



Foundation Document Overview

Colorado National Monument

Colorado



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Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT is to provide for the preservation, understanding, and enjoyment of its natural and cultural resources as showcased by its extraordinary erosional, geological, and historical landscapes reflective of the northern Colorado Plateau and of great scientific interest.

Significance

Significance statements express why Colorado 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.

- Colorado National Monument exposes and preserves three different groups of rock and sediment—the first is the Early to Middle Proterozoic gneiss and schist; then the horizontally bedded Mesozoic sedimentary rocks; and the youngest being the various types of Quaternary deposits such as alluvium, colluvium, and dunes reflecting two billion years of Earth history. Wind and water erosion continues to form and reveal spectacular land forms and viewsheds of canyons, plateaus, and towering monoliths at the northeastern gateway of the Colorado Plateau.
- Colorado National Monument preserves and protects representative examples of intact high desert ecosystems of the Colorado Plateau, providing opportunities for scientific studies.
- Colorado National Monument preserves and protects cultural, physical, paleontological, biological, and geological resources and values for education, interpretation, and enjoyment within a growing urban community.



Fundamental Resources and Values & Other Important 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.

- **Geologic Processes.** The magnificent scenery, character and beauty of the monument are the result of geologic processes in many forms, including sedimentation, faulting, uplift, erosion, landslides, rockfalls, and flash floods. Geologic processes dominate all other natural processes acting on the monument landscape.
- **Geologic Features.** The abundant geologic features preserved at Colorado National Monument provide an ideal outdoor lab for ongoing scientific study of the geology of the Colorado Plateau. Particularly notable are the hanging canyons (U-shaped valleys), rock layers that record geologic history, distinctive monoliths and canyons, and the Great Unconformity (1.2 billion years of absent rock history).
- **Ecological Systems.** The species, landscapes, and related attributes so highly valued by monument visitors and society at large cannot be preserved without also conserving the ecological systems of which they are a part. Some of the key components of the system are eco-regional distinctiveness (old-growth pinyon-juniper forest, hanging gardens), ecological functionality (air, water, and hydrological processes; biological soil crusts; riparian and wetland ecosystems); and native grasslands and sagebrush shrublands.

- **Human History.** The continuum of human use and cultural ties are revealed by rock art, lithic scatters, and historic trails and routes of ancestral peoples including the Archaic, Fremont, and Ute tribes, informing the rich and diverse museum collections of Colorado National Monument. Other historic cultural resources such as Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Mission 66 structures, artifacts, and stories serve to document the more recent time line of human history in the monument.
- **Rim Rock Drive.** The idea of a roadway along the rim of the red rock canyons was a rallying point for local support that led to the preservation of the national monument. As a road engineering masterpiece of the Great Depression era, Rim Rock Drive has earned its listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The scenic roadway is inseparable from the identity of the monument, providing the primary platform from which visitors can experience, understand, and appreciate the beauty of the monument.
- **Scenery.** The striking and colorfully sculpted canyons, monoliths, rock formations, and distant views of the Grand Valley, Book Cliffs, and Grand Mesa along with the Colorado River, encompass a visual beauty that stirs imaginations, forges individual connections between people and the monument, and is embedded in the identity of Colorado's Western Slope.

Colorado 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.

- **Wilderness.** The monument encompasses some 20,000 acres, of which approximately 15,000 acres have been identified or proposed as wilderness and serve as a refuge for self-discovery, solitude, and natural quiet. The wilderness acreage is still under congressional consideration and is managed under NPS policy as a wilderness until formally designated by Congress.
- **Diversity of Visitor Experiences.** Colorado National Monument's proximity to an urban setting provides opportunities for a diversity of visitor experiences through education, interpretation, and recreation.

Description

Colorado National Monument preserves one of the grand landscapes of the American West. Sheer-walled canyons, towering monoliths, colorful formations, desert bighorn sheep, soaring eagles, and a spectacular road reflect the environment and history of the plateau and canyon country. Historic Rim Rock Drive offers 23 miles of breathtaking panoramic views and numerous scenic overlooks. Trails lead across mesa tops and into backcountry canyons. Picnicking and camping are available. At an average elevation of 6,000 feet at the rim, the climate is relatively mild, but can change rapidly to snow or summer storms.

Around 440,000 people per year visit Colorado National Monument to enjoy these and other opportunities. The monument encompasses some 20,000 acres, of which approximately 15,000 acres has been identified or proposed as wilderness and serves as a refuge for self-discovery, solitude, and natural quiet. The wilderness acreage is still under congressional consideration and is managed under NPS policy as a wilderness until formally designated by Congress.

