



Foundation Document Overview

Buffalo National River

Arkansas



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of BUFFALO NATIONAL RIVER is to preserve a free-flowing river and to conserve and interpret the combination of natural, scenic, cultural, and scientific features characterized by deep valleys, towering bluffs, wilderness, and landscapes of the Ozark Mountains.



Significance

Significance statements express why Buffalo National River 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.

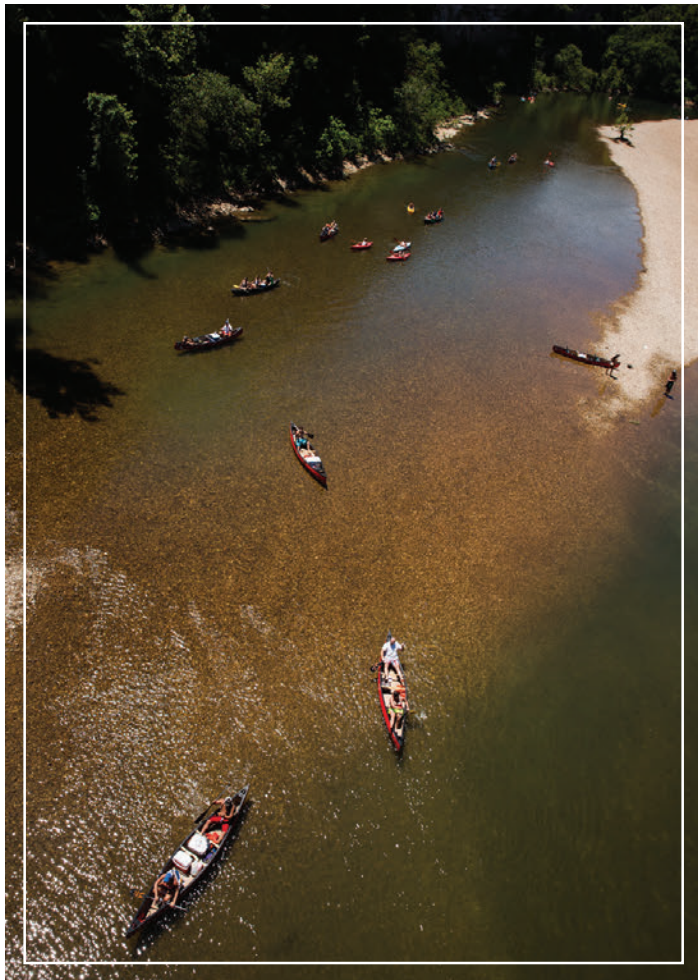
- Buffalo River is an exceptional example of a free-flowing Ozark mountain river. Undammed, it is the only river protected for its entire length within the Ozark Plateau.
- The topographical diversity and geographic setting of Buffalo National River, combined with the convergence of northern, southern, and western ecosystems, form the park's ecological backbone, highlighted by rare glades and relic species (e.g., beech forests and goat prairie communities).
- Buffalo National River contains a dense array of karst features, including hundreds of caves and thousands of sinkholes, sinking streams, springs, and other natural features formed by the complex interplay of groundwater and surface water. The park exhibits outstanding examples of faulting, ancient river terraces, landslides, ore mineralization, and extensive fossil deposits.
- Buffalo National River features a mosaic of cultural landscapes that conveys the story of Ozarks settlement and history spanning the first prehistoric inhabitants to the present-day Boxley Valley community—providing opportunities to study and interpret cultural, environmental, technological, and social adaptations.
- Buffalo National River's spectacular waterfalls, towering bluffs, clear water, wooded canyons, caves, historic sites, wilderness qualities, and intact and undeveloped riparian corridor provide an exceptional, year-round setting for discovery, solitude, and diverse recreational opportunities.



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.

- **Clean, Free-Flowing River**
- **Physical and Biological Processes**
- **Aquatic and Riparian Habitat**
- **Geologic Resources**
- **Cultural and Historic Resources**
- **Wilderness Character**
- **Recreational Opportunities**



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.

- **First Impressions: Perceptions of Place.** The Buffalo River landscape reveals awe-inspiring scenery and a collective wealth of nature and illustrates a rich heritage of traditional values and lifeways that have sustained generations of people.
- **Motivations and Incentives: Why Visitors Come Here.** The Buffalo River offers opportunities for visitors to be challenged intellectually and physically, find renewal and inspiration in wilderness and examine their relationship to the natural world, develop a greater sense of self and community, and create lasting memories through a diversity of recreational and educational experiences.
- **People and Place.** Generations of people have found their needs for physical, economic, and spiritual survival met within the Buffalo River landscape, which bears witness to the people who came before and their ability to adapt and to preserve traditional ways of life.
- **Science and Education.** A dynamic outdoor classroom and diverse living laboratory, Buffalo National River encourages people to learn about and appreciate the rich ecological relationships that nurture and sustain our civilization and to understand how today's decisions will affect the lives of future generations.
- **A Beautiful River Preserved.** Both the effort to establish a park and continued vigilance to protect the river's integrity illustrate the ability of people to work together to balance ongoing changes in land use, recreation, and conservation, and to ensure this free-flowing river exists for future generations.



Description

Unique in the Ozarks and rare throughout the United States, the Buffalo River is completely undammed from the Boston Mountains to its confluence with the White River, 153 miles downstream. Buffalo National River—the country's first national river—is protected as a free-flowing stream for 135 of those miles within the park's boundaries. The remaining 18 miles of the river originate upstream from the park through lands administered by the United States Forest Service. Towering bluffs, waterfalls, canyons, caves, and historic sites provide an exceptional setting for discovery, solitude, and diverse recreational opportunities.

Public Law 92-237, which established the park as a unit of the national park system in 1972, highlights several of the park's exceptional qualities. A U.S. House of Representatives Committee Report (1972) described the justification for the establishment of Buffalo National River as "... not one single quality, but the combination of its size, its completeness, its wild qualities, and its associated natural, scenic, and historical resources that make the Buffalo worthy of national recognition." Establishment of the park also ensured that the upper Buffalo National River and surrounding tributaries would conserve the scenic, scientific, recreational, and fish and wildlife values present in the area for future generations.

Recognized for its distinctive ecology at local, national, and global levels, Buffalo National River showcases diverse ecosystems as well as refugium of critical habitats sustaining high biological diversity, including many rare species.

Thousands of sinkholes, sinking streams, springs, and other natural features related to karst processes are found throughout the park. In the driest parts of the year, sections of the river may run underground for long distances. Outstanding examples of faulting, landslides, and ore mineralization are evident across the park's topography, and significant fossil deposits have formed in ancient layers through its long geologic history.

The park's 94,293 acres are divided into three management districts—the upper, middle, and lower districts, respectively. Park headquarters are located in Harrison (Boone County), Arkansas, just north of the upper and middle districts. Park visitation has averaged more than 1.3 million visitors per year (2006 to 2016). In addition to water-based activities with multiple launch points along the river, the park offers more than 100 miles of hiking trails and designated trails for horseback riding. Designated wilderness represents over one-third of the park's total acreage. Because there are few roads that parallel the river and few accessible overlooks, river and trail trips are among the best ways to experience the park. Similarly, Buffalo National River's abundant nooks and crannies provide opportunities for visitors to experience some of the darkest night skies in the region, as well as natural sounds.

Complementing the park's outstanding natural qualities, Buffalo National River embraces the story of Ozarks settlement and history from the first inhabitants as early as 12,000 years ago to today's rural community of Boxley Valley. The park consults with 10 American Indian tribes who are traditionally associated with the park and the resources therein.

