

# Description of Catoctin Mountain Park

At Catoctin Mountain Park, the story of human habitation is written on the land. Years of clear-cutting the hardwood forests for making charcoal and building homesteads and farming the valley left a deep mark on the landscape. Previous to European incursions by second-generation Americans and German immigrants, small tribal groups led a semi-nomadic existence—they farmed, hunted, and fished the land and rivers. Evidence of their presence in western Maryland can be traced back 3,500 years. In 1732, European American settlers began arriving in the Monocacy River Valley, where the native people were seldom seen. Farming and small industries, such as sawmills, gave way to a burgeoning charcoal and iron industry whose structures are still visible today.

Catoctin Mountain Park originated during the Great Depression. The federal government acquired over 10,000 acres in 1935 and established the Catoctin Recreational Demonstration Area (RDA) in 1936 with Executive Order 7496. The program created public parks out of marginal farmland near cities—most eventually became state or national parks. In 1936, a New Deal agency named the Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired hundreds of local men to create maintenance shops, a visitor center, and cabin camps. Later, in 1939, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) set up camp



in today’s Round Meadow, tasked with returning the Catoctin landscape to native eastern hardwood forest.

In the spring of 1942, at the request of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the National Park Service began to consider several areas for a presidential retreat. An existing camp area within Catoctin Mountain RDA known as Camp Hi-Catoctin was selected by the president. He christened the camp Shangri-La (named for the fictional Himalayan paradise). In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower renamed the retreat Camp David after his father and grandson, both named David.

Today, the 5,748-acre Catoctin Mountain Park represents a spirit of regeneration—the second-growth forest, mountain streams, historic cabin camps, and facilities for persons with disabilities offer visitors diverse outdoor recreation opportunities near mid-Atlantic population centers. Hiking trails through red oaks, birches, dogwood, and other native forest species lead to high valley panoramas and one of the best trout fishing streams in the region. The buildings and structures built by the WPA and CCC, along with the site of the nation’s first Job Corps Center in 1964, left a tangible presence that speaks to the nation’s progress in times of great challenge.



## Foundation Document Overview

### Catoctin Mountain Park

#### Maryland



#### Contact Information

For more information about the *Catoctin Mountain Park Foundation Document*, contact: [CATO\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:CATO_superintendent@nps.gov) or 301-663-9388 or write to: Superintendent, 6602 Foxville Road, Thurmont, MD 21788



## Purpose



*The purpose of Catoclin Mountain Park is to provide quality recreational opportunities in the Catoclin Mountains and serve as a setting and buffer for the Presidential Retreat, while protecting and conserving the park's natural and cultural environments in the spirit of New Deal conservation programs.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Catoclin Mountain 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.

- Catoclin Mountain Park is significant because it was one of 46 Recreational Demonstration Areas developed in the 1930s and represents an outstanding example of New Deal-era programs that established rural areas for conservation and recreation purposes.
- Catoclin Mountain Park is significant because it is an early and continuing example of conservation practices resulting in the regeneration of an eastern deciduous forest.
- Catoclin Mountain Park is significant because it provides outstanding scenic values at the transition of the Monocacy River Valley and the Catoclin Mountains in the Piedmont Plateau and Blue Ridge geologic provinces.
- Catoclin Mountain Park is significant because it provides diverse outdoor recreation opportunities in a mountain setting near the population centers of the mid-Atlantic region.
- Catoclin Mountain Park is significant because it provides exceptional aquatic habitat.
- Catoclin Mountain Park is significant because it serves as the setting where international leaders convene to discuss world peace and international diplomacy and serves as the Presidential Retreat.
- Catoclin Mountain Park is significant because it is the location of cabin camps that have served both as the oldest operating camps for persons with disabilities in the nation as well as one of the original locations where the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency, trained in World War II.
- Catoclin Mountain Park is significant because it preserves a cultural heritage that dates back more than 3,500 years, and ranges from stone tool making, to agriculture, to charcoal production.

## 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.

- Cabin camps
- Ethnographic resources
- Cultural landscapes
- Eastern deciduous forest
- Geological resources
- Wildlife communities
- Fish communities
- Views and vistas



## Other Important Resources and Values

Catoclin Mountain Park 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.

- Natural Sounds / Air Quality / Night Sky
- Campgrounds and Picnic Areas
- Trail System
- Water Quantity and Quality



- Naval Support Facility – Thurmont (The Presidential Retreat)
- Other Historic Structures
- Archeology
- Museum Collection

