural Traditions.**
- **Ecosystem Processes.**
- **Natural Landscape and Scenery.**



Description

Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument is approximately 20 miles northeast of downtown Flagstaff in northern Arizona. The park is situated east of the tallest peak in Arizona among hundreds of volcanic features. Established by presidential proclamation in 1930, Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument protects 3,040 acres representing the Colorado Plateau's most recent volcanic eruption. It is the youngest, least-eroded cinder cone in the San Francisco Volcanic Field and represents the only series of eruptions in the Southwest indisputably witnessed by local peoples. Much of the ground surface is covered by lava flows or deep volcanic cinder deposits, and at first glance, the landscape still appears stark and inhospitable. Nestled within the dramatic geologic features are small islands of pine and aspen trees, desert shrubs, and wildflowers that provide small but unique habitats for wildlife. Over several hundreds of years, life is slowly beginning to return to the landscape.

The significance of Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument extends beyond the geological events themselves. The powerful geologic processes that formed the volcano profoundly affected the way of life of local inhabitants during the 11th and 12th centuries and forever changed both the landscape and the ecology of the area. This volcano and its relatively undeveloped landscape provide an unparalleled opportunity to study succession and ecological change in an arid volcanic landscape.

